Anthems of Apocalypse

The Bible in the Modern World, 42

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Apocalypse and Popular Culture, 4

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Anthems of Apocalypse

Popular Music and Apocalyptic Thought

edited by
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Contents

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Introduction: Popular Music and Apocalyptic Discourse

Christopher Partridge

And I only am escaped to tell thee.
(Job 1.15)

These words are borrowed by Nick Cave to open his volume of collected lyrics (Cave 2007: v). They are the words of Job's servant, who has come with the tragic news that all his master's ten children have been killed. Moreover, although Job's servant is unaware of it, their deaths have been allowed by God as a result of a challenge put to him by the Adversary. There is a deeper significance to the catastrophe, an understanding of which takes us beyond 'some ordinary slaughter . . . some routine atrocity' (Cave, quoted in Chapter 1)—which, of course, as Cave suggests, is never really ordinary or routine. It is significant that Cave turns to these words to begin a volume of collected thoughts that he has, over many years, sought to share with us. Like Job's servant, Cave is a witness. As Roland Boer's chapter describes, because Cave crawls through the dirt of humanity, trawls through the carnage of life, he has emerged with something to share. He does this in murder ballads and love songs, and in poetic and caustic reflection on personal disintegration. It is little wonder, therefore, that he finds apocalyptic discourse rich with imagery and ideology. From the suffering, dereliction, and anxiety of life's underbelly, he has gleaned something of the end. However, as Boer argues, Cave articulates this in unexpected ways, recycling common images and apocalyptic metaphors to deliver a peculiar message. In the hands of a 'servant' like Cave, in true apocalyptic fashion, the familiar is made strange, the mundane becomes menacing. But, although Cave's voice is a distinctive one, he is not alone. Others, too, in the world of popular music want to tell us things about the end that we may not have wanted to know in ways we may not have thought about before. This volume (the first of its kind[1]) seeks to introduce readers to some of these messengers and their anthems of apocalypse.

1. Even overviews of eschatology and popular culture, such as that by Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence (2008), ignore popular music.

Popular Music and Apocalypse Culture

Fired by images of apocalyptic upheaval, of the bringing down of unjust governments, of the shifting of social tectonic plates, and the creation of a new land of righteousness, like radical Christians of the seventeenth century, 'the world turned upside down' (Hill 1972) has been the goal and utopian dream of many popular musicians. As with Cave's work and particularly the notion of 'chanting down Babylon' articulated in reggae (see Partridge 2009; 2010), more often than not references to the portents and monsters of the apocalypse refer not to an age to come but to the authorities and demons of the present world. This is very clear in the work of the vegan straight edge band Earth Crisis (Chapter 3) and that of Rage Against the Machine's Tom Morello (Chapter 4). Morello in particular has, like Cave, a high level of biblical literacy and is creative in his use of that knowledge in the service of a powerful socialist critique of capitalism, American imperialism, new left-activism and identity politics. As Michael Gilmour shows (Chapter 4), using apocalyptic images and metaphors, and following in the tradition of Woody Guthrie, Morello channels the power of biblical apocalyptic discourse into searing social protest.[2] Similarly, Earth Crisis makes use of Christian apocalyptic symbolism but does so in a very different way to the more theological treatments of Johnny Cash (Chapter 2) or even, from a very different esoteric perspective, David Tibet (Chapter 6). As Kennet Granholm's discussion of Earth Crisis shows, biblical apocalypticism provides a lens through which the present world and the human condition are viewed. The vision of Earth Crisis is not one of judgment from above; it is not based on a belief in an 'interventionist God' (to quote Cave again), but rather, the band's prophetic gaze is fixed on ecological catastrophe. Theirs is a secular rage, from which emerges an apocalyptic discourse that relies heavily on the biblical and esoteric ideas circulating within occulture and articulated particularly within the heavy metal subculture.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given its penchant for transgression, decadence and violence (see Kahn-Harris 2007: 34-43), heavy metal, especially extreme metal, has made much of apocalyptic thought. There are numerous band names, album titles and songs that reference and celebrate the apocalyptic. In addition to band names such as Apocalypse or Apocalyptica, there are others that give more than a nod to apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic

2. Many of Morello's songs explicitly encourage direct action and civil disobedience. In Rage Against the Machine, he warms his 'hands on the flames of the flag' ('Bombtrack', from *Rage Against the Machine* [1992]) and, as The Nightwatchman, exhorts listeners to '. . . hit 'em where it hurts, bite the hand that feeds'. He continues, 'You might get one to three or probation and a fine / but I know where I'm gonna be, I'm gonna be right on that front line' ('Union Song', from *One Man Revolution* [2007]).

thought. For example, the Californian deathcore band Winds of Plague—a name borrowed from the lyrics of the apocalyptic song 'Endless' by Unearth (available on the EP *Endless* [2002])—focuses on scenarios of violence, death and degradation. Their album *Decimate the Weak* (2008), which includes the song 'Anthems of Apocalypse' (which has now become the name of another band), explores many of the common ideas of secular apocalyptic rhetoric, ideas that have, in many cases, been learned from the dark occulture of the heavy metal subculture, rather than directly from Christianity—the reviling of which is almost de rigueur in extreme metal (see Chapter 7; see also Kahn-Harris 2007: 39-43). Hence, often such bands use biblical apocalyptic language and imagery with little reference to their original source. Nevertheless, with some knowledge of the original context of biblical apocalyptic thought, such bands often invert its meaning, celebrating tragedy, suffering and death, as well as dismissing notions of the triumph of goodness, love and God. This, of course, is typical of the dark occulture of the heavy metal subculture (see Chapter 7). Indeed, even within Christian metal, particularly 'unblack metal' (see Chapter 5), it is difficult to ignore the influence of dark occulture (see Partridge 2005: 207-78; L.S. Clark, 2005).

Having noted the above, it is important to understand that, as Malcolm Bull has commented, the use of apocalyptic rhetoric within popular culture is often simply designed to shock. Of course, this usage in itself tells us something about the continuing appeal and power of apocalyptic:

> Popular-secular apocalyptic feeds on the same images of nuclear holocaust, ecological catastrophe, sexual decadence and social collapse that inspire contemporary religious millenarianism. But unlike the religious variety, secular apocalyptic—which is found in many areas of popular culture, but most notably in science fiction, rock music and film—is not usually intended to effect personal spiritual transformation. It may be designed to influence public opinion in favour of social or political objectives such as nuclear disarmament or environmental regulation, but in many cases the language of apocalyptic is deployed simply to shock, alarm, or enrage (Bull 1995: 4-5).

Take, for example, Blasphemophagher's 2008 black metal album *Nuclear Empire Of Apocalypse*, released on the label Nuclear War Now! Productions. With uplifting track titles such as '. . . Of Atomic Orgies and Demoniac Elements', 'Demiurge of Thermonuclear Damnation', and 'The Return of Bestial Vomit', it is difficult to interpret their work as having any goal except belligerent, misanthropic offense. Without wanting to deny that such goals might have a value, I find it difficult to see how Blasphemophagher's use of apocalyptic can be understood as a conscious and ideologically sophisticated attempt to foster social and political change. Again, their songs betray little more than transgressive misanthropy and a self-conscious elitism rooted in a contempt for human weakness and the celebration of mass death. Apocalyp-

tic misanthropy is typical of extreme metal. As Dani Filth, the lead singer of the Cradle of Filth, has claimed, 'if I was in control of the world, I would wipe out half of it instantly and indiscriminately without any remorse' (quoted in Kahn-Harris 2007: 40; see also Mercer-Taylor 2009 and Chapter 7 below). Similarly, Bull references the widely read anthology of the bizarre and the extreme edited by Adam Parfrey, *Apocalypse Culture* (1990), which, significantly, has much content drawn from the world of popular music, as well as much that has fed into the apocalyptic rhetoric of that world. His point is that the apocalypticism in the volume is secular, dystopian and focused on a purposeless end. The apocalypse simply 'serves as the unifying theme for a collection of writings on bodily mutilation, Satanism, sexual perversion and terrorism' (Bull 1995: 5). That having been said, like the music discussed in this volume, *Apocalypse Culture* provides an interesting mirror on contemporary societies in the West. For example, the cover includes the following endorsement from J.G. Ballard: '*Apocalypse Culture* is compulsory reading for all those concerned with the crisis of our time . . . An extraordinary collection unlike anything I have ever encountered. These are the terminal documents of the twentieth century.' Other endorsements on the cover make grander claims. The music journalist Edwin Pouncey, for example, claims that it is 'a new Book of Revelation, a collection which is almost as awesome and terrifying as the original'. It hardly needs pointing out that, as any who have read *Apocalypse Culture* will be aware, this rather overstates the book's significance and literary merit. Nevertheless, as noted above, the volume does indicate something of the decadent nihilism at the heart of Western culture, a nihilism that surfaces most powerfully in popular music, particularly extreme metal and industrial music (see Chapters 6 and 7). Yes, such art is principally designed simply to shock, but, in so doing, it reflects something deeper and more worrying about modernity.

We have seen, however, that this is not always the case. Cave (Chapter 1), Earth Crisis (Chapter 3), Morello (Chapter 4), and Tibet (Chapter 6), for example, cannot be dismissed simply as 'shock merchants' who make crude use of apocalyptic language and imagery. And, of course, apart from the unfortunate perception of *Schadenfreude* often communicated in their rhetoric about the termination of the wicked, Christian music's focus on the apocalyptic is largely missiological and liturgical, the aim being to win souls, glorify God, and upset Satan (see Chapter 5; also Chapters 2 and 8).

Occulture and the Appeal of the Apocalypse

As a sociological term, 'occulture' refers to the environment within which, and the social processes by which, particular meanings relating typically to spiritual, esoteric, paranormal and conspiratorial ideas emerge, are disseminated, and become influential in the lives of individuals and in the socie-

ties in which they live. Central to these processes is popular culture, which disseminates, deconstructs and reinterprets occultural ideas. 'Remixed', such ideas incubate new spores of occultural thought (see Partridge 2004; 2005; forthcoming 1). Biblical ideas, myths, symbols and language are particularly prevalent within Western occulture. Indeed, popular Christianity is itself, of course, not immune to occulture. For example, Hal Lindsey's 'pop-dispensationalism' (see Chapter 2), articulated most influentially in his book *The Late Great Planet Earth*, references 'clairvoyants' and *Chimes*, 'a publication which specialises in psychic phenomena'. He quotes, for example, a 'writer . . . dealing with extra-sensory perception, prophecy (not Bible), and spiritual healing' (1970: 118), who, while misunderstanding the nature of the 'Future Fuehrer' (i.e. the Antichrist) (1970: 103), nevertheless provides a description of an occult future, which, Lindsey indicates, is fundamentally accurate as a description of the final days. He then continues to make associations between, for example, the religious practices of ancient cultures and ideas drawn from contemporary occulture, such as 'black magic art' (1970: 120). He is particularly cavalier in his interpretation of the history of astrology and the contemporary use of hallucinogens as avenues of satanic influence. That is to say, although reinterpreting occult practices and beliefs as 'satanic', he absorbs many popular occultural understandings, even accepting that, for example, some psychics are able to foresee future events (1970: 118). The point is that, because popular eschatology operates outside mainstream theology, it is malleable. It is continually revised in order to fit current events, ideas and theories. Being thus informed by context, popular eschatology is, therefore, vulnerable to occultural influence. This is certainly notable in popular music. Marcus Moberg, for example, makes this point with reference to the heavy metal subculture. In addition to the Bible, 'metal bands have . . . typically drawn inspiration from themes and ideas found in various strands of occultism, esotericism, Paganism, and Satanism, as well as in the world of legend and myth; especially as found Germanic, Norse, and Celtic traditions' (see Chapter 5; Moberg 2009b). Consequently, in metal subcultures, biblical themes—most notably the demonic and the apocalyptic (see Chapter 7)—become part of larger occultural narratives.

Apocalyptic ideas are particularly ubiquitous within occulture. In addition to the graphic violence of apocalyptic and its subversive vision of a world turned upside down, the force of its rhetoric and the affective power of its imagery are enormously appealing. Whether mixed with popular Egyptian mythology and Lovecraftian symbolism (e.g. Nile, *Annihilation of the Wicked* [2005]) or simply pop-dispensationalism, as in the case of Johnny Cash (Chapter 2) and Extreme (Chapter 8), the rhetorical power of apocalyptic challenges earthly authorities and worldly moralities in a way that few other genres are able to do. Apocalyptic's dressing up box is a large and colourful one, an ideal resource for musicians wanting to shout at the world. This is why rhetoric

about natural disasters, political upheavals, and even personal crises employ the dramatic language of apocalyptic. The point is that, whether secular or religious, whether thinking of ends as purposes or ends as terminations, apocalyptic language helps to make sense of life, asserts the inevitability of the conclusion of history and challenges the absoluteness of political authorities.

This concurs with Stephen O'Leary's analysis of apocalyptic discourse as unfolding in

> the context of changing cultural assumptions and presumptions about rationality, about the nature of time and history, and about the purpose and destiny of human collectivities. The root metaphor of contextualism allows us to comprehend apocalyptic as part of these larger patterns while at the same time accounting for particularity in the discourse (O'Leary 1994: 15).

The point I want to make is that, although there are historical events and traditional theological narratives that influence apocalyptic thought and increase its fascination, its overall appeal cannot be fully understood without an adequate grasp of occulture, to which popular music and its attendant subcultures are important contributors. In other words, however apocalyptic rhetoric is theorized, much of its persuasive power is determined by occulture. Hence, although O'Leary does not frame his argument in these terms, he does relate apocalyptic appeal to what rhetorical theorists refer to as 'social knowledge'. He then articulates this in terms of Alasdair MacIntyre's definition of 'tradition': 'an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined' (quoted in O'Leary 1994: 196). The occultural significance of this becomes clear when we look at the 'fundamental agreements' within apocalyptic thought. As O'Leary comments,

> the apocalyptic tradition, founded in mythic narratives and canonical scriptures and augmented by debates about the meaning of these texts, provides the social knowledge base that enables apocalyptic movements to appeal occasionally to a wider audience than the tradition's devotees and caretakers. Such an expansion beyond the base of the tradition is possible when the conventionally accepted understanding of a culture's destiny seems unable to account for social ills that challenge and threaten normal mechanisms for dealing with life's 'ultimate exigence' of time and evil (1994: 197).

Again, bearing in mind the eclectic nature of such social knowledge and also that, in expanding beyond the base of the principal tradition, it easily coalesces with other beliefs, ideas and traditions, the occultural potential of apocalyptic is enormous.

Apocalyptic Rhetoric

It is perhaps unsurprising that popular culture, *cultura popularis*, the culture of the people, has been central to the shaping of apocalyptic discourse in the

West. As Daniel Wojcik has shown in his study of contemporary apocalypticism in the United States,

> ideas and images about the end of the world permeate American popular culture and folklore, as well as popular religion, and are expressed in films, literature, music, poetry, visual arts, dance, theatre, cartoons, comics, humour, and commercial products . . . Today, millions of Americans embrace beliefs about the imminence of societal catastrophe. Apocalyptic thinking is an enormously influential and pervasive means of conceptualizing the world and one's place in it (1997: 2-3).

Again, as Crawford Gribben has commented, 'the popular idea that early modern millennial beliefs disappeared into a "world of cranks" must be revised in the light of the remarkable "mainstreaming" of prophetic expectation at the end of the twentieth century' and beyond (2006: 113; see also O'Leary 1994: 7). This mainstreaming of the apocalyptic within popular 'occulture', of course, directly challenges the thesis that it is confined to the margins of society. For example, Norman Cohn's important work on the history and social significance of apocalyptic thought (1970) identified it as a 'paranoid' response to economic deprivation and political persecution, a response that came primarily from the margins of society. The problem, however, is that, not only is apocalypticism not limited to those on the margins who are suffering economic deprivation and political persecution, but not all those who experience social hardship and insecurity interpret the world apocalyptically. Indeed, even in the modern world, he insisted, apocalypticism is found on the margins among 'chiefly young or unemployed workers and a small minority of intellectuals and students' (Cohn 1970: 286). Again, this is unconvincing. Of the many contemporary believers in the West, including the long list of people whose ideas have been informed by popular texts such as Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* (1970)—a list that includes musicians such as Bob Marley (see Partridge 2009: 61-62), Johnny Cash (Chapter 2), and Gary Cherone (Chapter 8)—relatively few fit into Cohn's categories. Certainly many of them cannot be described as 'politically marginal'. As O'Leary comments, 'a brief survey of the history of apocalyptic discourse shows that its appeal has historically cut across class lines. The audience of those receptive to prophecy and its interpreters has included emperors, peasants, merchants, farmers and factory workers, the educated and the uneducated alike from Isaac Newton to Ronald Reagan' (1994: 9).

O'Leary's rhetorical theory of apocalyptic discourse takes us a bit further than Cohn (helpful though the latter is in many respects). Why do some people interpret world events apocalyptically while others do not? They do so because 'a rhetor succeeds in persuading an audience with this definition; and only rhetoric can turn any disaster, real or perceived, into a sign of the imminent end'. The issue, he insists, 'is not whether audiences are

predisposed by such experiences to accept apocalyptic arguments, but how apocalypse contextualises disasters as a "rhetorical use of calamity"' (O'Leary 1994: 9). This is in large measure the significance of popular music. Addressing particular subcultures, apocalyptic aesthetic is shaped by a common stock of occultural images, sounds, and ideas. Allied to this aesthetic, apocalyptic rhetoric is driven home affectively in a sonically charged environment. The music, in other words, increases the affective impact of the rhetoric.

Angst, Suffering and the Apocalypse

Evil in some form is central to apocalyptic rhetoric, which proposes a solution by locating it in time and looking forward to its dissolution. As all the artists discussed in this volume demonstrate to some degree, despite the vicissitudes, the flux and pain of existence, apocalyptic rhetoric persuades its audience that life has meaning, conduct matters, history is purposive. What appears to be final evil now will be shown to be merely interim evil. Whether it will be followed by some utopian existence or not, an end will come![3]

This situating of the problem of evil in history, on the one hand, engenders hope but, on the other, encourages what Richard Landes terms 'semiotic arousal', even promiscuity (2004: 335)—events in time are frequently invested with eschatological meaning. In an effort to relieve apocalyptic angst, the troubled mind identifies signs of the end within contemporary culture. This coheres nicely with O'Leary's analysis of apocalyptic in terms of Kenneth Burke's 'frames of acceptance', the 'tragic' and the 'comic' (Burke, 1984). For Burke, 'frames of acceptance' are the systems of meaning by which people gauge their historical situation and adopt roles within it.The comic frame of acceptance, applied by O'Leary, interprets apocalyptic symbolism as open, emphasizing symbolic multivalence and repudiating a symbol's simplistic identification with historical referents. Again, within the comic frame of acceptance, history tends to be understood as cyclical and open-ended. The tragic frame, on the other hand, describes history as linear and fixed. It is a closed symbolic system, each component of the mythic narrative signifying a particular historical or political referent. The tragic frame, of course, describes much contemporary popular eschatology, such as the pop-dispensationalistm described by Mark S. Sweetnam in relation to Johnny Cash (Chapter 2). As such, the tragic frame is particularly semiotically promiscuous. Again, a good example of this is Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* (1970). History is

3. Of course, as we have noted above, some extreme metal bands speculate about the demise of this world in a way that seems to celebrate 'the winds of plague' that might one day sweep across it. However, while inverting biblical apocalyptic thought, glorying in tragedy and suffering, there is still an apocalypse, an end to the present world.

determined; it has an end; and, by examining historical events, the course to that end can be plotted—even dated (O'Leary, 1994: 68-69, 83-84, 200-201).

The Plausibility and the Threat of the Apocalypse

Peter Berger argued many years ago that 'human beings require social confirmation for their beliefs about reality' (1980: 18). Emphasizing social construction rather than the rhetorical and the discursive, he notes that social contexts determine an individual's understanding of what is and what is not plausible. For example,

> [ext]moral values of honour, courage, and loyalty are commonly characteristic of military institutions. As long as an individual is within such an institutional context, it is very likely that these values will be plausible to him in an unquestioned and taken-for-granted manner. If, however, this individual should find himself transposed into a quite different institutional context . . . then it is very likely that he will begin to question the military values . . . Biographically, the individuals may be seen as having migrated from one plausibility structure to another (Berger 1980: 18).

In the case of apocalyptic metanarratives, this migration often involves key Christian themes and concepts (linear time, dualism etc.) being retained, while other elements are added or subtracted in accordance with the context. That is to say, having noted the formative significance of occulture on popular apocalyptic thought, in the West the basic framework within which ideas are developed is usually Christian. Christian concepts and themes feature so prominently in much popular apocalyptic discourse simply because they have been formative in the shaping of Western 'plausibility structures'. This, of course, is important, in that to be so meaningful to so many people, apocalyptic ideas have to have a supporting plausibility structure that enjoys wide acceptance. A plausibility structure provided by the rhetoric of a particular community, such as that of the Jehovah's Witnesses or the Mormons, is unlikely to attract such widespread acceptance. Apocalyptic ideas need to transcend the plausibility structures of particular religious communities. Often the subtle occultural contextualization of a basic Christian eschatological model allows this to happen. It begins to make sense of the world for a large number of people, particularly in times of crisis and insecurity. Whereas neat (so to speak) pop-dispensationalism might be a little strong for many of our contemporaries, once it is served up in the music of Johnny Cash, Extreme, or mixed with the rhetoric of Rastafari (as in reggae), the context shifts, the plausibility increases and it becomes more palatable. This is particularly evident, of course, in films (see Walliss and Newport 2009; Walliss and Quinby 2010), such as the low-budget but surprisingly successful *The Omega Code* (1999)—the posters for which carried the wonderfully occultural tagline, 'Revelation foretold it, Nostradamus predicted it . . .' Although, as we have seen, in recent

years contemporary popular culture has provided many examples of 'meaningless apocalypse', nihilistic articulations of the end as termination with no discernible purpose—the result of human folly, natural catastrophe, or demonic caprice—even here, it is possible to identify themes, tropes, metaphors and terminology that reference biblical eschatology and, thereby, help us to make sense of it. Again, even when a mixed bag of religious and occultural ideas are referenced, as in the case of David Tibet and Current 93 (see Chapter 6), they tend to be embedded in a broadly Christian narrative, which, again, gives them the ring of truth and increases their plausibility.

An interesting and moving example of the significance of Christian thought for the establishing of plausibility and, thereby, the cogency and the affective impact of apocalyptic rhetoric is Jocelyn Pook's composition 'Oppenheimer' (from *Deluge* [1997]). The sampled words with which the track begins are those of the theoretical physicist Julius Robert Oppenheimer, often referred to as the 'father of the atomic bomb' because of his role as the scientific director of the Manhattan Project, North America's Second World War programme to develop the first nuclear weapons. Reflecting on his feelings of horror following the first atomic bomb test, Oppenheimer quoted a powerful passage from the *Bhagavad Gita,* in which Krishna, revealing himself as Vishnu, declares: 'Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.' Pook follows these words with a haunting mix of both Indian and Christian choral music. However, although the words are taken from the *Gita* and although the music is a careful synergy of styles, the dominant musicological reference is Christian apocalypticism. Indeed, Oppenheimer was particularly unusual in referencing Eastern religious thought in his reflections on the awful potential of the atom bomb, in that many reports compared the effects of the test to apocalyptic scenarios drawn from Revelation. Pook's work, however, musically relocates Oppenheimer's words back into the dominant Western apocalyptic tradition, thereby increasing their affective impact. As she comments in her sleeve notes, 'the main ideas of *Deluge* were born out of linking up the two [*Christian*] millennia . . . by means of myth, legends and fears about the end of the world'.

To push these thoughts about the relationship between plausibility and Christian thought a little further, apocalyptic rhetoric is 'produced by human beings who view themselves not only as rational creatures, but as actors in a cosmic drama' (O'Leary 1994: 15-16). Usually in the West, the apocalyptic cosmic dramas within which people locate themselves have a number of key themes, all of which have roots in a Judeo-Christian cosmology. These are summed up by Bernard McGinn as follows: 'first, a sense of the unity and structure of history conceived as a divinely predetermined totality; second, pessimism about the present and conviction of its imminent crisis; and third, belief in the proximate judgment of evil and the triumph of good' (quoted in O'Leary 1994: 16). Because these and related ideas are not far below the surface of the Western imagination and mesh with the individual's everyday

view of the world, not only is the apocalyptic fascinating and powerful, but, in a world in which tragedy and endings are part of the fabric of existence, it takes very little for an individual to become an actor, personally involved and semiotically promiscuous. The imagination applies the eschatological narrative, the apocalyptic conspiracy, to the individual's own history, his one's own understanding of one's place in the world. Myth and fiction are read as personally significant historical fact.

As to why there is this confluence of myth and history in apocalyptic discourse, as we have seen, it is a feature of the zeitgeist. What Paul Fiddes describes as 'a great flood of apocalyptic novels' (2000: 191) at the end of the last century—not to mention the deluge of apocalyptic music—was not simply a symptom of *Pre-Millennium Tension* (to quote the title of Tricky's unnerving 1996 album), though that undoubtedly contributed to the increased levels of explicit apocalyptic commitment. But, as he concludes, it is a sign of the times. As is clearly evident in Tricky's pre-2000 work, as well as that of many other artists at the time, apocalyptic discourse reflects angst about the probability of large-scale catastrophe. It articulates an intimidating feeling of threat. This sense of catastrophe has recently been theorized in terms of a transition from an 'industrial society' to a 'risk society' (see Beck 1992).

The thesis of the 'risk society' links the threat of real and often apocalyptic risks, such as environmental disaster, fueled by regular news reports about global warming, ozone layer depletion, pollution and nuclear power, with unprecedented social and political changes. It identifies a movement away from traditional social institutions and industrial societies. The problem is that the economic, political, legal and technological institutions that shaped these older institutions and societies are no longer able to adapt to the new reflexive, modernized world. Indeed, the very technologies that formed the basis of social and economic progress in industrial societies now create massive threats and, consequently, anxiety. For example, in a recent article for the Royal Society of Arts, the comedian and writer Mark Stevenson described this perception of threat:

> I've spent a large part of the past year considering Armageddon. Not the Hollywood cheese-fest of a movie, you understand, but actual, honest-to-God Armageddon. The end of the world as we know it. Game over. What some academics cheerily call 'global catastrophe risks'. A year spent meeting some of the smartest brains has shown me at least five versions of nanotech apocalypse, a host of 'machines take over'/'machines stop disasters, countless biotech risks that make the 1918 flu pandemic (body count estimate: 50 million) look like a sniffle, and let's not forget the ominous uncertainties of climate change. Even if we don't wipe ourselves out, I think I should remind you how awful the future is likely to be, and what new forms of terrorism, water wars, decreasing social cohesion and the possibility that Andrew Lloyd Webber will write a new musical. Let's face it, it's all bad. You might as well just get your head down, do the best for yourself and those you care

> about, try to buck the prevailing negative trend and snatch your comforts where you can (Stevenson 2010: 50).[4]

That having been said, as the tone of Stevenson's article indicates, there is a sense of banality about secular apocalypses. As Anthony Giddens has argued, they tend to be articulated in terms of long-term trends or calculations of 'statistical risk parameters' threatening humanity's survival, which detracts from the immediacy of the Apocalypse evident in much religious discourse (1991: 183). This intellectualization of risk can lead to a sense of resignation and apathy. As Stevenson puts it, 'the terrible story of our future . . . [that] I've been hearing since I popped out of my mother's womb . . . [is] so familiar that it rolls off the tongue like well-learned lines, as if I'm reading a script' (2010: 50). Many of the musicians discussed in this volume are, in their different ways, disturbed by such widespread apathy and familiarity with the Apocalypse. Hence, while unwittingly playing their own part in the familiarization of apocalyptic ideas (and therefore the growing apathy concerning them), they nevertheless seek to reintroduce the narrative power of the Apocalypse. Lyrically, musically and often visually they demand our attention; they force us to face termination; they present humanity on the brink of catastrophe; they shout at a humanity sleepwalking into the Apocalypse. And, unlike Christian musicians (see Chapters 2, 5, and 8), for many of them, humanity is facing termination, rather than facing an ending pregnant with millenarian hope. Of course, the message of Christian musicians, while offering hope to the redeemed, also declares that, for the unredeemed, this is the end—or perhaps worse. However, the point to note is that the aim is to focus the audience's gaze on the dramatic imagery of the Apocalypse and to divert it away from the statistician's chart, from pleasures of the world offered to humanity in the last days—as they suspect some have clearly decided to eat, drink and be merry prior to their inevitable demise. Again, Granholm's analysis of the use of apocalyptic symbolism by the band Earth Crisis (Chapter 3) and Gilmour's study of Tom Morello's work (Chapter 4) are illuminating here as good examples of the secular plundering of biblical apocalypticism in order to articulate the sense of risk. Indeed, to some extent, the music itself is intended to be, as Nick Millevoi described a live performance by the noise act Merzbow, 'the soundtrack to the apocalypse' (2010; see also Hensley, 2009).

From a slightly different perspective, and drawing heavily on premillenarian discourse, reggae (particularly during the 1970s and 1980s) focused on biblical signs of the end, on the prevalence of wars and rumours of wars, paying particular attention to the threat of nuclear holocaust and Armageddon. Although this was not unusual in the popular music of the period (bearing

4. It should be noted that Stevenson's thesis is that there are also a lot of promising developments in the modern world that challenge the widespread negativity.

in mind the cold war context), what is relatively distinctive in reggae discourse is the explicit association of the superpowers with Babylon and of nuclear war with divine judgment, both of which associations are understood in biblical terms. This, of course, is because apocalyptic discourse is taken from the Afro-Christianity of Caribbean slavery as interpreted within Rastafari (see Partridge 2009; 2010). A good example is Bunny Wailer's 'Armagidion' (on *Black Heart Man* [1976]), which links 'wars and rumours of war' (see Mt. 24.6) and nuclear apocalypse to 'the gates of doom and hell', to spiritual battles between light and darkness, to human unrighteousness, and to Satan. It then continues with rhetoric concerning redemption and post-apocalyptic life when 'night is passed and day is come'. Similarly, many reggae album covers of the period were especially apocalyptic in their depiction of imminent nuclear destruction and, often, in their articulation of Babylon's culpability. For example, the cover of Ranking Ann's *Something Fishy Going On* (1984) has, amid a scene of nuclear Armageddon, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in a nuclear submarine looking capricious and culpable (or maybe that's just the way I read the artwork). Other typical examples are Peter Tosh's *No Nuclear War* (1987), Mikey Dread's *World War III* (1980), the Mighty Maytones' *Madness* (1976), Michael Prophet's *Righteous Are the Conqueror* (1980), Mutabaruka's *Outcry* (1984), Ranking Joe's *Armageddon* (1982), and Steel Pulse's *Earth Crisis* (1984). To take the last of these, the title song from the album is typical in that it references violence, corruption, environmental catastrophe and the possibility of nuclear holocaust in Babylon's 'last days', repeating, in the chorus, references to 'doctrines of the fallen angels' and the 'eternal flames of hell.' Further, not untypical of such narratives is its concluding Rastafarian premillenarian declaration of hope: 'Jah kingdom rising . . .'[5]

The point of the above discussion is that, again, popular music provides evidence of what Cohn's examination of millenarianism so clearly demonstrates, namely that there is a relationship between end-time speculation and popular anxiety. However, as we have seen, unlike Cohn, we have argued that these are increasingly mainstream concerns, particularly as our cultures become determined by the threat of catastrophe. While the concerns will vary over time and be shaped by different cultural and social contexts, generally speaking, the amount of information we have today about the range of risks humanity faces, from flesh-eating viruses to climate change and from biological warfare to nuclear terrorism, engenders enough anxi-

5. Evangelical 'gospel reggae' artists, such as Sherwin Gardner and particularly Mark Mohr of Christafari, also make use of such language. Nevertheless, this is done missiologically in a way that seeks to distinguish it from Rastafarian discourse. For a good discussion of the theological tensions caused by the use of Rastafarian argot in gospel reggae, see Rommen 2006.

ety to create the conditions for apocalyptic excitement and semiotic arousal. Certainly, Cohn's comments regarding the extra-ecclesial nature of much of this apocalypticism are important. As this volume shows, not only is much contemporary apocalyptic discourse embedded in popular culture, but much contemporary eschatological speculation tends to be generated outside the formal theologizing of mainstream Christian denominations. While there is, of course, a great deal of popular apocalyptic speculation generated within the church, particularly within the evangelical and fundamentalist traditions (see Chapters 2, 5 and 9), as Wojcik has observed,

> [ext]many of the leading proponents of apocalyptic worldviews are not formally trained theologians associated with mainstream religious denominations or national organisations, but visionaries or prophecy interpreters who derive their apocalyptic authority from their charisma, predictive abilities, or divinely inspired revelations attained outside the formal sanction of dominant institutions (1997: 16).

Again, prophecy writing, notes Paul Boyer, 'was not a pursuit that attracted settled ministers and trained theologians, but instead enthusiastic amateurs, firm in their evangelical faith . . . and eager to share their interpretative deductions with the world' (1992: 305; see also 304–11). This, of course, is not surprising, in that, without the demands of critical theological discourse, such ideas quickly mutate, becoming assimilated more widely and easily into occulture. Popular culture—especially films and popular music—is crucial for understanding this process.

Final Comments

In Chapter 1—some of which would have functioned well as an introduction to the volume (see particularly the first section, 'Three Modes')—Roland Boer makes the following point about apocalyptic language: 'Heavily metaphorical, saturated with images, deeply mythological, it can be a highly creative genre. Yet all too quickly these metaphors and images solidify, become items to imitate again and again, and thereby lose their creative edge.' This being so, as he says, 'the better artists are those for whom apocalyptic does not involve cementing the images in place but exploring how they move about and generate new connections and possibilities'. This volume seeks to examine the creative way apocalyptic texts have been pressed into service by such artists as Cave (Chapter 1), Morello (Chapter 4) and Tibet (Chapter 6), artists who clearly are making use of this malleable genre and exploring new synergies. However, it is also important to understand the significance of those artists who enjoy 'cementing images in place', who simply rehearse a common stock of occultural apocalyptic ideas. Indeed, some such artists, both Christian and non-Christian, have been particularly influential in the dissemination of

apocalyptic thought and, in their own way, occulturally significant. If only for those reasons, their work should be the subject of the type of critical engagement this volume seeks to provide.

* * *

My own involvement with the project came rather late in its gestation. I am thankful to John Walliss, the director of Liverpool Hope University's Centre for Millennialism Studies, for asking me to take it on. To be frank, much of the work was already under way when I took over the task of editing the volume. Hence, to some extent my work has been limited to the gathering in of chapters that had been previously commissioned. That said, in the process, one or two have fallen by the way, while a couple of others have been added. I have enjoyed reading the essays and thank the authors for their contributions and patience with my queries. As for you, the reader, I hope you will find the volume both enjoyable and thought provoking.

1. Some Routine Atrocity, or, Letting the Curse of God Roar: Nick Cave and Apocalyptic

Roland Boer

> I saw some ordinary slaughter
> I saw some routine atrocity.
>
> Cave, 'Nature Boy',
> from *Abattoir Blues* (2004)

> All I had to do was walk out on stage and open my mouth
> and let the curse of God roar through me.
>
> Cave, *King Ink II*, p. 138

'Apocalyptic' has rolled off the tongue of more than one music critic to describe Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, or indeed his earlier incarnation as part of The Birthday Party. But what exactly does it mean to describe their music as apocalyptic? I take two paths here: a fairly conventional one that outlines the generally agreed upon notions of apocalyptic in biblical studies; and one that is far less conventional, for it seeks the way Nick Cave constructs his own apocalyptic world from the building blocks of biblical apocalyptic.

Three Modes

We can delineate the various senses of apocalyptic rather quickly, since there is reasonable (although never complete) consensus. There are three overlapping senses that refer to a genre, worldview and social movement. Originally literary, the genre refers to a body of knowledge revealed (*apokalypto*) to a chosen person by means of vision, dream or visitation. This knowledge provides an insight into history, especially a future and often cataclysmic history in which God is the central player. At this point an ambiguity arises between the technical meaning of apocalypse and its content: scholars will insist that it means a revelation, but more widespread usage understands apocalypse as referring to all matters pertaining to the catastrophic end of history with its coded accounts of the vast clashes between the forces of good and evil. I will

play with both sides of this ambiguity, although I do like to steer clear of the strange little squabbles in obscure corners of scholarship.

It is worth noting that the genre of apocalyptic is also notable for its use of language. Heavily metaphorical, saturated with images, deeply mythological, it can be a highly creative genre. Yet all too quickly these metaphors and images solidify, become items to imitate again and again, and thereby lose their creative edge. Indeed, we can roll off the terms all too easily—the Beast, the whore of Babylon, 666, the new Jerusalem and so on. To my mind, the better artists are those for whom apocalyptic does not involve cementing the images in place but exploring how they move about and generate new connections and possibilities.

A second sense refers to a worldview, although I really prefer the term ideology (see Collins 1997: 7-8; 2001: 25-38). While we have only two properly apocalyptic genres in the Bible—Daniel and Revelation—and many extra-canonical apocalypses, an apocalyptic worldview permeates some other texts. For instance, some of the Gospel sayings put in the mouth of Jesus (such as Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21) have a distinctly apocalyptic note, with their revelation of tribulation, war and rumours of war. But what does such a worldview mean? At the risk of stating the bleeding obvious, it is a distinct way of viewing the world. In terms of form, it refers to the way language is used, including the metaphors of an inner group and of conflict, powerful images that frame a world of oppression and miraculous release. In terms of content (although I have already slipped into content), we find a strong moral opposition between good and evil and a pervasive air of anticipation. The present time of troubles and gloom may be bad, but they have been foreseen and will be short. The inner circle (the 'good') will soon be vindicated in a much hoped for, if somewhat risky redemption when the bad will be vanquished. Suffering, pain, death, chosenness, reckoning, faithfulness, vindication—all of these make up an air of heavy anticipation. We might regard the worldview of apocalyptic as providing both a story to live by now and motivation for the future (see Boer 2008).

The final element of apocalyptic is the movement. The power of any piece of literature or worldview lies in the people who gather around it, the people for whom the text or the idea expresses their deepest beliefs, hopes and wishes. Indeed, the first big breakthrough in studies of biblical apocalyptic was the move away from purely literary influence and the use of sociological comparative studies to argue that apocalypticism is characteristic of severely oppressed and disempowered groups (see R.R. Wilson 1984). Apocalypse is the last resort, a final effort to make sense of a world that has gone horribly wrong. Jewish apocalyptic emerged when the population of Yehud found itself in a forgotten corner of the Persian empire and then the Hellenistic empireres. The people were chronically disempowered and forgotten, at the

receiving end of one pillaging army after another. In this context, one's last hope is in the chariots of God.[1]

This brief sketch is enough to provide me with some compass points for dealing with Nick Cave, especially in terms of biblical apocalyptic. Now, one could pursue the argument that the many fans of Cave actually form an apocalyptic movement, with their charismatic prophet who, through his songs and writing, foretells a new age free from all oppression. Then we would have the quaint image of a gathering of Cave fans at an appointed hour awaiting the second coming of Jesus. However, I would suggest that the last category of apocalyptic—the movement—does not actually apply to the work of Cave.

By contrast, the other two categories do apply, albeit with a few twists. It seems to me that many of Cave's songs have a distinct apocalyptic worldview. This is a world of murder, mayhem and atrocity, a grim world of unrelieved pain and sadness—in short, it is saturated with evil. Some of the material may also be described as apocalyptic in genre: in some cases we do have a revelation about a cataclysmic end. The catch is that this revelation usually belongs to a religious crackpot whose persona Cave both creates and inhabits. In all of this, there is a highly creative process under way. Old and new apocalyptic images, metaphors and symbols appear, but in unexpected combinations. In the process of drawing on apocalyptic, Cave transforms it in his own unique fashion. I like to imagine his creative process as an effort to catch at least some of the ideas that spark off and race around in his head.

God's Anger: The Flood

We can roughly map Nick Cave's music in terms of three overlapping zones—God's anger, Cave's Trinity and then the Resolution. They overlap in terms of musical form and content as well as in terms of time. The first really comes from Cave himself, for as he once put it, 'the Old Testament spoke to that part of me that railed and hissed and spat at the world'. Now, in Cave's self-representation he puts this down to an earlier, angry-young-man phase, fueled by drugs and alcohol and an exacerbated sense of sadness and rebellion.[2] But it seems to me that it is not a bad way to describe the apocalyptic side of his music. This anger is both derived *from* God and directed *at* God.

1. I must add a qualifier. Since these early breakthroughs it has become clear that oppressed groups are not the only context for apocalyptic. The (religious and political) right in the United States is far from being a forgotten minority, and yet apocalyptic characterizes its view of the world—in terms of worldview, literature and movement.

2. There are biographies a-plenty on Cave, especially given the gory details of his former drug habit, troubled relations with women and the music critics and his own liking for alternative publicity (see Brokenmouth 1996; Dax and Beck 1999; Johnston 1996). Add to this the interminable interviews over some thirty years (see http://www.bad-seed.

Apart from his early days with the gothic punk of The Birthday Party, the main aspects of this apocalyptic anger are the continuing punk-influenced songs that still appear today, and the thread of murder, mayhem and atrocity that runs through his work. I consider both in some detail in what follows.

As far as God's anger is concerned, what emerges after trawling through all of the songs written and sung by Nick Cave?[3] If we expected the book of Revelation or even Daniel to turn up as the prime source of images, then we are in for a disappointment. Instead, the prime apocalyptic source is the story of Noah and the Flood from Genesis 6–9. This story is not usually associated with apocalyptic. Yet in those chapters God speaks directly with Noah, the world is characterized as uncompromisingly evil over against Noah's goodness, and we have a catastrophic if somewhat watery end to the world as the basis for a new beginning. I would suggest that Genesis 6–9 is an apocalyptic vignette that we often overlook. The fact that it is another creation story, situated within the mythology of Genesis, tends to obscure its apocalyptic concerns. Yet the story of the Flood inhabits both the creation and end of the world, linking myths of origin with apocalyptic myths of the final cataclysm.

The Flood is a recurring motif in a series of songs: 'Tupelo' (*First Born Is Dead*), 'Muddy Water' (*Kicking Against the Pricks* [1986]), 'The Carny' (*Your Funeral . . . My Trial* [1986]) and 'Papa Won't Leave You Henry' (*Henry's Dream* [1992]).[4] Let me say a few things about the form of these songs before considering their content. To begin with, they are all much closer to Cave's punk roots. With its snarling disharmonies, sheer noise, and the foregrounding of all those things you are taught not to do as a guitarist, punk was both a moment in that perpetual return to the origins of rock and an effort to undermine it. If we take Jacques Attali's definition of music as organized noise (Attali 1977; 2006), then punk is the least organized of the lot. It is a cacophonous assault on the ears. Throw in anger, a cocktail of drugs and violent shows in seedy venues and punk starts to look a good deal like apocalyptic.

The four Flood songs are heavily indebted to Cave's punk past. Perhaps the best description is 'post-punk', a term that basically describes punk rockers if they survive the binge of drugs and alcohol and are able to explore their creative genius for a little longer. Each of the songs is raw and somewhat ragged. In contrast to the earlier material from days of The Birthday Party, the music is understated rather than becoming an implement to bash you over

org/~cave/interviews, as well as the collections of writings that include poetry, plays, film scripts, the novel and some autobiographical comments (Cave 1988; 1997; 1989).

3. Space precludes me from any detailed discussion.

4. I have not included the morose 'Ain't Gonna Rain Anymore' from *Let Love In* (1994), although it too speaks of storm and torrential rain. Here the storm is out in the ocean and it embodies a woman who has come and gone, leaving behind a dead calm and, as the title suggests, no more rain.

the head. Yet it still skirts the borders of harmony, favouring a pattern of simple repetition with discordant instruments. Above all, the music itself is ominous, full of foreboding, fear and threat.[5]

Rather fitting for the content of the songs, really. That content with its images and metaphors is a mix of recognizable apocalyptic items from the Bible such as the Beast, new arrangements and connections such as the Flood story and then a whole new collection of items that Cave drags in from elsewhere.

For instance, with the song 'Muddy Water' we encounter the rise of a river over a lowland farm and the end of a poor farmer's livelihood. But it is just a little more cataclysmic than your garden variety inundation: 'This flood will swallow all you've left behind / Won't be back to start all over'. On a slightly more sinister note both 'Papa Won't Leave You, Henry' and 'The Carny' spew out a much grimmer image of the watery destruction brought by the Flood. In the former, the rains from the 'firmament' (Gen. 1.7) signal a time of troubles, of 'lynch-mobs, death squads, babies being born without brains'. In 'The Carny' (short for a carnival worker) the foreboding that comes with the rains dominates the song. Here the fearful and legendary Carny has slipped out from the freak show with which he was travelling. His departure and the attempt by dwarves called Moses and Noah to bury his old nag (called 'Sorrow') trigger the deluge. The other freaks take shelter in fear, the forlorn ground rapidly floods and the company heads off for higher ground. But not before we get a vivid picture of the rising flood:

> The whole valley reeking of wet beast
> Wet beast and rotten soft hay
> Freak and brute creation (Cave 1986).

The best and most sustained example of an apocalyptic flood song is 'Tupelo' from the album *The First Born Is Dead* (not the last time a title draws from a biblical theme).[6] The song opens with sounds of thunder, lightning and rain. From beneath the storm rise the driving bass guitar riff and then

5. One reason for such sparse music may lie in Cave's drug habits. Before taking some time off in the late 1990s to get on top of his alcohol and heroin addictions, Cave would turn up to practice with a few scant lyrics but no music. The band would then contrive some music around the lyrics. When he finally managed to kick the drugs (although not his beloved cigarettes), he began composing with the piano. Music and lyrics started their connection much earlier in the process.

6. For example, *The Good Son*, which draws on and plays with both Cain and Abel (Genesis 4) and the Prodigal Son (Matthew 21 and Luke 15), and *Kicking Against the Pricks* comes from Acts 26.14. 'Tupelo' was written around the same time as the dense novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel* (Cave 1989). They share the same ominous mood, but there is not sufficient room here to discuss the novel.

the drum line that will anchor the song through its howling frenzy. With its jagged guitar cuts and the urgent quavering voice of Cave, it is not a song to which you would relax at the end of the day with one's pipe, slippers and hot chocolate. In fact, I used to turn it on at full blast at the doorways to my teenage sons' rooms if they had slept in. Somehow the song achieved what no alarm clock could do—wake them up. I must admit they cursed me to no end, thumping the 'off' button and returning to bed.

In this song Cave takes on a mad persona, something he does so well. Here it is a mad preacher from the Mississippi town of Tupelo—variously the birthplace of Elvis Presley and the name of a flowering tree that produces fine honey.[7] For this preacher the thunderstorm is the first sign of the end of the world, of God's judgment and Jesus' second coming. But the mishmash of biblical texts is both uniquely Cave *and* an extraordinarily good example of precisely this type of preaching. Cave-cum-mad-preacher assume they hold the truth (through a dirty little deal with God), and so the storm sweeps through in the last days. From mundane observations (the hen won't lay and the nag is spooked and crazy) to more ominous signs (black raindrops in which the birds won't fly, a sucked up river in which the first won't swim), the storm marks the arrival of the Beast himself. Salvation lies with a child born to a poor mother, 'in a clap-board shack with a roof of tin'. But the child's role is ominous. As a scapegoat he will carry the burden of Tupelo out of town but he will also be its saviour.

A series of motifs is drawn under the umbrella of the Flood: evil and good; the signs of the end; the final struggle between the Beast, who rolls in on thunder and rain, and the child, who is born to a poor drunken mother in a shack; the dual scapegoat from the Hebrew Bible. Rather than a secondary item that has been dragged into the apocalyptic fold, the Flood actually becomes the structuring device of an apocalyptic scene. Further, it functions at the different levels of apocalyptic I traced out earlier: the content of conflict at the end of history, the divine knowledge gained by an insider and the symbolism of ominous and fearful destruction. But Cave stretches each one, rearranging it to come up with something quite distinct. The history-closing conflict becomes less a coded prediction of events than a nightmare-ridden foreboding. Divine revelation becomes the dubious knowledge of a madman. The symbolism is a mix of recognizable items (Beast, lethal rain, death), new conjunctions (the Flood) and the wholly new (the freaks, the

7. Some (such as a somewhat hostile respondent to one of my earlier papers) assert that the overriding influence on Cave is music from the southern United States with its grim spirituality and stark experience of life. One may trace some of these themes in his work, but he has never lived in the South of that strange country between Canada and Mexico.

Carny, the dwarves called Moses and Noah, the babies born without brains and on and on).

Murder, Mayhem and Atrocity

Some of these Flood songs might qualify as apocalyptic at the level of genre, but another group is more clearly apocalyptic in terms of worldview. These are the songs of murder, mayhem and atrocity. There are quiet a few of these songs, so I need to be selective.[8] The ones that draw my attention are those that explore the motivations, contexts, nature and end result of murder. Although a few of the last category appear on *Your Funeral . . . My Trial* as well as 'Jangling Jack' on *Let Love In*, they come together with a unique concentration on *Murder Ballads*. I confess that the latter album is one of my great favourites. A good collection of slightly mad but all too familiar characters make up the murderers—the regular patron at the local bar, the aggrieved lover, an old woman, a small girl, a visitor from out of town and a doctor. Most of them are serial killers, some are caught, others not. Many of the murders are set in quiet small towns or isolated hamlets. Here Cave takes on the persona in question one after another. In the process we enter into the intimate, warped and coldly rational minds of the killers.

The best tracks on the album are 'Stagger Lee', 'The Curse of Milhaven' and the glorious 'O'Malley's Bar'. Like many of the tracks, they are ballads, but what stands out is that these three are played in an upbeat tempo. No sad tones of a minor key here (such as 'Henry Lee' or 'Where the Wild Roses Grow', sung with Kylie Minogue). These songs are played in major keys and with what comes about as close as Cave can get to dance rhythms. Yet, while the music is almost light-hearted and uplifting, the lyrics are graphically gruesome. Stagger Lee wreaks his destruction at a place called the Bucket of Blood, filling the head of Billy Dilly with lead as the latter sucks on his dick. In the small town of Millhaven, little Loretta nails dogs to doors, staves in heads of little boys, burns down slums and beheads the odd handyman, all the while singing 'all God's children, they all gotta die'.

8. For the sake of completeness, they are the following: the odd song threatens to kill a tough music critic ('Scum' from *Your Funeral . . . My Trial*); a good number do away with a woman ('Well of Misery' from *From Her to Eternity* [1984]; 'I'm Gonna Kill That Woman' and 'Hey Joe' from *Kicking Against the Pricks;* 'Your Funeral . . . My Trial' and 'Long Time Man' from *Your Funeral . . . My Trial*; 'Sugar Sugar Sugar' from *Tender Prey* [1988]); a couple at least join forces with a woman to kill another ('Deanna' from *Tender Prey* and 'John Finn's Wife' from *Henry's Dream*); one or two take on the persona of someone aggrieved and explore revenge ('We Came Along This Road' from *No More Shall We Part* [2001] and 'The Good Son' from the album of the same name [1990]).

Without a doubt, the best of all is the long-playing 'O'Malley's Bar'. In the persona of the killer, we enter his regular watering hole in a town where he has lived for thirty years. Today, however, God has called on him to fulfil his task. As he asks for a drink, he sniffs and crosses himself; his hand decides 'that the time was nigh'. In careful detail we run through the killing of each person present as the murderer sets out on a divine mission: 'I am the man for which no God waits / But for which the whole world yearns'. The craziness of the killer shows through in his biblical and theological allusions: O'Malley's daughter is like a Madonna on the church-wall; Mr Brookes reminds him of St Francis; the youthful Richardson, of St Sebastian and his arrows—he claims that he has no free-will and sees God and the ghosts of truth.

But is this apocalyptic? We might dismiss these songs and their poetry as the obsessions of a troubled artist who has more than enough demons with which to struggle. This is where a crucial couple of lines from 'Nature Boy' (*Abattoir Blues*) suggest a deeper logic to these murder ballads, songs of anger, senseless killing and death:

> I was just a boy when I sat down
> To watch the news on TV.
> I saw some ordinary slaughter,
> I saw some routine atrocity.

The song goes on to ask how this ordinary slaughter and routine atrocity might be overcome: his father suggests it is through beauty.[9] In other words, slaughter, destruction and atrocity may be the way the world is, but it should not be so. In short, what we have here is a rather strong doctrine of sin and evil. Instead of a mild theory in which evil is the precursor to redemption, Cave trawls his way through the rotting corpses of evil in all their putrid detail. Is this not a feature of apocalyptic? Is not a strong sense of the reality of evil one of its distinctive markers?

Redemption, or, Apocalypse and Women

Eventually this world of murder, mayhem and atrocity will need some redemption, although Cave takes his time finding it and offers no neat solutions. I have counted five types of redemption in Cave's varied artistic production. The first is really an absence of redemption: life continues on its gruesome path and the only relief is death. More characteristic of his early material, this absence of redemption is a perpetual feature of Cave's work, as the film *The*

9. For Cave's struggle—often cast in theological terms—to come to terms with a father who died early and did not realize his creative wishes, see my 'Under the Influence?' (Boer 2006).

Proposition shows (2007). The second is love, although it is invariably tainted with despair, bitterness and loss. The third is the figure of Jesus, who comes through as a gentle and sad caller in Cave's post-heroin phase.[10] These two combine in one of the most intriguing elements of Cave's work—the combination of woman, God and Cave in a reworked Trinity.[11] A final type of redemption is an extension of this Trinity: the connection between apocalyptic and women.

I would like to say a little more about the last two categories—Cave's Trinity and redemption through apocalypse and women. Cave's Trinity songs arise from the softer, crooning love songs in which the woman in question and God are woven into one. These are not your garden variety syrupy pieces that bands continue to spout forth as if they have discovered something jaw-droppingly new. No, Cave mixes up sorrow, pain and love in a unique fashion that is often fuelled by anger.[12] There are plenty of love songs like this in Cave's collection, but the highest points are those that bring woman, God and Cave into a divine Trinity and where the connections between them are erotic and sorrowful.[13]

10. See 'The Word Made Flesh' in *King Ink II* (Cave 1997).

11. As one example, in 'Brompton Oratory' we find the lines 'The reading is from Luke 24 / Where Christ returns to his loved ones'. Cave finds himself at a Pentecost communion, sips the communion wine while smelling the woman on his hands, and it is not clear whether the invocation of the beauty impossible to define, believe or endure refers to the woman in question or to God.

12. For the sake of completeness, the songs I place in this group are the following: 'From Her to Eternity', 'Wings off Flies', 'The Moon Is in the Gutter' (all from *From Her to Eternity*); 'Long Black Veil', 'By the Time I Get to Phoenix', 'The Carnival is Over' (from *Kicking Against the Pricks*); 'Sad Waters', 'Your Funeral . . . My Trial', 'Stranger than Kindness', 'Jack's Shadow', 'She Fell Away' (from *Your Funeral . . . My Trial*); 'Mercy', 'Slowly Goes the Night' (from *Tender Prey*); 'Ship Song, Lament', 'The Witness Song' (from *The Good Son*); 'Brother, My Cup Is Empty', 'The Loom of the Land', 'Jack the Ripper' (from *Henry's Dream*); 'Do You Love Me?' 'Loverman', 'I Let Love In', 'Thirsty Dog', 'Ain't Gonna Rain Anymore' (from *Let Love In*); 'I Do Love Her So (Lime Tree Arbour)', 'People Ain't No Good', 'Where Do We Go Now But Nowhere', 'West Country Girl', 'Black Hair', 'Green Eyes' (from *The Boatman's Call* [1997]); 'As I Sat Sadly By Her Side', 'Love Letter', 'Sweetheart Come', 'The Sorrowful Wife' (from *No More Shall We Part*); 'Bring It On', 'Dead Man in My Bed', 'Still in Love', 'Rock of Gibraltar', 'She Passed By My Window', 'Babe I'm On Fire' (from *Nocturama*); 'Cannibal's Hymn', 'Hiding All Away, Breathless', 'Babe You Turn Me On, Spell' (from *Abattoir Blues/The Lyre of Orpheus*); 'Lie Down Here (And Be My Girl)', 'Jesus and the Moon' (from *Dig!!! Lazarus Dig!!!* [2008]).

13. A detailed discussion of these songs of Cave's Trinity is for another time. Here is a complete list: 'Jesus Met the Woman at the Well' (from *Kicking Against the Pricks*), 'Sad Waters', 'Hard on for Love' (from *Your Funeral . . . My Trial*); 'Foi Na Cruz', 'Lucy' (from *The Good Son*); 'Straight to You', 'Christina the Astonishing' (from *Henry's Dream*); 'Do You Love Me', 'Nobody's Baby Now' (from *Let Love In*); 'Into My Arms', 'Brompton Oratory', 'There Is a Kingdom', 'Are You the One I've Been Waiting For', 'Idiot Prayer',

While I do not have room to explore Cave's Trinity or his love songs here in any detail (Boer 2010), I am more interested in a smaller group of songs. The resolution in these songs is quite dialectical, for Cave is beginning to reconcile the raw rock of his earlier days with the crooning love songs of the not so distant past. And one sign of that resolution is the way women and apocalyptic come together in some of this latest music.

There is a small collection of songs on *Abattoir Blues* that connects the apocalyptic anticipation of a world-ending cataclysm with the love of a woman: 'Messiah Ward', 'There She Goes My Beautiful World', 'Nature Boy' and 'Abattoir Blues'.[14] Or rather, the juxtaposition of the two offers the occasional shard of hope. No grand resolution here (unlike the earlier attempt in 'New Morning' from *Tender Prey*), no carefully worked-out schema of redemption—just the occasional hint that things need not go completely to hell. Each song offers a different possibility, whether overcoming catastrophe through beauty, or getting out and doing something instead of complaining, or in simple acts of hope in the midst of the contradictions of a world on the skids.

For instance, in 'Nature Boy' the song turns on the lines, 'in the end it is beauty / That is going to save the world, now'. The routine atrocity and murder of the opening lines finds a possible answer in beauty. And that is the trigger for an evocation of the world-changing arrival of a lover. Or in 'There She Goes, My Beautiful World' there are a number of threads in the song that look to the end of the world and simultaneously push towards redemption. One is autobiographical: Cave has said that a major reason he gave away the drugs was that he would lie for days and not do anything. So also in this song, where he lies on his bed with an empty head and empty ears and worries whether the great poets and authors wrote while 'under the influence'? Has his beautiful world of inspiration gone too? At another level it is nature that is going and perhaps gone through environmental collapse, especially if we remember the evocation of natural beauty at the beginning. And then it is a woman—the ambiguous 'she' who is going—and even God of whom he asks for nothing except one thing: 'Give me ever-lasting life'. All of these items must face the redemptive close of the song:

> So if you got a trumpet, get on your feet, brother, and blow it
> If you've got a field that don't yield, well get up and hoe it.

'Far from Me' (from *The Boatman's Call*); 'And No More Shall We Part', 'Hallelujah', 'Gates to the Garden', 'Darker with the Day' (from *No More Shall We Part*); 'Get Ready For Love', 'Supernaturally' (from *Abattoir Blues/The Lyre of Orpheus* ().

14. An earlier effort appears in 'Straight to You' from *Henry's Dream*. Here Cave meshes the loss of the passion of love with the end of the world – heaven has denied its kingdom and chariots of angels are colliding. To my mind this is a bit more clumsy than the efforts in *Abattoir Blues*.

I hardly need to comment on these lines: if you're worried to death about something—the effects of heroin, what God is up to, love or perhaps the end of the world—then pull your finger out and do your bit.

In 'Messiah Ward' we get a more consistent end-of-the-world theme: the refrain keeps reminding us that 'they're bringing out the dead', and we learn that the stars have been torn down and that the moon has been banned from shining. Yet in the pitch-dark of this mayhem, the author suggests to the woman, 'You can move up a little closer / I will throw a blanket over'. It is a small act, but in the midst of the cataclysm it offers a simple hope. Is it enough to forestall and overcome the mayhem and destruction of Armageddon?

Finally, in 'Abattoir Blues', the cataclysmic scenario is the most extensive of the lot: fire in the sky, mountains of dead, crashing stock exchanges, the culture of death and mass extinction. The song is also suffused with the deep contradictions of everyday life. The frivolous life of those in wealthy nations—sparrows on the way to work and Frappucinos in the morning—clashes with the scenes of woe that come from elsewhere in the world. How to respond? The song offers no final solution to the abattoir, preferring to throw out possibilities. Is it to be a lifeline from God? What about escaping with the two of them? Or is it through a simple request: 'Slide on over here, let me give you a squeeze'?

These songs trace a tension. No longer do we follow a desultory path to a grim end; instead another option begins to open up. The sky might be on fire and the dead might be heaped up, but Cave searches for some path other than the one that ends in meaningless oblivion. Not so much a pie-in-the-sky resolution, the songs explore the possibility that destruction and redemption are two sides of the same coin. You may not be able to stop such a cataclysmic end, but there are one or two things worth hanging onto.

Conclusion

Critics who write on Nick Cave like to slot him into categories or plaster labels on him. I am not sure it is all that easy to do so—I have tried now on a number of occasions. But what has emerged from this study of Cave and apocalyptic is that he really does fire off in many different ways. To recall an image I used earlier: his creative work is more like myriad sparks that fly off in all directions, or perhaps rapid-fire signals that take off all over the place in response to an idea or a stimulus. He might begin with conventional images—trees, flowers, the sea and the stars—but he takes them in entirely unexpected directions.

So also with his apocalyptic materials. We might feel that we have an idea of what he's up to—the Flood, love, the end the world—but then he throws

in a whole bunch of new and unexpected images that rearrange the coordinates with which we began. So the Flood becomes an apocalyptic motif (as do travelling carnivals, freaks and thunderstorms); murder, mayhem and atrocity become the subject of some great upbeat music; and love meshes in with the end of the world. In the process he has expanded and rearranged the sense of apocalyptic genre and worldview with which I began. It may no longer be a body of revealed knowledge, but it certainly is a richer collection of images, metaphors and symbols.

2. Evangelical Millennialism in the Lyrics of Johnny Cash

Mark S. Sweetnam

On the fourth of December 1956 serendipity brought together four of the biggest stars of rock and roll at the Sun studios in Memphis. As the result of a series of encounters whose sequence has been contested, Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, and Jerry Lee Lewis—later dubbed the 'Million Dollar Quartet'—spent the afternoon together singing around the studio piano. Sun's legendary Sam Phillips, scenting a golden publicity moment, alerted Bob Johnson, the entertainment editor at the *Memphis Press-Scimitar*, who turned up with a photographer to document the moment. Happily, Phillips also left the tape rolling, and the informal and exuberant performances that he captured tell us a great deal about these musicians and the music that they sang (Guralnick 1994: 365-68).[1]

The most striking thing about the collection of music performed by Presley, Perkins, Lewis and Cash is the predominance of gospel music. This is striking, but not surprising. It is no secret that, in the words of Slim Ausborn's brother James, 'gospel sort of inspirited [Elvis] to be in music' (Guralnick 1994: 21). 'Reared by a devout Assemblies of God mother . . . Lewis was formed by an evangelical Pentecostal Christianity' (Clapp 2008: 54). That the influence of that upbringing was slow to leave Lewis is amply evidenced by his recording session for 'Great Balls of Fire' at Sun's studios in 1957. Lewis baulked at recording the song because the lyrics reminded him of eternal judgment, and, spelling a word he cannot bring himself to speak, 'H-E-L-L' (see Clapp 2008: 56-57; Marcus 1997: 290-93).[2] Similarly, as we shall see, Cash made little secret of the importance of gospel music to his own musical formation. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that, out of the forty songs recorded in the extant tapes, over a quarter were spirituals.

1. The session recordings were released as *The Complete Million Dollar Session*, Charly, 1999.

2. Lewis's discussion with Phillips can be heard on *Jerry Lee Lewis: A Half Century of Hits*, Time-Life M19232.

It is saying nothing new to point out that the overlaps between gospel, country, and rock and roll music are, and have been, significant. Their roots in the American South, the shared performers in both modes, and the bleeding of material between the genres all make it both difficult and undesirable to consider either in isolation (Malone 2002). Moreover, this trend has continued well beyond the era of the Million Dollar Quartet. To this day, the mainstream stars of country music, in particular, are preoccupied with performing and re-performing religious material. Country music stars announce their intention to cling to the old rugged cross, anticipate peace in the valley some day and express the fervent hope that the circle will be unbroken by and by.

In general, this material is remarkable for its lack of any sort of doctrinal specifics: these spirituals operate more in the realm of religious platitude and are seldom expressive of anything more than a lowest-common-denominator evangelicalism. As such, country gospel contains little material that commits either the performer or the listener to any fixed doctrinal positions.

The crossover between country and gospel music is perhaps more striking in Johnny Cash than in any other star of country music. At the beginning of his career, Cash resolved that a tithe of his music would be religious (see S. Turner 2004: 76),[3] his move from Sun to Columbia in 1958 was motivated by Phillips's unwillingness to allow him to record gospel music, and when he selected material for his somewhat premature career-spanning retrospective in 2000, he did so under three titles: *Love, Murder*, and *God*. The liner notes that accompany this latter album outline Cash's belief in the appropriateness of country gospel music:

> There are many . . . aspects of God, as He revealed Himself to many, but to bring it back down to earth and to keep it simple for all of us, God is a God to sing to or sing about. Songs of praise, songs of wonder, songs of worship.
>
> To me, God likes a southern accent and he tolerates country music and quite a bit of guitar. This record is a sampling from over the years, a carefully selected, but complicated mix of gospels, spirituals and songs of praise. At times I'm a voice crying in the wilderness, but at times I'm right on the money and I know what I'm singing about. It's about singing, praise, worship, wonder and wisdom.[4]

The songs in *God* are 'carefully selected'; the album is designed as both the culmination and summary of a vital strand of Cash's career. That being so, its contents deserve our consideration, and that consideration reveals how closely Cash conforms to country music's avoidance of doctrinal music. It

3. Rodney Clapp describes Cash as 'a generous "tither" indeed', calculating that, out of a total of 964 songs, 235, or 24 per cent, were explicitly religious (2008: 140).

4. Johnny Cash, liner notes for *Love, God, Murder*, Sony, 2000.

would, I think, be excessive to refer to this as a strategy. However, given the predominance of Cash's own songs on that album, the lack of any definite doctrinal specifics must be the result of something more deeply rooted than a dependence on country gospel standards. A similar observation could be made about the album *My Mother's Hymn Book*, released shortly before Cash's death. Given that the concept of the project involved Cash's returning to the spirituals of his youth, it is not surprising that the album, which contains no original material, should survey just the sort of experientially focused, doctrinally nonspecific material that has been the mainstay of country gospel music.

The impression created by the contents of these albums accords with Cash's impatience with doctrinal specifics as outlined in *Man in Black*, Cash's first autobiography:

> To this day I have not learned nor tried to understand much of the difference in church doctrine. The preacher whose theme is pet doctrine cannot hold my attention very long. In my travels to Europe, Asia, and Australia, many times I have remembered and realized more fully that the gospel is the only doctrine that really works, and it works for all men. I'm sure denominations are important for bringing a body of believers together and giving them strength and motivation, but when this or that denomination begins to teach that their interpretation of the Word opens the only door to heaven, then I feel it's dangerous (Cash 1975: 32-33).

The range of denominations that Cash is ignoring here is unclear: few if any evangelical denominations would claim that their doctrinal positions represent the only road to heaven. That he is concerned with a range well beyond these evangelical denominations becomes clear later in the autobiography when he expresses his 'understanding and tolerance' for his first wife's Catholicism (Cash 1975: 69).

This commitment to a strongly held but curiously under-defined evangelical Christianity underpins much of Cash's life story. Few other performers have given religious experience such a large part in their personal narratives as the Man in Black. Contrary to some versions of the story, he does not precisely ascribe his rehabilitation from drug abuse and self-destructive behaviour to evangelical conversion. Rather, he describes a conversion experience in his early teens and his arduous journey back from drug addiction as new acts of submission and re-dedication (Streissguth 2006: 22). Nonetheless, the classical conversion narrative clearly provides a paradigm for his transformed life. Following his journey back from the brink, Cash was one of the world's most visible evangelicals, sharing appearances with Billy Graham and producing and performing in a cinematic retelling of the life of Christ, *The Gospel Road* (1972). Over a decade later, in 1986, Cash would comply with Graham's urging to complete *Man in White,* his novelization of the life of the apostle Paul, on which he had been working since the 1970s and which reflected the

extensive Bible study that he and June undertook after their marriage. Public and fervent though they were, however, the endorsement of Graham and Cash's other evangelical interventions were not even close to representing any sort of real doctrinal commitment.

The one exception to this is Cash's treatment of prophecy. In only this area does Cash's work appear to interact with doctrinal specifics. The evidence of Cash's work suggests that he was influenced by and gave expression to the tenets of the pop-dispensationalism that Hal Lindsey had been popularizing throughout the early 1970s. These ideas were to have an enormous impact on American religious, social and political life over the coming decades, and they gave rise to the most specific songs. (For a good discussion of this context, see Boyer 1992.) It is worth emphasizing Cash's involvement in the 'Jesus people' and Campus Crusade culture that gave birth to Lindsey's distinctive form of dispensational theology. So, for example, it is significant that, when Explo '72, the first large-scale contemporary Christian music (CCM) concert organized by the Campus Crusade for Christ took place in Dallas, the 180,000 young people who attended flocked to hear Love Song, Larry Norman, Randy Matthews, The Archers, and Children of the Day, the new stars of the CCM scene, also gathered to listen to Cash and his longtime friend Kris Kristofferson. By this time, Lindsey had already left Campus Crusade for Christ and founded the Jesus Christ Light and Power Company. But his blockbuster hit *The Late Great Planet Earth*, which had been published in 1970, drew extensively on the content of his ministry with the Campus Crusade, making this movement the *fons et origio* of Lindsey's dramatic—and dramatically successful—theology.

Though that dramatic theology is often described as dispensationalism, it is rather the case that Lindsey's theology is a mutation of dispensationalism so dramatic as to require a new nomenclature. Pop-dispensationalism is a useful way of describing this populist (and popular) reworking of dispensationalism. Lindsey's system of prophetic interpretation, adumbrated to massive success in his *Late Great Planet Earth* and perpetuated in a plethora of subsequent publications, is clearly based on the dispensationalist paradigm. However, recent work has argued for the importance of understanding how radically Lindsey has altered the basic dispensational framework (see Sweetnam 2011). It is important, therefore, to bear in mind that defining dispensationalism is a complex and difficult task and that proving that Cash was influenced by Lindsey does not necessarily amount to the same thing as proving that he was a dispensationalist.

Beyond question, the pop-dispensationalism that appealed so clearly to Johnny Cash did have its roots in dispensationalism, a scriptural hermeneutic and worldview that originated in the thought of the Irish clergyman John

Nelson Darby.[5] Darby himself first brought dispensationalism to the United States, where it was further popularized by the Bible conference movement, which itself provided the context for the *Scofield Reference Bible*, an annotated study Bible that propelled the dispensationalist worldview enshrined in its commentary to still further success. (For a discussion of the history and influence of this text, see Mangum and Sweetnam 2009.) A convenient summary of dispensationalist belief is hard to come by. My own attempt to delineate its key features has focused on five crucial emphases that have marked the system: its commitment to evangelicalism; its stress on a literal biblical hermeneutic; its recognition of different period (dispensations) in divine dealing with humankind and its insistence on the uniqueness and importance of both Israel and the church in the divine plan; its expectation of the imminent and premillennial return of Christ; and its emphasis on both apocalyptic and millennial expectation.[6] This basic dispensational framework was radically reshaped by Lindsey. Of particular importance to this chapter is Lindsey's most sensationalist modification of dispensationalism. Normative dispensationalism has consistently emphasized the parenthetic nature of the current dispensation. This amounts to saying that Scripture contains no prophecy relevant to the present age. (For a detailed discussion of this aspect of dispensationalism, see Sweetnam 2006.) Furthermore, it is argued, Christ's return is imminent and therefore cannot be anticipated by any 'signs of the times'. In other, simpler words, setting a date for Christ's return is impossible. Lindsey, however, eschews this sort of reticence. Centring his interpretation of prophecy on the establishment of the State of Israel, he outlined a sensationalist and pessimistic future and interpreted, for a popular audience, the signs of the times that spoke so eloquently of the proximity of Christ's return to

5. In spite of the global impact and influence of Darby's theology, there is no published scholarly biography of J.N. Darby. Three popular biographies are available: Turner and Cross, *Unknown and Well Known: A Biography of John Nelson Darby* (1990), is a new edition, with additional material, of a laudatory biography by a contemporary of Darby. See also Max Weremchuk's *John Nelson Darby* (1992) and Marion Field's *John Nelson Darby: Prophetic Pioneer* (2008). The role of Darby in the development of dispensationalist thought has been discussed by a variety of writers: F. Roy Coad's *A History of the Brethren Movement* (1976) is a classic study of Darby in relation to the Brethren movement. More recently, Timothy C.F. Stunt's *From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain, 1815–35* (2000) has set Darby in a wider context. Questions of Darby's influences have been discussed by Stunt in 'Influences in the Early Development of J.N. Darby' (2004) and 'John Nelson Darby: Contexts and Perceptions' (2006). Finally, Jonathan D. Burnham, *A Story of Conflict: The Controversial Relationship between Benjamin Wills Newton and John Nelson Darby* (2004), provides further useful material.

6. Mark S. Sweetnam, 'Defining Dispensationalism: A Cultural Studies Perspective', *Journal of Religious History* 34 (2010), pp. 191-212.

rapture his saints.[7] Lindsey's dramatic interpretations enjoyed unparalleled success. Boosted by his 'folksy' colloquial style, eye-catching paperback covers and a wide distribution outside the traditional channels of Christian literature, *The Late Great Planet Earth* went on to become the *New York Times*' non-fiction best-seller of the 1970s. Given this popularity, to say nothing of the chronological coincidence between Lindsey's success and Cash's revitalized and deepened interest in Christianity during this period, it would not be surprising to find elements of this 'signs of the times' dispensationalism in his recorded music.

But during Cash's lifetime, such indications were difficult to find. Relatively little of Cash's own writing focuses specifically on the prophetic or the eschatological. One of the few exceptions to this is the song 'When He Comes'. This lyric originally featured on the first record of the two-disc set *A Believer Sings the Truth* but it is not without significance that Cash also choose to include it on his *God* compilation album. The song's lyrics are broadly premillennial in aspect but clearly do not present a specifically dispensational picture of the events to take place 'when He comes'. Indeed, the ordering of events anticipated in the chorus of the song precludes any sort of dispensational reading:

> And He'll plant His beautiful feet upon this mountain,
> And the dead of all the ages who believe on Him shall rise,
> And I'll be one, I'll be one in the first resurrection,
> When He comes.

The location of the first resurrection (that of the believers 'of all the ages') at the moment when Christ's feet touch the Mount of Olives explicitly con-

7. Lindsey's breakthrough book was *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970). The phenomenal success of this book catapulted Lindsey to a position of prominence as an interpreter of biblical prophecy and contemporary geopolitics. *The Late Great Planet Earth* was the best-selling American non-fiction book of the 1970s, outsold only by the Bible (Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* [Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1986], p. 4) Since its initial publication, the book has gone through more than 108 printings with sales, by 1993, of more than 18 million copies in English and anywhere between 18 and 20 million further copies in 54 foreign languages (Lindsey, *Road to Holocaust* [New York: Bantam Books, 1989], p. 195). See also George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 77; and Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993], p. 311). In 1977, a film version of the book was produced, with narration by Orson Welles—and this was only the beginning. Lindsey went on to publish over 20 books, refining and adjusting his ideas, loudly claiming credit for accurate predictions, and, rather more quietly, rewriting those that had failed to come true.

tradicts the dispensational expectation of a 'two-stage' coming, involving the resurrection of Christians at the rapture, a minimum of seven years before the appearing of Christ at the Mount of Olives. In keeping with the general lack of the theologically concrete in Cash's material, the song presents the sort of vague premillennialism that is commonplace in American evangelicalism but certainly does not depict Cash as a dispensationalist of any stripe. As we will see, the other songs released during Cash's lifetime do bear a more dispensational complexion, but the presence and prominence of this exception must be recognized. What is equally intriguing is that this song was first recorded on 26 January 1979, in the same session that saw the first recording of 'Over the Next Hill We'll Be Home' (Smith 1985: 130). This song, as we shall see, bears a clear impress of Cash's interest in Lindseyan pop-dispensationalism. This should make us cautious about overstating the certainty that we can glean from the evidence of these songs.

A further caveat must be noted. This chapter considers only the millennial implications of songs written by Cash himself. This is not reflective of a lack of material: on the contrary, Cash's *oeuvre* is replete with songs by other writers that reflect an interest in the eschatological. One has only to think of chilling dystopianism of 'The Wanderer', written for Cash by U2's Bono and performed by Cash on *Zooropa*; or of the apparent belief in reincarnation expressed in Cash's stanza of 'The Highwayman', the eponymous chart-topping opening to an album recorded with Kris Kristofferson, Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson (1984). This sort of eschatological orientation is maintained on the latest Cash release. *American VI: Ain't No Grave* (2010) features an effective performance of Sheryl Crow's 'Redemption Day'. Though the evidence abounds, it is difficult to make too much of it. Certainly, it would be difficult to justify the very naive position that singers are fully committed to ideological, philosophical, or religious positions that they articulate in singing the songs of others. This gap between belief and expression, between reality and performance never entirely goes away—it is present even when we consider songs written by the performing artist. Nonetheless, we are on immeasurably safer ground when we look at original material than when we consider the content of cover versions.

Among the wealth of original material written by Johnny Cash, we do find material testifying to his indebtedness to pop-dispensational thought. Songs expressing Cash's interest in pop-dispensationalism were released throughout his life. Scattered across a range of albums, which were not specifically Christian in their content, the songs' impact was somewhat weakened. However, Johnny Cash ran out of time well before his record company and producer ran out of music. Posthumous releases of Cash material have included the spectacularly tactlessly titled collection *Cash Unearthed* (2003)and the two postscripts to the Rick Rubin produced American Recordings series—*Ameri-*

can Recordings V: A Hundred Highways (2009) and *American VI: Ain't No Grave*. Of rather more interest than the contents of Rubin's cutting room floor, however, are the songs recorded on *Johnny Cash: Personal File* (2006). The liner notes to this double album recount the circumstances in which this material was uncovered. In early 2004, following Cash's death, John Carter Cash invited Steve Berkowitz, senior vice-president of A&R at Legacy Recordings, and Gregg Geller, a producer, to go through the hundreds of recordings that were stored in the House of Cash studio in Hendersonville, Tennessee. The 'large walk-in closet' there contained 'virtually every recording that had passed through [Cash's] hands', according to Geller. And among the test pressings of his Sun records, and audio masters for *The Johnny Cash Show*, was a series of white boxes labelled simply 'Johnny Cash—Personal File.' The tapes within contained 49 unheard recordings, over half recorded in a ten-day period in 1973 and the remainder recorded at intervals during the 1970s and into the 1980s. The songs, recorded in no apparent order, were released in 2006 as a double album. The first disc contained a mixture of Tin Pan Alley hits, traditional folk tunes, new songs and favourite covers by the Louvin Brothers and Johnny Horton, among others. The second disc was devoted to gospel music. Eleven of its 24 songs were written by Johnny Cash: most of them had never been released. The release of this material was greeted with considerable interest and acclaim by music critics, who pointed to the pared-down and simple sound of the recordings—which feature just Johnny and his guitar—as the forerunner of the sound of the first of Cash's American Recording albums. But this most substantial collection of Cash's original gospel material also provided the first comprehensive evidence that Cash's prophetic belief had significantly influenced his musical production. That evidence is contained in three original tracks: 'Over the Next Hill (We'll Be Home)', recorded during the initial ten-day session in 1973, 'Matthew 24 (Is Knocking at the Door)' co-written with June Carter Cash in 1973 and committed to tape in December of 1982, and 'Look unto the East', recorded in 1974.[8] 'Matthew 24' had previously been released as a duet with June Carter Cash on the Columbia Records album *Johnny Cash and his Woman* (1973). 'Over the Next Hill' had featured on *A Believer Sings the Truth* (1979) and on the soundtrack of the Cashes' 1993 documentary *Return to the Promised Land* (Soundtrack on Renaissance, B0000520TV). 'Look unto the East' was released only on *Personal File*. These three songs deserve to be examined in some detail. It is worthy of note that 'Over the Next Hill' and 'Matthew 24' are quoted at the beginning of *Man in Black*, and it is highly significant that

8. These dates are taken from the liner notes to *Personal File*. There are some discrepancies between that chronology and that outlined in Smith 1985.

they sandwich a section in which Cash explicitly links their writing with his new interest in Israel:

> In the last few years . . . I've been writing more gospel songs. Having been to Israel three times, studying the life and words of Jesus and on the third trip doing a film about Jesus, with His words always on my mind I wrote a flood of songs (Cash 1975: 16).

In addition, it is interesting to note the chronological proximity of these songs: they all emerge from the same atmosphere of cold war pessimism and uncertainty that undoubtedly energized Lindsey's project and at a time when pop-dispensationalism was exerting its strongest influence.

The recording of 'Over the Next Hill' featured on *Personal File* is prefaced with Cash's reminiscences about the genesis of the song:

> I remember one night June and I were driving from Denver to Cheyenne, Wyoming where we were gonna do a show at the rodeo—the granddaddy of them all, you know—the biggest rodeo in the world. And we'd been driving quite a while—travelling quite a while and the night was clear and you could see for miles and we were toppin' a hill I said I bet we'd be able to see Cheyenne from the top of this hill and she said 'Yeah, it'd be nice if over the top of this hill we'd be home.' I said 'That's a good song' and I said 'make a good spiritual.' And I stopped the car—I let her drive while I wrote 'Over the Next Hill We'll Be Home'.[9]

The mundane context of these events notwithstanding, Cash was inspired to write a spiritual that related the contours of contemporary events—'the way the land is laying'—to an imminent homecoming. 'Familiar landmarks' and 'the turn the tide is takin'' all unite to proclaim the titular truth that the lyrics continually echo —'over the next hill, we'll be home'. The lyrics, especially when combined with Cash's reminiscences about the song's genesis—included in both *Man in Black* and *Personal File*–hardly seem remarkable for any sort of heavy theological content. Nonetheless, the fact that they prompt Cash's discussion of his interest in Israel should be sufficient to tip us off that something significant is going on in this song. Indeed, the message of the song—that the contours of the contemporary landscape indicate that that Cash is nearly home—echoes the primary assumption of Lindsey's pop-dispensationalism. Lindsey's use of contemporary events to prop up his interpretation of Scripture is precisely followed in the way in which the landscape imagined in this song provides confirmation of the prognostications of 'the prophets I've been hearing'. Moreover, both the 'great redeeming', the rapture (Christ's return for his own) and 'the coming storm', the Tribulation (the seven-year period of suffering, destruction and death that follows the

9. Johnny Cash, 'Over the Next Hill We'll be Home', *Personal File* Disc 2, Legacy, 2006.

rapture) play a significant role in the future as predicted by dispensationalist exegesis. The reference to 'the place that we are nearing / that so many have been fearing' seems to be an allusion to a place in time rather to a place in (or out of) space. The relevance of the atmosphere of pessimism and paranoia that the turn of the early 1970s tide had induced in many seems clear here.

There is one other significant feature of this song on which it is relevant to remark. In the fourth stanza, Cash refers to the 'dreams that I've been dreaming'. The placement of this line within the song sets it in parallel to the words of the prophets in the previous stanza. This elevation of the individual dream is hardly representative of the evangelical mainstream. It is, however, representative of a quasi-mysticism that informs Cash's lyrics.

At first glance, the refrain of Cash's 'Matthew 24 Is Knocking at the Door' seems to stress a far more biblicist approach than 'By the way the land is lying'. The 'little apocalypse' of Matthew 24 is an important apocalyptic passage of Scripture. It is of particular importance to dispensational exegesis, in which it is read as referring particularly to the events of the Tribulation. In addition, because of its apparent prophecy of the restoration of Israel as a nation, it is the single most important chapter of Scripture in Lindsey's presentation of prophecy. In spite of the biblicism of the refrain, however, 'Matthew 24' is even more overtly concerned with current affairs and even more explicitly engaged in a Lindseyan interpretation of these events. This concern with contemporary sensation is foregrounded in the opening lines of the first two stanzas: 'I heard it on the radio, there's rumours of war', and 'I heard about an earthquake'. The priority is interesting here: the engagement with prophetic Scripture dramatized in the song is motivated and mediated by the signs of the times. And the choice of wars and earthquakes is also significant. Prophetic Scripture, and Matthew 24 in particular, highlighted earthquakes and 'wars and rumours of wars' as harbingers of the end. In referring to these events as the 'signs of the times we're in today' Cash is deliberately using a resonant term in dispensationalist discourse, a term that was frequently used to sum up Lindsey's project.

It is the second stanza of the song, however, that most clearly indicates Lindsey's influence on Cash's eschatology. One of the most important elements of Lindsey's packaging of prophetic truth was the way in which he offered to identify the modern equivalents of the national participants in the biblical account of the end of time. So, one of the chapter headings in *The Late Great Planet Earth* succinctly affirms 'Russia is a Gog', and another chapter, entitled 'Yellow Peril' identifies the 'kings of the East' with the armies of Communist China, focusing, exactly as Cash does, on the phenomenal number of troops that could be mustered when the time finally comes.

The closing lines of the song maintain this tone of expectation but complicate slightly the order of prophetic expectation. The 'young and old now prophesy a coming prince of peace' is an allusion to the millennial prophecy

of Joel, who promises, 'your old men will dream dreams and your young men will see visions' (2.28). Cash, then, is pushing this millennial prophecy back into the present, in a break with the precise ordering of Lindseyan expectation. In this atmosphere of prophetic and eschatological expectation, Cash himself has been gifted with a special insight. His dream of 'lightning in the east' echoes Christ's assurance, in Matthew 24, about the unmistakable nature of his manifestation in glory:

> Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.
> For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be (Mt. 24.27).

Traditional dispensational exegesis of this passage stressed that this refers to Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation, not his arrival in the air secretly to rapture his saints. But the fact that Cash dreams of this spectacular arrival introduces a degree of vagueness that frees him from a too close adherence to any sort of dispensational programme.

'Matthew 24', then, is a highly significant song in two ways. First, it does provide us with clear evidence of the impact of Lindsey's work on Cash's thought. The trajectory from signs of the times to Scripture and heightened eschatological expectation is classically that of *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Lindsey's alignment of cold war foes with the armies of biblical prophecy clearly appeals as much to Cash as it did to many of his contemporaries. At the same time, the implications of Cash's artistic imperative are clear. He is making use of pop-dispensational tropes but is not engaging in a straightforward dispensational song writing programme. This can be clearly seen when the lyrics considered in this chapter are contrasted with songs such as Larry Norman's 'I Wish We'd All Been Ready', which was written at Hal Lindsey's suggestion and which has a clear dogmatic and evangelizing priority:

> A man and wife asleep in bed,
> She hears a noise, she turns her head, he's gone!
> I wish we'd all been ready.
> Two men walking up a hill,
> One disappears and one's left standing still.
> I wish we'd all been ready.
> There's no time to change your mind,
> The Son has come and you've been left behind.
> The teacher of truth told tales.

A similar priority emerges in 'Look unto the East'. In considering this song, it is worth bearing in mind that it was not released before Cash's death. In other ways, too, this song certainly differs from the two we have previously considered. But there are also important similarities to be noted. The song

clearly draws upon the same body of dispensational tropes as the songs that we have already considered. While it is about the same beast, the song itself is clearly a different beast. It is broadly dispensationalist in its recurring Israeli-centricism—the East is a crucial site in this song. The expectation of the rapture also informs this song—the so-called 'nuptial mysticism' that anticipates the return of the bridegroom for his bride—has had a long and important history in dispensationalist thought.

'Look unto the East', however, is a much more complex song than the two that we have previously discussed. Most obviously, its heavily alliterated language is self-consciously artificial, contrasting dramatically with the conversational speech in which the earlier song's more overtly doctrinal message was couched. But the imagery used is also far more complex, echoing Yeats, perhaps, in its bestial imagery and, a jump further, perhaps, sounding almost Donnean in its conflation of Christ's sacrifice and return because of the special site that they share. Notably, there is no need for Cash to segue away from scriptural prompts to experiential or dream-based material: the imbrication of the two is both closer and more fluid.

What we seem to be seeing here is the aestheticization of dispensationalism, a move from the relatively straightforward use of Lindsey's teaching to a more abstract and artistically more complex treatment. This treatment shares some of the concerns of pop-dispensationalism but is less didactic and far more open-ended in its treatment of these issues. Cash seems to have found the limits of the earlier approach rather quickly. We have no evidence of whether his personal understanding of biblical prophecy changed in the interim, and there is some reason to suggest that his views remained largely the same. But the artistic ascendency of pop-dispensationalism was short-lived.

This analysis is borne out by Cash's most famous apocalyptic song—'The Man Comes Around', the title track of *American Recordings IV* (2002), the last album released before Cash's death. It is noteworthy that an earlier, and unreleased, version of this song appeared on the posthumous *Unearthed*, indicating that it had been the subject of some revision. This revision and its extent are confirmed by the liner notes, in which Cash reveals the amount of effort that the song cost him:

> I wrote and recorded 'The Man Comes Around' early on in this project, and for three or four months I recycled that song over and over, until I'd have to get up out of bed, and turn on the radio. It worked for a while, but my inner playback system always went back to 'The Man Comes Around'. I spent more time on this song than any I ever wrote (liner notes, Cash, *American IV: The Man Comes Around*).

'The Man Comes Around' is opened and closed by spoken passages of Scripture: opened with the angel's invitation to John, in Rev. 6.1-2 to 'come and see', and closed by the vision of Death's pale horse from the v. 8 of the

same chapter. Between these scriptural bookends, the song is clearly saturated with biblical language and imagery. But it is also shaped by dispensational and pop-dispensational tropes—most obviously in the line 'Till Armageddon no shalam, no shalom', which combines a clearly premillennial understanding of prophecy with a classically dispensational Judeo-centricism, but also in its use of the parable of the ten virgins and the promise of 'Alpha and Omega's kingdom'. Beyond this, however, the song stakes out no doctrinal ground. This is perhaps not surprising, given the genesis of the song. The liner notes of *American Recordings IV: The Man Comes Around* recount a dream in which Cash walked into Buckingham Palace, where he encountered Queen Elizabeth 'knitting or sewing', with 'a basket of fabrics and lace'. Looking up at him, she said, 'Johnny Cash, you're a thorn tree in a whirlwind.' On waking, Cash traced the quotation:

> I realized that 'Thorn tree in a whirlwind' sounded familiar to me. Eventually I decided that it was biblical and I found it in the book of Job. From there it grew into a song, and I started lifting things from the book of Revelation. It became 'The Man Comes Around'.

It is interesting to contrast this narrative of the song's origins with Cash's account of the writing of 'Over the Next Hill'. The inspiration has moved from the actual to the imagined, from the real to the surreal. 'Over the Next Hill' had its genesis in a very concrete set of circumstances: a journey to a gig, time constraints on the journey, and the presence of June to prompt his creativity. All of that is gone, or inverted, in the inspiration for 'The Man Comes Around'. And this contrast provides a convenient measure of the way in which Cash's artistic response to prophetic Scripture and the tenets of Lindseyan pop-dispensationalism has been transformed. In some ways at least, this carefully crafted song is the logical culmination of Cash's evolving interest in dispensational doctrine and tropes. It is the development of tendencies that informed even his most scholastic songs, but they have clearly developed very considerably.

These songs reveal Johnny Cash's response to prophetic Scripture and to the tenets of pop-dispensationalism. They also tell us something about Cash's creativity and the way in which he used and transformed the influences to which he had been exposed. But the critical response to Cash is also very revealing, especially when contrasted to that afforded the *Left Behind* series of novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. Secular cultural commentators have excoriated the theology of *Left Behind*, drawing concerned and sometimes hysterical attention to its social, moral and geopolitical implications. This is precisely the same theology that Cash absorbed and expressed in these songs. Yet no attention has been paid to this congruence, and Cash's status seems highest and his popularity greatest among precisely those groups that have been most eloquent in their criticism of *Left Behind*. To a degree, this

may have something to do with a lack of theological acuity and ability to recognize in Cash's necessarily brief allusions the influence of a whole system of theology. Less easy to explain and excuse is a review of Cash's *Personal File* in the evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*. It concluded that 'there's nothing intrinsically revelatory in Cash's *Personal File* other than the folk singer's deep love for country music, storytelling, and the gospel' (Farias 2006). In this summary, Cash is reassimilated to the sort of doctrinally unspecific mom-and-apple-pie evangelicalism that we expect from country music. But there was much more to *Personal File* than that, and a great deal more to Johnny Cash.

3. Metal, the End of the World, and Radical Environmentalism: Ecological Apocalypse in the Lyrics of Earth Crisis

Kennet Granholm

I was 17 years old when I got my hands on Earth Crisis's EP *Firestorm* (1993). I recognized the music as hardcore, but the powerful distorted guitar riffs, heavy drums and aggressive vocals were reminiscent of extreme metal. Although I instantly fell in love with the music, it was the lyrics that had the strongest impact on me. The impassioned calls for animal liberation, veganism, and ecological justice changed my worldview. A few months after this initial encounter I had become vegetarian, and later still I was both vegan and straight edge. Though I have since then 'dropped the edge', I am still a vegetarian and subscribe to many of the animal liberation and ecoethics positions advocated by the band. What I did not pay much attention to back then, however, was the band's heavy use of Christian terminology and imagery, particularly Christian end-time discourse. This is very curious indeed, as the hardcore genre in general, though not necessarily opposed to religion, is still very secular in character. Indeed, in the early 1990s straight edge hardcore scene Earth Crisis was one of the few bands that used this sort of language. The focus of this article is precisely this, the use of religious and apocalyptic vocabulary and symbolism by Earth Crisis. I will contextualize the band in the hardcore and straight edge scenes, as well as in the new environmental and animal rights movements from the 1960s onward.

A few words on terms such as 'apocalypse', 'apocalypticism', and 'Armageddon' are in order. Though the word 'apocalypse' strictly speaking refers to Jewish and Christian biblical writings containing prophetic revelation of 'an imminent cosmic cataclysm in which God destroys the ruling powers of evil and raises the righteous to life in a messianic kingdom', it has more and more come to be used as an all-around term for 'a great disaster' (M-W 2010a). As a result, some of the potentially positive connotations have been lost. Similarly, the word 'Armageddon', originally referring to the time or place of the final fight between the forces of good and evil in the biblical tradition, has come to signify a general 'end of all things'. Apocalypticism, thus, today often refers

to 'a doctrine concerning an imminent end of the world', whereas a classic understanding would add 'and an ensuing general resurrection and final judgment' (M-W 2010b). In this article the use of the terms lies somewhere in between their original and popular meanings. Overall, Earth Crisis does deal with 'the end of all things'; although ideas of final judgment are not fully absent, there is no notion of a supernatural being acting as judge.

Hardcore Punk and the Straight Edge Movement

> I'm a person just like you, but I've got better things to do
> than sit around and fuck my head, hang out with the living dead
> snort white shit up my nose, pass out at the shows
> I don't even think about speed, that's something I just don't need
> I've got straight edge (Minor Threat, 'Straight Edge' [Minor Threat 1989]).[1]

These words by the Washington DC-based band Minor Threat came to function as a manifesto for a new youth movement in 1981—the straight edge (or sXe) movement. In 1983 the Minor Threat song 'Out of Step' further clarified the movement's ideology with the line 'I don't drink, don't smoke, don't fuck—at least I can fucking think'[2] (Minor Threat 1989). The impetus for the movement was the strong presence of alcohol, drugs and promiscuous sex in the US punk and hardcore scene, something that was perceived as being far removed from true rebellion (Haenfler 2006: 7, 37). Straight edgers would discard the evils of older generations and make true individual freedom possible by abstaining from using drugs and engaging in promiscuous sex, instead focusing on clean living and 'positivity'[3]. As Ross Haenfler notes, 'Straight edgers claim that resisting social standards and expectations allows them to follow their own, more meaningful, path in life, toward greater self-actualization' (Haenfler 2006: 47). Almost thirty years after Minor Threat set the movement in motion, abstaining from drugs, alcohol and tobacco still constitutes the core value and absolute rule in the scene (Haenfler 2006: 10; Wood 2006: 70-71). The 'X' symbol often used by scene members in clothing, drawn on their hands and/or in tattoos (Wood 2006: 113-15) originated in Washington, DC, as well. State laws required music venues to allow minors entrance, but in order to prevent them from purchasing alcohol, their hands were marked with a large X. Certain youngsters, including ones old enough to drink, adopted the sign as a mark of

1. Lyrics quoted with the kind permission of Dischord records.
2. Lyrics quoted with the kind permission of Dischord records.
3. The effectiveness of straight edge rebellion is questioned by Steven Hamelman (2006), who, although himself abstaining from drugs, alcohol and tobacco, seems to propose that 'rock 'n' roll' needs to be about 'sex and drugs'.

pride, signalling that they chose not to intoxicate themselves (Haenfler 2006: 7-8, 35; Wood 2006: 115-17).

Since its inception, straight edge has been closely linked to the genre of music called hardcore, though the genre itself is broader than the movement (Haenfler 2006: 9). Hardcore, or hardcore punk, developed out of late 1970s punk music (Waksman 2009: 9), with pioneering American bands such as the Misfits (first single in 1977, first EP in 1980), Black Flag (first EP in 1978), and Dead Kennedys (first single in 1979, first album in 1980) (see Blush 2001: 50-73, 102-15, 195-208). The North American connection is so strong that some even describe hardcore as Americanized punk. Hardcore is more extreme than the earlier punk on almost all levels: harsher in sound, faster and often treating more controversial subjects. In terms of image, though, the opposite is true. Where punks adorned themselves in t-shirts with offensive texts or symbols, torn jeans, leather jackets, safety pins, and colourful hair-dos often in 'mohawk' or some other radical style, hardcore kids[4] commonly favoured a more clean-cut style with shorter hair and more conventional clothing such as jeans and t-shirts (often with band logos) (Haenfler 2006: 9). Especially among 'Victory style' (see below) and metalcore fans tattoos and a muscled physique were common (Haenfler 2006: 16-17). Both hardcore and sXe became global phenomena already by the early to mid 1980s, with a truly global breakthrough in the 1990s, along with the commercialization of hardcore. Local scenes exist in many parts of the world outside the US, such as the Northern Swedish scene of the 1990s centred on the city of Umeå, with local record labels such as Desperate Fight Records and renowned sXe bands such as Refused (first EP in 1993).

Haenfler divides developments in sXe into six different stages, although he points out that such a division can function only as an ideal type (2006: 11-17). The 'old school' stage (1979–1985), represented by bands such as Minor Threat, was followed by the 'youth crew' (1985–1991), 'emo-influenced/politically correct' (1989–1995), 'Victory style' (1991–2001[5]), 'youth crew revival' (1997–2006), and 'metalcore' (1998–2006[6]) stages. It is the 'Victory style' stage, named after the most important sXe/hardcore record label in the period—Victory Records—that is of particular interest here. Victory Records bands, such as Strife (first Victory Records album in 1994), Snapcase (first Victory Records album in 1994), and Earth Crisis, ushered in a heavier sound more influenced by metal than by earlier hardcore. These bands, particularly Earth Crisis, were at the forefront of a hybridization of metal and

4. 'Kid' is a common in-scene term for participants in the hardcore scene.

5. Interesting to note is that Haenfler places the end of the 'Victory Style' era at the time of the disbanding of Earth Crisis. This points to the significance of the band.

6. Note that 2006 is the year of publication for Haenfler's book and does not necessarily signal the end of the metalcore-stage.

hardcore commonly termed metalcore (Haenfler 2006: 16; see Waksman 2009: 213). This connection between metal and what is essentially punk rock is in itself nothing new. Throughout the history of both genres there has been cross-fertilization (Waksman 2009: 7). In hardcore we have the above example of metalcore, and in metal subgenres such as thrash and speed metal are highly indebted to punk (Waksman 2009: 13).

In addition to the metal-influenced aural qualities, the Victory-era bands also brought a renewed focus on political issues. While vegetarianism had been an ingredient in punk and hardcore for a long time, and an aspect of sXe ideology itself from the mid 1980s (Haenfler 2006: 53; Wood 2006: 39-40), the Victory era bands brought issues of veganism and environmentalism to the forefront (Haenfler 2006: 16; see Wood 2006: 41; Peterson 2009: 56). In some scenes, such as the Umeå one, the animal liberation cause became the primary point of discussion and political action, though a drug-free lifestyle and positivity still formed the basis of sXe identity. In essence, and though the issue was much debated, it became commonplace for an sXer to be vegetarian or vegan (Haenfler 2006: 53; Wood 2006: 45-48; Peterson 2009: 84-87). Certain individuals and bands started to advocate more 'hardline' or 'militant' approaches, entailing both a more active stance in promoting the core sXe values, which sometimes included instances of prejudice or even violence towards people who did not abide by these values, and in particular the promotion of radical animal liberation politics and direct action (see Haenfler 2006: 49-50, 82; Peterson 2009: 86-87). In addition, the metalcore of the Victory-era bands also brought hardcore and straight edge to the mainstream (Haenfler 2006: 170). Major independent metal record labels such as Roadrunner Records and Century Media have signed hardcore bands, and many bands have played at large metal festivals such as Ozzfest (Haenfler 2006: 17). A significant role in the commercialization and popularization of certain sXe ideals and approaches was played by the (non-sXe) band Rage Against the Machine, whose vocalist Zach de la Rocha had previously been in the sXe band Inside Out (Haenfler 2006: 185).

The New Ecological/Animal Rights Ethos

In addition to hardcore and sXe, Earth Crisis also needs to be put into the context of the new environmental and animal rights movements. The following brief history of the Western environmentalism and animal welfare/rights movements focuses particularly on newer and more radical developments in the English-speaking world.

Classic American environmentalism developed on the basis of three different premises: wildlife management, conservationism and preservationism (see Brulle 2000: 133-72). Wildlife management has its origin in organizations for game protection, such as the New York Sportsmen's Association

(1844), which had the aim of protecting the 'gentlemanly activity' of hunting—as opposed to the more 'lowly' activity of hunting in order to gather food (see Gottlieb 2005: 64)—by preventing overhunting of important game animals. A shift towards wildlife management occurred in the 1930s (Brulle 2000: 135-43). Conservationism, similarly, builds on a 'utilitarian and technological/managerial perspective regarding nature', based on the idea of humanity's stewardship of the earth, and contends that 'nature is a resource to be used by society to meet human needs' (Brulle 2000: 145-46). The goal is thus to protect from overuse aspects of nature that are of significance for human beings (Brulle 2000: 146-48; Gottlieb 2005: 55). This approach, based in essence on economic interests, continued in the 1980s and 1990s with the idea of sustainable development (Brulle 2000: 156-58). The movement gained momentum in the late nineteenth century in the US, with, for example, the passing of the Federal Forest Reserve Act in 1891 and the creation of forest reserves such as Yellowstone Park in the late 1890s (Brulle 2000: 150-51; Gottlieb 2005: 55-57). Finally, the preservation movement focused on the 'spiritual and psychological relationship between humans and the natural environment' and saw nature as having value not only because of its possible economic significance but primarily because of its aesthetic beauty and its importance for 'the spiritual well being of humanity' (Brulle 2000: 161; Gottlieb 2005: 57). An early and important preservationist group, still active in the 2000s, is the Sierra Club, founded by John Muir in 1892 (Brulle 2000: 166; Gottlieb 2005: 52, 56).

In the same period, developments were occurring also on the animal welfare front, but this time more actively in Britain (for more extensive discussion, see Granholm 2009: 34-36). The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA[7]) was founded in the UK in 1824, with an American equivalent—the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) formed in 1866 (Bekoff 1988: xvii). From the 1840s, the terms 'vegetarian' and 'vegetarianism' were used for people advocating meatless diets, and the first organized vegetarian association, the Vegetarian Society, was founded in the UK in 1847, and an American equivalent, the American Vegetarian Convention, in 1850 (Beardsworth 2003: 222). Later, the scope of animal welfare was broadened when societies opposed to vivisection were founded in the UK (1875) and the US (1895) (Bekoff 1998: xvii-xviii).

More radical developments occurred on both fronts beginning in the mid 1900s. The issue of health hazards due to environmental degradation had been approached by Alice Hamilton already in the 1910s and 1920s, but it was Rachel Carson who, in the 1950s and 1960s, voiced the new environmen-

7. The organization gained the patronage of Queen Victoria in 1840 and was thereafter known as the *Royal* Society for the Prevention of Cruelty towards Animals (RSPCA).

talist movement concerns. With scientific scrutiny Carson discussed the dangers of pollution and linked the issues of public health and the environment. Her use of language also signalled a new rhetoric, with descriptions of nature 'under siege' from science and technology and images using other terms relating to warfare. Other authors in the 1950s and 1960s, such as Paul Goodman, Herbert Marcuse, and Murray Bookchin, also linked human disease with environmental problems—and also connected the latter to structures of social injustice. This rhetoric was similar to the new social protest movements of the 1960s, and environmental issues became linked more strongly to movements for societal change and protests against the 'powers that be'. Overall, a view of technological progress as harmful was developing, using terms such as 'ecocide' (Gottlieb 2005: 83-92, 121-34,137-38).

The environmental movement that emerged in the late 1960s differed from the earlier movements in its ecocentric worldview (Gottlieb 2005: 43-44). Taking its cue from the new left, it linked social issues to environmental issues and pointed to consumerism and corporte greed as causes of environmental deterioration. The movement looked for solutions in value and lifestyle transformations that would change people's relation to nature as well as to each other, and environmentalism was linked to personal liberation (Gottlieb 2005: 138-39, 142, 156). With the decline of the new left in the early 1970s, the new environmentalism also found resonance in the so-called 'counterculture', along with criticism of 'old school' environmentalism because of its increasingly close ties to conservative forces of industry and government (Gottlieb 2005: 140-46, 150; see also 216). With ecological disasters increasingly being seen on the global level (see Shabecoff 2003: 187-89) came more dystopian and pessimistic projections of end-of-the-world scenarios through ecological catastrophes (Gottlieb 2005: 156).

On the philosophical level, a profound shift towards ecocentric perspectives occurred in the 1970s. In a seminal paper in 1973, Arne Naess (1912–2009) distinguished between 'shallow ecology'—an anthropocentric approach that focused on the use of natural resources for humanity—and 'deep ecology'. This latter, rigorously biocentric approach to environmentalism placed the global natural environment at the forefront, with humanity being understood as a part of nature, rather than as a separate, superior element (Cooper 2000).[8] Another viewpoint that had a considerable impact was James Lovelock's so-called 'Gaia-hypothesis'—the metaphoric description of the earth in its totality, with all its combined life, as a single living organism (Lovelock 1979; Allaby 2000). Similar developments occurred in the animal rights movement in Oxford, with psychologist Richard D. Ryder coining the term

8. Aldo Leopold foreshadowed the new environmental movement and deep ecology already in 1940, when he proposed that wilderness had an importance in itself, beyond humanity, and stressed the significance of seeing it as an organism (Gottlieb 2005: 69-72).

speciesism to denote the discrimination against non-human animals based on their species (Ryder 1996: 168). Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1975), where speciesism is claimed to be the foundation of human mistreatment of animals, popularized the term and the approach. He also identifies vegetarianism as the most important act in the pursuit of animal liberation (see Singer 1991: 151-76). The modern animal rights movement differs greatly from the earlier animal welfare groups in rejecting most or all uses of animals for the benefit of humankind, including the use of animals in medical experimentation and the eating of meat and other animal products (Sztybel 1998).

All these developments gave the impulse for direct action and grassroots politics, favouring active involvement by ordinary citizens (Gottlieb 2005: 219, 227). Groups such as Greenpeace (1971), and even more notably Earth First! (1980), shifted the focus away from national concerns and instead dealt with local issues in a transnational arena, sometimes taking direct action that was illegal (Gottlieb 2005: 252-59; see Shabecoff 2003: 184-85). Along with Earth First!, groups such as Earth Liberation Front were influenced by deep ecology, and 'ecotage' tactics—ecologically motivated sabotage—were deemed acceptable, even preferable. These groups employed a rhetoric of 'warfare' and 'ecocide' (Gottlieb 2005: 258). Similarly, radical animal rights groups such as the Hunt Saboteurs Association (1963; see HSA n.d.) and the Animal Liberation Front (1976; see ALF n.d.) engaged in illegal direct action to prevent the abuse of animals.

Earth Crisis and Ecological Apocalypse

Earth Crisis was started as a concept by lead singer Karl Buechner in 1989 (Burgess 1996; Peterson 2009: 241) and was founded as an actual band in 1991 (Rafi 2009) or 1992 (St. John n.d.), in Syracuse, New York. The members on the first release by the band, the EP *All Out War* (released in 1993 by Conviction Records and reissued by Victory Records in 1995), were, in addition to Buechner, Scott Crouse and Benjamin Read on guitar, Ian Edwards on bass, and Michael Riccardi on drums. Even on this early recording, the metal influences of the band are obvious, although the production values are lower than on mainstream metal albums and the hardcore elements are considerably more prominent than they are on later recordings. The metal sound is further developed on the second EP, *Firestorm*, and had come into full bloom on their first two full-length albums, *Destroy the Machines* (1995) and *Gomorrah's Season Ends* (1996). As for the band members, Dennis Merrick replaced Riccardi on drums on *Firestorm*, Kris Wiechmann replaced Read on guitar on *Destroy the Machines*, and bass player Ian Edwards's brother Erick replaced Wiechmann for the band's first album on a major record label, Roadrunner Records, *Breed the Killers* (1998). It appears that Wiechmann stopped being straight edge, or as Buechner puts it, 'bailed out on the edge and our friend-

ship', and was therefore fired from the band (see Unrest 2007b). For most of the band's career, their albums were released by the Chicago-based major independent label Victory Records, with Earth Crisis forming one of the label's top acts. The band broke up after the 2000 album *Slither* (2000) but reformed for a limited number of shows in 2007 and released a new album in 2009, *To the Death*, on the major metal label Century Media.

Around the time of the breakup of Earth Crisis, Buechner and Ian and Erick Edwards formed the band Freya and released their first full-length recording, *As the Last Light Drains*, on Victory Records in 2003. Former Earth Crisis drummer Dennis Merrick joined for the 2007 album *Lift the Curse*, but by the latest record, *All Hail the End* (2010), Buechner was the only member left who had been involved in Earth Crisis. Freya is a sXe hardcore band like Earth Crisis but was conceived of as more experimental and 'less message-driven', and not as political as Earth Crisis (Sciaretto 2009). There are, however, some interesting religious references employed by Freya, including the name of the band itself, which of course refers to the Old Norse goddess of fertility. Furthermore, there are other references to Pagan mythological beings in Freya's lyrics. For example, the title song 'As the Last Light Drains' on their 2003 album has the subtitle 'Valkyric' and the album *Lift the Curse* contains the song 'Lilith'. Apocalyptic motifs also take an interesting, more personal shape in the song 'Doomsday Device' (on *As the Last Light Drains*). The song expresses desperation for the state of the world and a willingness to give in to apocalyptic war and destruction. Apocalyptic themes and biblical vocabulary are more frequent on Freya's latest album, clearly apparent in its title *All Hail the End*. The album contains songs titled 'Human Demons', Deities of Wrath', 'Condemned', 'Into the Wasteland', and 'The End of the End'. The album art of *Lift the Curse* is also interesting from a religious studies perspective. The album is described by Buechner as being 'a timeline from Eden to Armageddon' (Unrest 2007a), and the front cover depicts Cain killing Abel, whereas the back cover has an almost identical picture with a soldier killing another soldier (see David 2007).

Earth Crisis was immensely influential in the new developments in sXe hardcore in the 1990s (see Peterson 2009: 241). In terms of music, the band was key in developing and popularizing the hybridization of hardcore and punk. The latest record by the band is in many ways a pure metal album, almost indistinguishable from the music of a death/thrash metal band such as Slayer—the latest album of which is even recommended to customers who buy the Earth Crisis album *To the Death* at Amazon.co.uk. Lyrically, although not being the first vegan sXe band, Earth Crisis became the foremost champion of animal liberation and environmental causes in the scene, known for its uncompromising 'hardline' or 'militant' approach (Wood 2006: 51). While some Earth Crisis lyrics seemingly advocate violence, such as the killing of vivisectionists in the song 'Wrath of Sanity' (on the album *Destroy*

the Machines), those scholars who have written most extensively on the sXe hardcore scene are unanimous in their opinion that these lyrics should not be taken literally but should instead be viewed as 'creative expressions' (Wood 2006: 51) or 'outlets for anger' (Haenfler 2006: 89).

The lyrics of Earth Crisis can be divided into two major thematic categories: the imminence of ecological apocalypse, and liberation (or salvation) through personal strength and integrity. The motif of morality is something that unites these two themes. Both themes contain strong religious or spiritual dimensions. The extensive use of religious vocabulary and imagery by both Earth Crisis and Freya is particularly interesting, as religion is not a prominent theme otherwise in the sXe scene.[9] As Haenfler notes concerning sXe, 'the group advocates no form of religion and most adherents are deeply suspicious or critical of organized faiths' (2006: 45). This critical stance applies to Earth Crisis as well; the band offers a Christianity-critical message in the song 'Unseen Holocaust' on the album *Firestorm*. The Christianity-based apocalyptic motifs used by the band cannot therefore be directly attributed to any strong religious convictions of its members.[10]

Ecological Apocalypse

The central ingredient of the theme of ecological apocalypse is, quite naturally, the fast-approaching total destruction of the ecosphere. This destruction is often depicted with terms that allude to murder. For example, the EP *All Out War*, by Earth Crisis, contains a song entitled 'Ecocide', a word also used in new environmentalism. The song paints a vivid picture of the world dying in fire and screams of pain with nothing but a scarred, lifeless planet remaining. Furthermore, corporate greed is suggested as the reason for this imminent destruction, and the destruction is described as nearly unstoppable because greed silences all the protests that might have prevented the catastrophe. Similarly, the song 'Eden's Demise' from the EP *Firestorm* describes the end of time in human-caused ecological disasters. Here, as well, the earth is anthropomorphized, described as being tortured. The humans engaging in this destructive activity are likened to fascists, as well as to demons, and

9. It should be noted though that there are religious sXers (see Haenfler 2006: 73). The most notable example would be 'Krishnacore' bands such as 108 and Shelter. Robert T. Wood, however, notes that beginning in the early 1990s there appeared more 'themes and images that many would describe as Satanic in nature', starting with mainly 'Christian images of the apocalypse' (Wood 2006: 58). Whether these themes should be regarded as satanic is, however, a different issue.

10. Most likely, these motifs are simply absorbed from the surrounding culture as generally acceptable—and thus recognizable—ways of conveying apocalyptic meaning.

the solution provided is in line with the modern animal rights movement, namely turning to veganism.

Imagery and vocabulary of this sort are common in many Earth Crisis songs. The song 'Forced March' on the album *Destroy the Machines* critiques modern society and prophesies that people's fast-paced lives will result in humanity consuming itself and that this will lead only to destruction. In a similar vein, 'Inherit the Wasteland' (also on *Destroy the Machines*) proposes that the path humanity is on will lead to total destruction, with the seas, the air, and the ground being rendered unable to sustain life. Not only is humanity in danger, but animals and the rainforests are explicitly mentioned. The song ends with repeated chants declaring that the world is running out of time. The title song 'Destroy the Machines' provides a solution to the problem by promoting direct action and 'ecotage' in order to save forests from being killed (a word used explicitly in the lyrics). What is at stake is the liberation of the earth as a whole, rather than just the plant and animal life of the earth. Similar scenarios are portrayed in songs such as 'Ecocide' on *Breed the Killers*, though this time with explicit reference to biblical narratives of a plague of locusts in comparison to the greed of corporations. More biblical references and discussion of morality can be found on tracks such as 'End Begins' on *Breed the Killers*. The lyrics employ standard Christian apocalyptic motifs in linking Rome and Babylon and asking if it is time for the Antichrist to arise. Songs such as 'Cease to Exist' on *Gomorrah's Season Ends*, 'One against All' and 'Death Rate Solution' on *Breed the Killers*, and 'Cities Fall' on *To the Death* predict doomsday scenarios as a result of nuclear weapons and global war.

Morality and Righteous Vengeance

In addition to treating ecological apocalypse, many Earth Crisis songs link the issue to morality and employ Christian concepts such as demons and sin. This, however, goes well beyond the motif of ecological apocalypse. For example, in the song 'No Allegiance' on *All Out War* the word 'sin' is used in referring to former straight edgers who have left their drug-free lifestyles, and the song 'Firestorm' on the EP of the same name refers to drug dealers as 'demons'. The same association is made in the song 'To Ashes' on the latest album, *To the Death*. 'Demons' appear also in songs such as 'Names Carved into Granite' and 'Forgiveness Denied' on *Gomorrah's Season Ends*, in 'End Begins' and 'Breed the Killer' on *Breed the Killers*, and in 'Provoke', 'Nemesis', 'Biomachines' and 'Mechanism' on the album *Slither*. In the song 'Unseen Holocaust' on *Firestorm* Christian colonizers are themselves referred to as demons that devastate the paradisiacal (and presumably more nature-harmonious) existence of native peoples.

The common prescription of how to deal with these 'demons' and 'sinners' is to do so by rather harsh means, such as violence or the destruction of property. 'Wrath of Sanity' on *Destroy the Machines*, which describes vivisectionists as demons nurtured by the pain they cause innocent animals, are encouraged to repent and turn away from their sins or be subjected to violence. Later on in the song, however, redemption is deemed impossible and the sins of the vivisectionist can be expiated only by their deaths. The animal liberation vigilante is likened to a knight on a crusade. A similar justification and vocabulary are employed in the song 'Stand By' on *All Out War*.

The motif of morality is explicit in song titles such as 'New Ethic' (on *Destroy the Machines*) and 'Morality Dictates' (on *Gomorrah's Season Ends*), which both deal with animal liberation and the moral necessity of a vegan diet. The same is the case in a song such as 'Fortress' on the album *Destroy the Machines*, where the sXer stands as the sole moral person in a decrepit world, surrounded by the 'profane', who are compared to the inhabitants of the biblical Sodom.[11]

Salvation through Personal Strength, Integrity and Morality

The motif of morality is also linked to issues of salvation through personal integrity in many Earth Crisis songs. In 'All Out War' on the EP of the same title the sXer is depicted as a person who through his/her own arduous labour has managed to rise to a higher moral plane in comparison to other people. 'Normal people' are weak in comparison, and this weakness is the cause of suffering in non-human animals. The same rhetoric is used in the song 'Against the Current' on the album *To the Death*. In 'Forged in the Flames' (on *Firestorm*) this weakness is deemed evil, and sXers, through their own hard work again, have a far greater respect for the sanctity of their persons and control over their own lives than non-sXers. Again, the sXer is considered a knight, this time unrelentingly guided by 'the light of truth'. The 'X'-symbol that so many sXers use to identify themselves is even compared to the cross upon which Christ was crucified.

The motif recurs in songs such as 'Born from Pain' and 'The Discipline' on *Destroy the Machines*. Here the biblical references and spiritual dimensions are more prominent. Both songs refer to the strength a person accesses through disciplined reliance on straight edge 'doctrine'. The sXers are described as persons who are not limited by their corporeality or lower instincts, and as

11. This mention of 'being surrounded by the children of Sodom' has led to some accusations that Earth Crisis is a homophobic band. However, the band itself lists homophobia as one of the societal wrongs that must be opposed (Earth Crisis 1996; Peterson 2009: 248; see also Haenfler 2006: 111-13).

individuals who provide 'salvation' for themselves. The sXer can, through adherence to discipline, achieve liberation, turn this worldly hellish existence into a paradisiacal state and achieve moral and spiritual stability.

Discussion

As already mentioned, Earth Crisis's considerable engagement with Christian themes is, while not exactly unique in the sXe hardcore scene, still notable. 'Spiritual' themes of self-empowerment, self-sufficiency, purity and spiritual strength are a formational element of sXe hardcore (Haenfler 2006: 47-49), and here Earth Crisis conforms to the norm. The question of why Christian motifs might be so prominent in the lyrics of the band remains unanswered.

A first possible explanation comes from research on popular culture and religion provided by Lynn Schofield Clark. In her *From Angels to Aliens,* Clark proposes that 'the dark side of evangelicalism' has had a major influence on popular culture, particularly in America, where 'writings of American Protestantism gave a very real specific frame of reference to the topics of evil, hell, the rapture, and, more generally, the realm beyond this world' (2003: 25). This, in turn, was effected by an 'increasingly sophisticated understanding of the media, [which] placed its concerns in the public imagination' and thus (American) evangelicalism itself is a major player in bringing the supernatural to the fore in popular culture and the popular imagination (2003: 25-26). She suggests that evangelical definitions of 'end-times' and 'evil' provide something of a taken-for-granted framework for treatment of these themes in popular culture, particularly from the 1970s and 1980s onwards due to increased political presence (2003: 28; see also Partridge 2005: 283 for similar views). In the evangelical narratives of the end-time (and evil generally) the focus is commonly on *battle* and *war* against evil (Clark 2003: 28), as well as a self-understanding of being surrounded or *besieged* by the forces of evil (Clark 2003: 32).

Clark's claim that 'Evangelicalism's emergence as a cultural force has, to an unprecedented degree, placed the concept of the battle between good and evil on the public agenda' (2003: 39) may be somewhat exaggerated, and certainly applies mostly to the situation in the United States. Narratives of opposing forces, 'good and evil', go at least as far back as the beginnings of Christianity. Still, Clark's explanations do have currency in discussions of American popular culture from the 1970s onwards, and even beyond the United States, as American influences on popular culture are more or less global. However, much more detailed examination of changes in narrative structure would be needed in order to examine the potential impact of American evangelicalism.

When Clark writes that evangelicalism provides '"publically available stock of symbols and narratives" that are incorporated into the entertain-

ment media' (2003: 25), she comes close to Christopher Partridge's remarks on 'occulture' and Christian apocalypticism (see Partridge 2005: 279-95). In his two-volume *The Re-Enchantment of the West,* Partridge argues that we have been witnessing a shift away from a Christian culture to a 'spiritual/mythic/paranormal background knowledge that informs the plausibility structures of Westerners' (Partridge 2004: 187). This 'occulture' functions as a sort of reservoir, containing elements from 'those often *hidden*, *rejected* and *oppositional* beliefs and practices associated with esotericism, theosophy, mysticism, New Age, Paganism' (Partridge 2004: 68) as well as from 'world religions', unorthodox science and a wide range of other phenomena, from which material can be drawn to create narratives, worldviews, beliefs, practices and so on. Partridge's approach is extremely helpful in shifting the focus away from 'self-contained grand traditions' such as 'Christianity' and 'Hinduism', and instead concentrating on how elements of these are fused together in ways that cross religious institution borders (cf. Gordon Lynch's [2007a] notion of 'progressive spirituality' as another way of conceptualizing such 'cross-border' religiosity).

Partridge's approach is problematic, however, in treating Christianity and occulture as essentially separate, and thus still playing into the notion of Christianity as some sort of monolithic 'tradition'.[12] People identifying as Christians, while holding unorthodox or even conflicting views, should still be called Christian on the basis of their self-identification. Thus, there need not be any discrepancy between 'occulture' and Christianity.[13] After all, what could be termed esoteric elements—often deemed heretical by church authorities—have been part of Christianity since its very early days. A distinction needs to be drawn between Christian institutions and official theological positions, and Christianity as a whole. However, the concept of occulture is extremely helpful in thinking about contemporary religiosity, and particularly the role of popular culture therein.

Partridge effectively shows how Christian terminology and narrative concerning the end-time is extensively used in the West, also in domains that are not Christian or even overtly religious (2005: 279). While other sources for end-time narratives exist in occulture, such as Hindu traditions, the structure of such narratives in the West is still 'very clearly Christian' (Partridge 2005: 280). Particularly relevant for this article is the claim that apocalypticism has

12. For a critique of the notion of 'tradition', see von Stuckrad 2003.

13. However, with the general 'de-christening' of post-Enlightenment Europe and the development of occultism, we see a relative separation of the esoteric from Christianity. Occultism, defined by Wouter Hanegraaff as '*all attempts by esotericists to come to terms with a disenchanted world*' (Hanegraaff 1996: 422), became something of a 'tradition' of its own, and here we can certainly speak of a discrepancy between occulture and Christianity, as well as direct opposition on the part of the former towards the latter.

been an important feature in environmental movements (Partridge 2005: 280, 311) and in the notion that narratives of violence lie at the core of much end-time thinking; this claim in itself encourages 'strong good–evil dualisms and combat mythologies' (Partridge 2005: 299). The Christian evangelical/fundamentalist position also commonly places oneself (or one's group) in the realm of the righteous, existing surrounded and against the 'evil majority' (Partridge 2005: 299).

While Clark's and Partridge's works provide useful explanations for the popularity of Christian end-time narratives in popular culture, they are less useful in offering an explanation for the prominence of these narratives in a specific case such as Earth Crisis. Here we need to look at the ways in which genre conventions come into play in the lyrics of Earth Crisis. Although the band is commonly identified as a hardcore band, the main musical inspiration lies in metal—something that is acknowledged by band members (Peterson 2009: 243, 248; Rafi 2009). Rock music, and by extension metal, is engaged in a discursive quest for authenticity and artistic seriousness, in opposition to the perceived pursuit of mass commercial profits and lack of significant artistic aspirations in pop music (Frith 2001: 94-96). In a similar vein, Keir Keightley sees rock as being based on a 'rejection of those aspects of mass-distributed music which are believed to be soft, safe or trivial' (2001: 109). This description does not suggest a distinction based on musical style and genre but rather highlights internal discursive strategies inherent in rock music and identifies the foundation of it in a discursive construction of authenticity, uniqueness, and artistic merit. Metal itself, conceived in the late 1960s and early 1970s, drew on countercultural rebellion but included far grimmer outlooks on life than the hippie 'love and peace' message (Moberg 2008: 85; 2009a: 109). Particularly in so-called 'thrash metal', which itself was highly influenced by punk rock, themes of apocalypse and environmental disaster abound. This is aptly exemplified in the lyrics of a pioneering band such as Megadeth (see, e.g., Megadeth's 'Set the World A Fire' on *So Far, So Good . . . So What!* [1988]) and 'Rust in Peace . . . Polaris' on the album *Rust in Peace* (1990).[14] When looking at the apocalyptic motifs of Earth Crisis, we need to remember the discursive trait of rebellion (see Moberg 2009a: 124) and the quest for authenticity inherent in rock music in general, and in metal in particular. Furthermore, when looking at extreme metal in the form of thrash and death metal, which as discussed above have greatly influenced Earth Crisis, we find plenty of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic motifs. Thus, the Earth Crisis heavy use of Christian imagery and apocalyptic motifs fits

14. For more examples of apocalyptic motifs in metal, see the articles by Rupert Till and Marcus Moberg in the present volume.

perfectly with the common metal convention of using confrontational and apocalyptic themes and terms such as 'evil', 'sin', 'demons' and so forth.

This links to what could be called subcultural capital, a term coined by Sarah Thornton (1995) that refers to the ways in which members in a particular musical scene[15] or 'subculture' gain status by playing on the internal rules and conventions of the scene. While this term primarily refers to scene participants other than bands, it is still useful in this context. In his work on extreme metal, Keith Kahn-Harris writes that '[s]ubcultural capital is both endowed by others as prestige and power and claimed by scene members for themselves in the ways they perform their identities' (2007: 121). It could be claimed that bands also need to accrue subcultural capital in order to remain compelling to other scene participants. Cultural capital is the 'coolness factor' that makes a band popular and commercially viable (cf. Partridge 2004: 131-36).

Conclusion

In this article I have discussed the religious motifs used by the vegan straight edge band Earth Crisis, with a particular focus on the prominent apocalyptic themes. I have also contextualized Earth Crisis in relation to both the hardcore scene and the straight edge movement, as well as the new environmentalism and animal rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s and onwards. While the common sXe themes of abstinence from drugs, alcohol and tobacco appear in Earth Crisis lyrics, they are almost overshadowed by animal liberation themes and an ecosphere centredness that, along with terms such as 'ecocide' and 'ecotage', are in line with new environmentalism and the animal rights movement. Earth Crisis cannot be understood apart from these contexts, but the band must be discussed also in terms of trends in popular culture in the period in which the band has been active, the early 1990s to the present day. Here, two scholarly interpretations are of particular interest: Clark's notion of 'the dark side of evangelicalism' influencing popular culture (2003) and Partridge's notion of the role of popular culture in forming an occultural reservoir of material, where detraditionalized elements of Christianity are common, and which is used in the construction of contemporary religious identities (2004; 2005). Both approaches provide new ways of looking at the relationship between religion and popular culture and are similar in their treatment of religion as source material for popular culture, which in turn forms a resource for the construction of religious identity (see also Lynch 2006). However, while these perspectives do provide help in

15. For a treatment of the term 'scene' as an analytical concept, see Kahn-Harris 2007: 13-15.

understanding the appeal of apocalyptic motifs in popular music in general, another approach is more useful when it comes to understanding the prominence of apocalyptic motifs in a specific case such as Earth Crisis. Hardcore bands have not generally tended towards the use of religious imagery and symbolism. Rather, they have aimed at more 'down-to-earth' treatments of political issues. In order to understand why Earth Crisis is different, though not unique, we need to explore the band's strong reliance on extreme metal, which itself makes heavy use of religious themes and apocalyptic motifs. As Earth Crisis guitarist Scott Crouse expresses it: 'Most of the bands were coming from a more Punk Hardcore background and we were coming from a more solid Metal background' (Rafi 2009). Earth Crisis's strong reliance on religious symbolism and use of apocalyptic motifs can thus be traced to the band's essential nature as a metal band and its adhering to the genre conventions of metal.

4. Raging against the Machine: Tom Morello's Nightwatchman Persona and the Sound of Apocalypse-Inspired *Schadenfreude*

Michael J. Gilmour

In his 1943 memoir/novel *Bound for Glory*, Woody Guthrie writes about the inspirations behind his songs:

> . . . there on the Texas plains right in the dead center of the dust bowl, with the oil boom over and the wheat blowed out and the hard-working people just stumbling about, bothered with mortgages, debts, bills, sickness, worries of every blowing kind, I seen there was plenty to make up my songs about (Guthrie 1982: 178).

Guthrie sang for and about the downtrodden. Some liked him and some hated him for it; some walked with him, others over him; some jeered and some cheered; and before long he 'was invited in and booted out of every public place of entertainment in that country'. The reason for such mixed reactions lies in the lyrical contents of his songs, which do not always include happily-ever-after-type endings. What is more, Guthrie tells us, he 'made up songs telling what [he] thought was wrong and how to make it right, songs that said what everybody in that country was thinking' (Guthrie 1982: 178).

In more recent years, Tom Morello, former guitarist for Rage Against the Machine and Audioslave, and more recently part of the band Street Sweeper Social Club, picks up where Woody Guthrie left off, blending his politics, music, and empathy for society's most vulnerable under the moniker the Nightwatchman, releasing albums with this name in 2007 and 2008. He invites the comparison, citing the phrase painted on Guthrie's guitar ('THIS MACHINE KILLS FASCISTS') in one song ('Maximum Firepower,' on *One Man Revolution* [2007]), and marking his own acoustic instrument with an equally forceful slogan ('WHATEVER IT TAKES').[1] He appears to welcome

1. Morello marks his electric guitars with slogans as well, including 'ARM THE HOMELESS' and 'SOUL POWER'.

the connection to Guthrie, as is evident in an interview with National Public Radio, 14 August 2007.[2]

Morello's solo acoustic efforts as the Nightwatchman resemble the politics of his earlier work with Rage Against the Machine. 'The name says everything', according to one description of that band.

> The aggressive musical blend of metal guitar and hip-hop rhythms is an appropriate background to the rap-styled delivery of angry, confrontational, political lyrics, addressing concerns over inner city deprivation, racism, censorship, propaganda, the plight of Native Americans and many other issues as the band strive [*sic*] to offer more than mere entertainment (Larkin 2007: 1150).

Though the Nightwatchman's musical style is different—Guthrie-, Dylan-, and Springsteen-esque acoustic guitar and harmonica—the aggressive, politically and socially aware content remains.

Morello regularly introduces biblical themes into his lyrics and in many cases is both creative and insightful in his use of this material. For instance, in 'Flesh Shapes the Day' (on *One Man Revolution*), he claims,

> . . . you might have heard different
> But I know it's a fact
> That Jesus, Mary, Joseph
> And the Apostle Paul were black.[3]

Obviously the lyrics aim to be provocative, but they touch on an idea well represented in the Gospels, with its advocacy of those victimized by systemic abuse. Jesus and his followers stand up for and identify with the poor, the needy and the marginalized, which I suspect is Morello's point. On another occasion he cautions his audience not to be surprised 'If the sermon on the mount / Next time is delivered / In a little coffee house' ('Maximum Firepower', on *One Man Revolution*). Again, an odd statement but one revealing an understanding of the biblical text mentioned. Morello knows full well that Jesus says in this sermon, 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God' (Lk. 6.20); 'Blessed are the poor in spirit' (Mt. 5.3).[4] The lyric suggests that those who take up the cause of the needy,

2. Available at http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12785337 (accessed August 2010).

3. I take all excerpts of the Nightwatchman's songs from liner notes for *One Man Revolution* (2007) and *The Fabled City* (2008).

4. Technically, Matthew alone includes the Sermon on the Mount (5.1) because Luke refers to a sermon on a plain or 'level place' (6.17). In both cases, these narrative settings precede the Beatitudes, which are part of the longer sermon. Luke's phrasing of the beatitude about the poor focuses the words on the economically desperate ('you who are poor' [6.20]), whereas Matthew's inclusion of the phrase 'poor *in spirit*' (5.3) suggests something

those who preach social justice through music (coffeehouses), preach the same message as Jesus himself in his most famous sermon. This is a bold statement but one illustrating Morello's thoughtful and biblically literate song writing.

Biblical apocalyptic themes and passages in particular figure prominently in Morello's work, strengthening the social commentary of the songs and lending moral authority to underlying ideological purposes. To illustrate, 'Night Falls' (*The Fabled City* [2008]) describes a crisis in labour relations that culminates in a tragedy: 'Steve Sutton died there on the bridge / Local 393 was born.' Participants in the story told in the song fall into clear moral categories ('just and unjust') and the singer ensures an alignment of his audience's sympathies with the workers in two ways. First, the birth of a union suggests that the man's death was preventable, a consequence of corporate incompetence, or abuse and disregard for workers' well-being and safety. Second, the singer offers brief glimpses into Sutton's private life before his death, as a woman warns him 'not to go' (to work or to some labour action, presumably), whispering, 'I love you so.' These words highlight the tragedy that follows and heightens our anger toward those responsible for it.

However, the most compelling line in the song follows the statement about Sutton's death: 'A black and white picture of the coming of the Lord'. This incomplete thought accomplishes a number of things simultaneously. It lends gravitas to this story about the plight of exploited workers, a familiar theme for Morello, who sings with great urgency about this issue as the Nightwatchman. He even insists that the cause warrants acts of civil disobedience on some occasions (e.g. 'Union Song,' *One Man Revolution*). The line about the coming of the Lord also reinforces sympathy for Sutton and his co-workers because several biblical references to Christ's return emphasize that he comes *for his people*, often identified as the righteous (e.g. Mt. 25.31-40; 1 Thess. 4.13-18). The subtle implication is that the workers in the song have God on their side, that they are the 'just'. At the same time, Morello's words implicate the company and its representatives in wrongdoing (they are the 'unjust') because biblical writers also present 'the coming of the Lord' as God's *judgment on the wicked* (e.g. Mt. 25.41-46; Rev. 19.11-21). Morello's appeal to this biblical apocalyptic theme has no direct religious meaning. Instead, he uses a religious concept to make a political statement. The ancient setting of biblical passages is also immaterial because the song is actually concerned with contemporary issues.

different, like an attitude of dependence on God. Matthew's version does not exclude the literal poor, but the sense of Morello's lyrics comes closer to Luke's beatitude, even though he refers to Matthew's 'mountain'.

'The outcry of Revelation for justice and judgment can be fully understood only by those who hunger and thirst for justice' (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 128). The practice of re-reading ancient apocalyptic texts as though they address circumstances facing readers themselves in their own time and place has a long, storied history. It is well represented in artistic works as well, and since our subject involves creative (song) writing, I illustrate with a literary example.

At one point in Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, an interpretation of the book of Revelation captivates Pierre Bezukov: 'Writing the words *L'Empereur Napoléon* in numbers, it appears that the sum of them is 666, and that Napoleon was therefore the beast foretold in the Apocalypse' (Tolstoy 1966: 737-38). By using a system that gives numeric values to letters, he finds the key to finally understand the book's cryptic references. Not only does this reading strategy reveal that Napoleon is the beast of Revelation 13; it also provides clues about Pierre's—and by extension Russia's—own destiny. This emerges when he applies his alphanumeric theory of interpretation to the words *quarante-deux*, the number of months 'allowed to [the beast] to exercise authority' (Rev. 13.5). Pierre again reaches the number 666, concluding that Napoleon's power would reach its peak in the year 1812 because in that year the emperor was 42 years old. Building further on this, Pierre wonders, 'what would put an end to the power of the beast, that is, of Napoleon' (Tolstoy 1966: 738). He counts the numeric value of several possibilities, including the Russian nation and the emperor Alexander, but none of these makes much sense to his mind. Pierre finally tries his own name and nationality—*L'russe Besuhof*–and discovers, to his amazement, that it also adds up to 666. The significance of this prophecy is unclear to him at first, but he carries with him 'the vague idea that he was *L'russe Besuhof* who had the number of the beast, 666'. Furthermore, Pierre suspects, 'his part in the great affair of setting a limit to the power of the beast that spoke great and blasphemous things had been predestined from eternity' (Tolstoy 1966: 740). He eventually concludes that he must 'meet Napoleon and kill him, and either perish or put an end to the misery of all Europe—which it seemed to him was solely due to Napoleon' (Tolstoy 1966: 1001). Only much later, after his failed efforts to defeat the beast/assassinate Napoleon, does he see the folly of his ways: 'His intention of killing Napoleon and his calculations of the cabalistic number of the beast of the Apocalypse now seemed to him meaningless and even ridiculous' (Tolstoy 1966: 1122).

The Russian Pierre had good reason to fear the advancing French armies and their general, so this demonizing of the invader is not very surprising. By casting Napoleon as the biblical beast, he creates a symbolic universe allowing an imagined escape from an otherwise hopeless situation. Aligning the French

with the devil and the Russians with God promises a reversal of fortunes for the Muscovites because there is no ambiguity in biblical apocalyptic literature. There are clear winners and losers in these ancient, mysterious books, so it is not surprising that others (not just fictional characters) align Revelation with their own circumstances, often with results every bit as bizarre, amusing, and desperate as the one Tolstoy describes in *War and Peace* (for illustrations, see, e.g., Kirsch 2006). Individuals and reading communities regularly approach the strange language of Revelation this way, just as Pierre does in this novel, as though John the Seer looked across the centuries to describe and express concern about their unique stories, dilemmas and plight.[5]

Once contemporary readers identify their enemies with biblical villains, they acquire a new sense of self-assurance and symbolic power. They can rest assured that vindication awaits them as surely as appropriate punishment awaits their opponents, and for those experiencing hardship and persecutions—real or imagined—this anticipated reversal of fortune brings a form of pleasure. The term *Schadenfreude* applies here. It means delighting in the sufferings of others, specifically in suffering one has not caused, and it is, according to philosopher John Portmann, a very natural emotional response (Portmann 2000: 16, 19, 24). Portmann organizes his explanation of this emotion around four principal sources or causal antecedents: (a) low self-esteem; (b) loyalty and commitments to justice; (c) the comical; and (d) malice. The first two causal antecedents seem most relevant for those operating with a religiously informed worldview, especially if they perceive themselves as marginalized in some way. If justice is the outcome of suffering this is a morally appropriate emotion because the *schadenfrohe* person is not taking pleasure in the suffering itself: 'the attendant pleasure is not properly in seeing someone suffer but in the hope that someone will learn a valuable lesson from having suffered' (Portmann 2000: 37).[6]

Since biblical apocalyptic literature involves imaginative representation of the downfall of the mighty, the abusive and the wicked, it is reasonable to suppose that some ancient authors and readers found pleasure in these revenge fantasies, despite biblical warnings not to celebrate the misfortunes of others (e.g. Prov. 24.17-18) (see, e.g., Gilmour 2006: 129-39). By its very nature,

5. To give but one example of this reading strategy originating in a religious community, the Jehovah's Witnesses' official commentary on the book of Revelation aligns major events in the organization's history with John's Apocalypse (see Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania 1988). I have provided discussion about this fascinating commentary elsewhere (Gilmour 2006b).

6. Willard Gaylin explains the concept in relation to envy. If envy generates pain when others experience pleasure, *Schadenfreude* involves joy in learning of their misery. Gaylin also maintains that delighting in the fall of the mighty is a common emotional reaction because it 'reduces the gap between their power and ours' (2004: 68).

ancient apocalyptic literature provides the powerless and vulnerable with a way of imaginative escape from hardships and at least temporary relief from their fears. For the ancients and their later interpreters, the fantastic imagery and cosmic plot lines of this literature strip oppressors of dignity and moral authority and assure their victims of eventual justice and peace. Whether understood to depict conditions in the first-century Roman Empire (the New Testament's John the Seer), the nineteenth-century Napoleonic Wars (Tolstoy's Pierre Bezukov), or twentieth- and twenty-first-century socioeconomic, labour and racial inequalities (Morello's Nightwatchman), the book of Revelation promises a remarkable reversal of fortune for those exploring its mysteries.

Schadenfreude, the Book of Revelation and Popular Music

Many who find *artistic* inspiration in the book of Revelation align current events and crises with its language just as comfortably as religiously inclined readers like the Jehovah's Witnesses (see n. 5) and Pierre Bezukov, who undergoes a conversion in the novel. No doubt drawn to its poetry, drama, mystery and ambiguity, songwriters also find in the book visions of a just world[7] that inform their music. This last item is particularly pertinent for a discussion of the reception of Revelation in popular music, because this art form so often becomes a vehicle for advocacy, political posturing and social commentary. The poetry of Revelation makes it clear that those responsible for violence and evil on the earth will fall, a message both easily adaptable to new contexts and desirable for writers seeking an emotive and rhetorically forceful means to articulate their points of view. As entertainers and artists with relatively little political power in most cases, songwriters who draw on biblical apocalyptic writing compose a kind of highly symbolic fiction in which singers and their ideal audiences have God on their side. In the imagined worlds of apocalyptic-inspired songs, ideas of good and evil, justice and abuse, compassion and violence cease to be eternal binaries. The integration of Revelation allows writers to imagine a just world in support of their particular causes. Though I want to avoid overstating the case, it appears that many songwriters turning to the Apocalypse for inspiration do so as a way to imagine the downfall of their 'enemies', and the very nature of the form (popular music) invites audiences to find pleasure (*Schadenfreude*) in their Revelation-inspired, ideologically tendentious songs.

We find this in Sheryl Crow's musical commentary on US post-9/11 foreign policy, particularly the Iraq War. On her album *Detours* (2008), Crow introduces this subject unambiguously in the opening song 'God Bless This

7. I take this phrase from Schüssler Fiorenza 1991.

Mess' in her reference to a war based on lies and then moves immediately to an image of the enemies of God found in the book of Revelation in the song 'Shine over Babylon'.[8] The opening line of this second song refers to the singer walking on seven hills, which recalls the 'seven mountains' mentioned in Rev. 17.9. Crow models her Babylon on John's visions, particularly Revelation 17 and 18. This passage resonates with Crow's anti-war position, I suspect, because not only is the biblical Babylon responsible for spilt 'blood' (17.6), but it is also a highly politicized entity ('the nations'; 'the kings of the earth' [18.3]). Furthermore, since Crow suspects that the impetus behind the Iraq War is economic self-interest ('madman oil drillers'), the Babylon of Revelation is relevant because of the emphasis placed on wealth and greed: 'the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxury' (18.3; cf. 18.9-19). In Crow's terms, these modern-day villains seek 'the golden cow' and praise the 'bloated bank account.'

There is pleasure (*Schadenfreude*) in the imagined downfall of wrongdoers. Crow does not celebrate the destruction of the violent and greedy (which is part of Revelation 18) in 'Shine over Babylon', but she does include a version of this fantasy in 'Gasoline' later on the same album. This dreamlike tale looks forward to a time when oil no longer determines the fate of the world, something desirable because oil is a cause of war ('Shine over Babylon'). In a time when oil's value drops, there is one less reason for nations to fight. Oil is free in the future she imagines in 'Gasoline', and for that reason her lyrics amount to a playful version of John the Seer's 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!' (Rev. 18.2). Sheryl Crow is certainly not alone among contemporary songwriters in finding something to cheer about in Revelation's sometimes-grim pronouncements.

We find a very different example of creative re-reading of Revelation in Iron Maiden's 'Brighter than a Thousand Suns' from the album *A Matter of Life and Death* (2006),[9] which examines humanity's corruption and violence. The song begins with a first person plural confession ('We are not the sons of God') and closes with the sinners' prayer ('Holy Father we have sinned').[10] Humanity is guilty of Nimrod's crime, namely ambition and the search for power: 'the power of man, on its tower ready to fall' (cf. Gen. 11.1-9). The reference to the Tower of Babel in the song implies divine intervention, because in that biblical story God confuses humanity's language and puts an end to their overreaching endeavours (Gen. 11.8). Some things never change. Just as with the ancients, human striving and progress in the modern world overreach, something suggested by reference to the symbol $E = mc^2$, which amounts to the boastful 'Come, let us build our-

8. I take excerpts from the album's liner notes.
9. Lyrics by Bruce Dickinson and Steve Harris.
10. Cited excerpts are my transcription.

selves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens' (Gen. 11.4). If modern society shares the ambition evident in the ancient Babel tower builders, it must also face a similar fate: 'the LORD scattered them abroad' (Gen. 11.8). Attempts to build a city and a tower—technological and military advancements described in Genesis and continued in modern societies ($E = mc^2$)—are a 'race to suicide'. The song alludes to war generally, and nuclear war in particular. The title of the song derives from Robert Jungk's book about the rise of atomic warfare *Brighter Than a Thousand Suns: A Personal History of the Atomic Scientists* (1959; originally published in German in 1956 with the title *Heller als Tausend Sonnen*). The lyrics even mention the author ('Robert') and refer to missiles (iron fingers stabbing the sky), nuclear dust and bombers.

The song alludes to Jesus' discourse on the Mount of Olives, an apocalyptic sermon concerned with the impending destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans. Twice in the song we hear the phrase 'All the nations are rising', which hints at Jesus' words 'nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom' (Mt. 24.6-7; Mk 13.8; Lk. 21.10). Significantly, Jesus' Olivet discourse describes the complete devastation of Jerusalem ('not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down' [Mt. 24.2]), and the inevitable suffering that military actions produce. Jesus warns his followers to 'flee to the mountains' (24.16) at the first signs of the crisis. It is fitting that an Iron Maiden song outlining the horrors of warfare draws on this ancient resource to give emotive force to its anti-war rhetoric.

This song also links the image of nations rising (Jesus) to the powers of darkness described in Revelation by using the terms 'hate', 'fury' and 'Satan'. Satan (Rev. 12.9) comes to the earth full of rage, as Maiden fans know well: 'woe to the earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath' (Rev. 12.12; spoken, along with Rev. 13.18, at the beginning of 'The Number of the Beast,'on the album of the same name [1982]). Furthermore, it comes as no surprise to those reading Revelation (or listening to Maiden's 'Number of the Beast,' for that matter) that the devil's 'time is short' (Rev. 12.12), so once again we find songwriters aligning 'enemies' (overreaching warmongers) with the ultimately defeated villains of apocalyptic literature. Satan's time is short, and the same is true for those responsible for war in the present day.

As noted above, Maiden's phrase 'All the nations are rising', along with the terms 'Satan', 'hate' and 'fury'' conflates Jesus' Olivet discourse in the Gospels and the language of Revelation. In Revelation 16, we find words similar to those spoken by Jesus in reference to the kings of the earth and their armies gathering for battle (Rev. 16.12-16). Those armies suffer a dismal defeat, ultimately putting up no resistance to the rider on the white horse (Jesus):

> I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against the rider on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured . . . the rest were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh (Rev. 19.19-21).

These armies fail just like those tower builders in Genesis. Iron Maiden imagines a day when those who take up the sword will fall by the sword, when the violence of contemporary warfare will end.

Tom Morello: The Nightwatchman

As it does for Sheryl Crow and Iron Maiden, the book of Revelation provides fuel for the Nightwatchman's political rhetoric and contributes to the pleasure that audiences experience when imagining the downfall of perceived enemies (*Schadenfreude*). Morello's lyrics occasionally include violent gestures directed towards those identified as oppressors or in some way responsible for the plight of the desperate. The protesting narrator of 'One Man Revolution' (*One Man Revolution*) admits to hiding in the bushes with a baseball bat, and in 'Midnight in the City of Destruction' (*Fabled City*) he prays that God will drown the president if New Orleans' levees burst again. On other occasions, however, songs introduce a biblically informed rhetoric that frames stories about the destruction of the 'wicked' and a particular worldview, using terms that are more religious in orientation. On some occasions, this use of the Apocalypse is ironic. For instance, in 'Fabled City' (*Fabled City*) the presumably Mexican narrator looks across the impenetrable border to the United States with its iron gates and closed iron door and refers to that country's streets as 'paved with gold' (cf. Rev. 21.21). The imagined glories are a chimera, however, for various other characters in the song face unemployment (a moved plant), demeaning work (washing floors) and homelessness (living in an alley).

This song includes also a clever rewriting of the parable of the lost sheep (Mt. 18.10-14; Lk. 15.1-7). The narrator observes one hundred swallows sitting on a wire outside his window and surmises, 'if one flew, then 99 would follow'. This statement is unusual for at least three reasons. First, the one lost sheep in the parable goes astray and the shepherd brings it back to the group of 99, whereas the song suggests that the 99 leave their place to follow the one. Is this suggesting that unemployed workers in Mexico should attempt to cross the border to find the streets of gold, or does it recommend an uprising by oppressed migrant workers already in the United States? It all depends on how one understands the meaning of the single bird that 'flew', whether it indicates flight towards the opportunities across the iron border or a metaphorical journey towards freedom for the oppressed worker, and therefore a

call to migrants to seek freedom through job action, worker solidarity and unionizing. The album cover for *The Fabled City* presents Morello with guitar in hand, standing in front of an orangey-red and green American flag—the same colours as Mexico's flag—perhaps suggesting that the Nightwatchman stands with Mexican Americans and Mexican migrant workers in America, both legal and illegal.[11]

Second, the parable of the lost sheep includes a comforting statement about the Father in heaven not willing 'that one of these little ones should be lost' (Mt. 18.14). Furthermore, by shifting the imagery from sheep to birds, as Morello does in 'Fabled City,' he draws on another of Jesus' comforting statements: 'Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father . . . you are of more value than many sparrows' (Mt. 10.29, 31; cf. Lk. 12.24). This insistence that God does not overlook the marginalized and vulnerable resonates because the 'angel sad and old' who lives in the alley in shadows may be 'hidden from the Lord'. The closing lines of the song, with these allusions to the Gospel parables, remind the suffering and those responsible for their plight that in fact God takes notice of their desperation (i.e. 'not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father . . . you are of more value than many sparrows' [Mt. 10.29, 31]). Those in the land with streets 'paved with gold' who exploit workers to create their pseudo-paradise and then choose not to share their wealth with the poor and needy must realize that God befriends the vulnerable. Ironically, this positive image from Revelation ('the street of the city is pure gold' [Rev. 21.21]), a book concerned with socioeconomic injustices (see, e.g., 6.6), serves to identify those responsible for those very abuses.

Consider also Morello's 'Let Freedom Ring', which also addresses the plight of the needy:

> There's a man homeless and hungry
> There's a wind that's hard and biting
> There's a song in need of singing.

As I observed above, socioeconomic injustice is a concern for John the Seer, so it is no surprise to find the language of the Apocalypse in this song. The singer refers to a fuse that needs lighting. A fuse is a necessary prelude to an explosion, of course, which in this context refers to 'the day' that is coming, one that the singer admits 'I hope to see.' What day? Morello spells this out clearly:

> There's a book with seven seals
> There's a beast with seven heads

11. According to the liner notes, David Hammons's 'African-American Flag' (1990), which is in the Museum of Modern Art, is the inspiration for the album's cover.

> There's seven angels on seven horses
> There's seven vials with seven plagues

In Rev. 6.5-6, John hears and sees the following:

> When he opened the third seal [of seven], I heard the third living creature call out, 'Come!' I looked, and there was a black horse! Its rider held a pair of scales in his hand, and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, 'A quart of wheat for a day's pay, and three quarts of barley for a day's pay, but do not damage the olive oil and the wine!'

One way of reading this passage is to understand that God himself calls out for fair wages and protection of the poor, whose situation worsens when basic foodstuffs are not available. A denarius is a typical daily wage for labourers (Mt. 20.2), and a quart of wheat, or three quarts of lower-quality barley, is approximately the daily amount consumed by a worker. 'These prices,' according to Wilfrid J. Harrington, 'are eight times or more above normal famine prices' (1993: 90).[12] John describes here a society in which the poor are especially vulnerable because they cannot afford a subsistence-level diet.

The setting of this passage in Revelation is the opening of the seven seals by the Lamb (i.e. Jesus; Rev. 5.1-8.1), which Morello refers to in the song. The point seems to be that the breaking of the seals, the opening of that 'book', includes words of compassion for those in need. Those who harm them—and the scales carried by the angel on the black horse (6.6) suggest scrutiny in this matter—are among those who experience the terrible judgments that fall on the world when the Lamb breaks those seals. Morello's song simultaneously anticipates the compassion that awaits that 'homeless and hungry' man and the judgment to fall on those responsible for his condition.

Closing Notes

Unlike Pierre Bezukov in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, contemporary songwriters are not trying to decipher Revelation to uncover some meaning buried within its symbols and numbers. Instead, they use the book to articulate their own concerns and desires. Popular music is potentially both advocacy and entertainment. It follows that the imagined downfall of 'villains' identified in the music provides a source of pleasure both for songwriters and for their audiences. This *Schadenfreude* frequently depends on the employment of biblical apocalyptic imagery.

12. The second rider takes peace from the earth (Rev. 6.4), and the third with his scales appears with the words cited above, thus linking hunger and violence. As Harrington puts it, 'War carries famine in its train' (1993: 91).

Artistic and religious visions of comprehensive cataclysm are often, on one level, veiled revenge fantasies. For instance, the 'time of anguish' anticipated by Daniel reflects in part the longing for justice of a battered, powerless minority bruised by Syrian atrocities (Dan. 12.1; cf. 11.30-31; 1 Maccabees 1–6). John records the cry of martyrs calling on God to 'avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth' (Rev. 6.10), though the book's vitriol is aimed particularly at the devil-inspired Roman Empire (12.9; 13.1-2). Biblical apocalyptic writing gives a voice to the marginalized and vulnerable, whether the Jews harassed by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (1 Macc. 1.10, 41-64) or the early churches of Asia Minor marginalized during Domitian's reign (81–96 CE). Contemporary songwriters face other villains. Apocalyptic and apocalyptic-inspired writing allows those with no real status in the eyes of the world, and no political, military or economic strength, to imagine a better world. God is on their side, and the downfall of their 'enemies' is inevitable and brutal. Their audiences also experience delight, or *Schadenfreude*, in these judgment-filled lyrical narratives.

5. Portrayals of the End-Time, the Apocalypse and the Last Judgment in Christian Metal Music

Marcus Moberg

Introduction

The past couple of decades have witnessed a steady increase in the scholarly attention devoted to the contemporary intersection between religion and the nexus of new media (particularly electronic media), popular culture and consumer culture (e.g. Forbes and Mahan 2000; L.S. Clark 2005; Hoover 2006; Lynch 2007b; Einstein 2008). This work has essentially been based on the general observation that, in a time marked by institutional religious decline, the rise of 'alternative' spiritualities and the privatization of religious life and practice, for increasing numbers of people, religious/spiritual inspiration has ever more frequently begun to be sought within the wider popular/cultural realm.

Religion and popular culture have always constituted 'overlapping categories' (Mahan 2007: 48), but even a cursory glance at the wider Western popular cultural environment of the past three to four decades reveals an increasing preoccupation with topics related to religion and spirituality. In particular, various beliefs and notions pertaining to the impending demise of humankind and the end of the world—which are beliefs and notions that have largely, although loosely, remained explored within a Judeo-Christian eschatological and apocalyptic framework—have long constituted a salient feature of popular culture. As is explored in the varied contributions contained in this volume, this has occurred not only in the context of film and television (e.g. Stone 2001), but most certainly in the context of popular music as well. Indeed, a few post-1960s popular music cultures and scenes have even become largely characterized by their consistent interest in this type of subject matter. Among these, heavy metal music and its various subgenres stand out particularly well. Metal has, moreover, also been used as a vehicle for the expression and articulation of ideologies and worldviews (including religious ones) as disparate as, on the one hand, satanist, anti-Christian, and National Socialist and, on the other, ultra-Orthodox Judaism and evangeli-

cal Christianity (Moberg 2009a: 116-24; Kahn-Harris 2010: 97). This chapter focuses on the latter.

On the whole, Christian metal can be described as constituting the merging of evangelical Christianity with metal music and culture, situated somewhere on the borderline between these two phenomena. Therefore, when looking at the ways in which eschatological and apocalyptic themes and narratives are explored in relation to and through particular popular cultural forms, Christian metal provides a particularly interesting case study indeed.

This chapter begins with a general discussion of how popular culture's dealings with eschatological and apocalyptic themes have been approached within scholarship working at the interface of religion and popular culture. This is followed by a brief account of how these types of themes have commonly appeared, and continue to appear, in metal music and culture in general. The remaining part of the chapter is devoted to a more detailed, although primarily descriptive, discussion and analysis of the ways in which eschatological and apocalyptic themes tend to be portrayed within the world of Christian metal music.

Approaching Eschatological and Apocalyptic Themes in Popular Culture

How is popular culture's consistent and continuing utilization and employment of eschatological and apocalyptic themes and subject matter best approached and understood? Notably, among the varied contributions that have been made to the rapidly expanding but still quite fragmented scholarship on the intersection between religion and popular culture, only a handful of studies have displayed a more sustained focus on popular culture's utilization of such themes and subject matter. Among these, Christopher Partridge's two-volume work on the 're-enchantment of the West' (2004; 2005) and Lynn Schofield Clark's research on the religious/spiritual significance of popular culture in the everyday lives of American teens (2005, first published 2003) certainly count among the more original and thought-provoking.

Beginning with Partridge, the main argument advanced throughout his two volumes on the re-enchantment of the West essentially revolves around the idea that the proliferation of a vast array of alternative religions, spiritualities, and worldviews in the West in modern times has gradually brought about the formation of a widely shared 'reservoir of ideas, beliefs, practices, and symbols' (Partridge 2004: 84) which he terms *occulture*. In particular, argues Partridge (2005: 2), the proliferation of these disparate beliefs and ideas, or the development of an 'occultural milieu', is highly indicative, if not indeed illustrative, of the emergence of a new 'spiritual atmosphere' and more general transformations of Western religious/spiritual sensibilities.

As examined in detail by Partridge, *popular culture* has played, and very much continues to play, a pivotal role in these developments: 'Motifs, theories and truth claims that once existed in hermetically sealed subcultures have begun to be recycled, often with great rapidity, through popular culture' (Partridge 2004: 119). As we, as individuals, are surrounded by, engage with and consume popular culture during the course of our daily lives, so do we also constantly come across and become increasingly familiar with the various religious and spiritual themes and ideas that are repeatedly disseminated through it (Partridge 2004: 53; cf. Hoover 2006: 28). Indeed, as Partridge contends, 'there is little doubt that people are, from their own particular perspectives, developing religious and metaphysical ideas by reflecting on themes explored in literature, film, and music' (2004: 121).

Nevertheless, different forms of religion and spirituality tend not to be treated on an equal footing within the wider contemporary popular cultural environment. As Partridge writes, 'occulture tends to be antagonistic to traditional Christian beliefs in particular' (2004: 136). However, as illustrated by the commercial success and enduring popular appeal of films dealing with the end of the world, Satan, demons, the Antichrist and so on, popular culture's long-standing interest in Judeo-Christian eschatology, apocalypticism, millennialism and demonology is a notable exception to this. But, argues Partridge, even as such 'darker' types of Judeo-Christian themes continue to surface within popular culture, they tend to take on a 'latent' character; 'more often than not, when these themes bubble to the surface in the West they carry an eclectic mix of occultural ideas and influences . . . they tend to be forms of detraditionalized Christian belief' (2005: 2).

For present purposes, it is of particular import to note that Partridge (2005: 279-327) also makes the further argument that, within the wider contemporary popular cultural environment, one can clearly also discern a growing interest in different forms of 'dark occulture' frequently sourced by 'dark' Judeo-Christian subject matter (i.e. eschatology, apocalypticism, millennialism and demonology). Perhaps more than any other contemporary form of popular music, metal is particularly illustrative of this (e.g. Moberg 2009b), and Partridge is quite right to single out metal as having 'had an enormous occultural impact' (2005: 251).

Lynn Schofield Clark (2005) has presented some very similar thoughts in her *From Angels to Aliens: Teenagers, the Media, and the Supernatural*. In particular, Clark connects the proliferation of apocalyptic and millenarian themes in popular culture to the more recent rapid growth of evangelical Protestantism in the United States:

> More recently, evangelicalism's acceptance as a legitimate religious identifier, combined with an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the media, placed its concerns in the public imagination. To understand the contemporary attitudes towards the supernatural, we must understand

> evangelicalism's role in bringing such matters to the fore, and hence their role in providing some of the 'publicly available stock of symbols and narratives' that are incorporated into the entertainment media (Clark 2005: 25).

As illustrated by this passage, there is an obvious connection between Clark's notion of a 'publicly available stock of symbols and narratives' and Partridge's notion of 'occulture'. Furthermore, when Clark writes of the 'dark side of evangelicalism' (2005: 24) and of how evangelical beliefs, teachings, and 'stories of evil, demons, and apocalyptic battles' (2005: 13) have entered the secular popular cultural mainstream, direct connections can also be made to Partridge's concept of 'dark occulture'. Moreover, like Partridge, Clark does not fail to point out the general unpredictability and uncontrollability of popular culture, when she notes that once evangelical beliefs and concerns enter into and become assimilated within the broader popular cultural mainstream, evangelicals themselves consequently also lose 'control of how these concerns will be understood or addressed' (Clark 2005: 26).

In contrast to Partridge's thesis, however, Clark's argument is highly North America-specific. One could, moreover, certainly pose the question whether she is overstating the influence of *one* particular Christian tradition (i.e. evangelicalism) when it comes to the proliferation of Judeo-Christian eschatological and apocalyptic themes within the broader North American popular cultural environment, which, after all, continues to dominate the Western (if not the global) popular cultural environment on the whole. Indeed, one might ask, when these types of themes have been explored in films and television series in particular, is it not more often a *Catholic* framework in relation to which they have tended to be explored rather than an evangelical one?

However, to be fair, Clark is also keen to emphasize that, when themes inspired by the 'dark side of evangelicalism' surface in popular culture, they tend to be significantly reworked and often also employed in combination with a range of other esoteric and occult ideas. Moreover, even though there may be some potential problems with her strong emphasis on the impact of North American evangelicalism, Clark is nevertheless to a certain extent able to highlight how contemporary intersections between religion and media/popular culture in North America have become increasingly characterized by a relationship of *mutual* influence, with religion often being able to influence and affect media/popular culture as much as the other way around (cf. Hoover 2006: 205).

Furthermore, and importantly for present purposes, when making her argument, Clark is not only referring to the broader Western popular cultural mainstream. She is also referring to the phenomenon of 'evangelical popular culture', which emerged in the USA in the mid-1970s and subsequently has developed into a multi-billion dollar industry. Indeed, the evangelical popular cultural phenomenon constitutes a notable, but often overlooked, com-

ponent of the contemporary North American popular cultural environment on the whole. Moreover, as I shall discuss in more detail below, evangelical popular culture also constitutes the religio-cultural backdrop against which Christian metal music and culture necessarily need to be understood.

The primary underlying rationale of evangelical popular culture has always been to offer evangelical youth 'Christianized', 'moral' and 'family friendly' versions of 'secular' popular cultural forms. In addition to this, though, there has always been the further aim of evangelism and of actively engaging the secular popular cultural environment in its own vernacular in order to 'infiltrate' it and bring it more into accordance with 'Christian values' from *within* (Clark 2005: 32; cf. Luhr 2009: 5-8). Popular cultural forms of various sorts, whether film, music or video games, are generally not regarded as being 'inherently secular but, rather, *neutral* forms that can be used to meet evangelical needs' (Hendershot 2004: 28 [my emphasis]). More generally, this ideology of engagement and 'infiltration' stems from the concern widely shared by evangelicals that the contemporary popular cultural environment constitutes a critical battleground over the hearts and minds of youth (e.g. Clark 2005: 32-41; Hendershot 2004: 34-39; Luhr 2009: 5-8).

As evangelical Protestantism in its many forms has spread on a global scale (e.g. Vasquez 2003), some slightly different definitions have emerged of what evangelicalism 'is' or who exactly counts as an 'evangelical' Christian. As Heather Hendershot points out, 'evangelicals tend to see themselves not as a *type* of Christian but as the only true Christians' (2004: 2). Yet, irrespective of whether people who call themselves 'evangelicals' would agree or not, the term 'evangelical' is actually most commonly used to denote precisely a certain *type* of Protestant Christian who espouses a more particular set of beliefs and understandings of what a Christian life is supposed to be all about (see Bebbington 1989: 2-3).

According to Clark, people who call themselves 'evangelicals' tend to identify with the following four 'key beliefs' in particular: (1) the belief in the inherent sinfulness of humanity and the need for *personal salvation*; (2) the belief that all 'true' Christians should adhere to the biblical Great Commission and aim to spread their faith to others; (3) the belief that the Bible is literally true, inerrant and inspired by God; (4) and the belief in the rapture and the imminent second coming of Christ (2005: 30; for a detailed historical discussion of the development and spread of evangelicalism, see Bebbington 1989; Hunter 1993).

For present purposes it is of particular importance to note that, just as evangelicals tend to regard the Bible as the literally true and inerrant word of God, they also tend to take 'a more literal approach' to the interpretation of biblical eschatology and prophecy (Hendershot 2004: 178). However, since biblical prophecy, and especially the book of Revelation, is notoriously difficult to interpret and decipher, evangelicals can turn to a wide

array of evangelical popular cultural products designed to provide guidance on these issues (Hendershot 2004: 179-80). Particularly in North America, evangelical understandings of the biblical foretelling of the parousia have been profoundly influenced by so-called 'dispensationalist' teachings initially developed within the Plymouth Brethren movement in Ireland and Britain in the nineteenth century. At the risk of simplifying matters somewhat, dispensationalist teachings are based on the dividing up of history into (usually seven) different successive periods (i.e. dispensations) marked by different relationships between God and humanity. The belief in the so-called 'rapture' occupies a central position in these teachings. Among many slightly different versions, this is essentially the belief that all 'true' Christians will be 'lifted' or 'brought up' (i.e. 'raptured') from earth to heaven sometime before, during or at the end of a seven-year period of 'Tribulation'—a time marked by immense hardships and the rise to power of the Antichrist—that is to precede the second coming of Christ (e.g. Sweetnam 2006; Hendershot 2004: 101; cf. Moberg 2009a: 93-94).

Indeed, as a key feature of North American evangelicalism, this particular belief has become central to evangelical popular culture and sparked the development of what has become varyingly referred to as 'apocalyptic fiction' (Clark 2005: 34), 'apocalyptic media' (Hendershot 2004, 179) or 'prophecy fiction' (Gribben 2009). The wider popularization of these teachings, and especially the notion of the rapture, has most probably first and foremost occurred through Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye's immensely successful *Left Behind* series of novels (e.g. Gribben 2006; 2009), which has inspired a wide range of *Left Behind*-related products, including three feature films and two computer games.

According to Hendershot (2004: 179-80), evangelical 'apocalyptic media', such as the above-mentioned films and related products, principally have a threefold aim: to instruct audiences in biblical prophecy; to frighten and compel people to accept Christ as their personal savior; and to guide or 'convert' those who have been 'left behind' after the rapture and still live on the earth during the period of Tribulation.

Today, the evangelical popular cultural phenomenon has come to encompass nearly every form of popular culture and has gradually also come to affect the very nature of North American evangelicalism (Hoover 2001: 70-72; 2006: 78, 150; Romanowski 2005: 111). For example, contemporary Christian music—the fastest growing segment of the evangelical popular culture industry (e.g. Hendershot 2004: 52-53)—has not only made its way into the more relaxed worship settings of many evangelical congregations and megachurches but has also become an integral part of youth-oriented evangelical events of various sorts. In the early 1980s, contemporary Christian music came to include metal as well, although this did not happen without some degree of controversy (Moberg, forthcoming).

Apocalyptic Themes in Metal Music and Culture

Until recently, scholarly explorations of metal music and culture were scarce. This might seem strange, considering the exceptional longevity of metal as a genre, the many often 'satanism'-related controversies and moral panics that have surrounded it (Hjelm, Kahn-Harris and LeVine, forthcoming), and the fact that it long ago developed into a truly global popular music culture that continuously attracts new and ardent followers all over the world. As Andy Brown has argued (2003), earlier scholarly disregard of metal music and culture is perhaps best explained by metal culture's general disinterest in matters related to cultural politics. As a consequence of this, scholars interested in exploring popular music 'subcultures' as sites of 'counter hegemonic resistance' in the late 1970s and early 1980s instead turned their investigating eye to more obviously politically oriented popular music cultures such as punk (Kahn-Harris 2007: 17).

In addition to this, it is noteworthy that, despite its long-standing general fascination for the world of religion, mythology and legend, metal music and culture have only fairly recently started to attract the interest of scholars of religion (e.g. Partridge 2005; Lundskow 2008; Santana and Erickson 2008). Indeed, the pervasiveness of religious and mythological themes, imagery, language and symbolism throughout metal music and culture is clearly noticeable even at a cursory glance.

The visual and aesthetic dimension of metal is intimately informed by a particular discourse (i.e. the types of subject matter most commonly explored in lyrics). Although metal lyrics have never been dominated by any one specific theme, as Deena Weinstein has observed in relation to the 'classic' metal (heavy metal) of the 1970s and 1980s, one can nevertheless discern a 'significant core of thematic complexes' (2000: 35). According to Weinstein, metal's narrative dimension can be divided into two main categories, the 'dionysian' and the 'chaotic', which are, in some respects, contradictory. While the dionysian category primarily includes themes such as ecstasy, sex, intoxication, youthful vitality, male potency and power, the category of the 'chaotic', by contrast, includes themes such as chaos, war, violence, struggle, alienation, madness, evil and death. Indeed, metal has become known particularly for its exploration of these types of chaotic themes, and it is within this thematic category that one also finds frequent references and allusions to the figure of Satan and the apocalyptic visions of the Bible.

As Weinstein observes, not only has the Bible always provided metal bands with a host of narratives and themes on which to draw, but it has also provided a broad range of religious symbols and a rich religious terminology (2000: 38-39). In addition to the Bible, metal bands have also typically drawn inspiration from themes and ideas found in various strands of occultism, esotericism, Paganism and satanism, as well as in the world of legend and myth,

especially the Germanic, Norse, and Celtic traditions (e.g. Moberg 2009b). Different bands have, however, explored such themes in varying depth and in varyingly sophisticated ways.

Metal thus stands out from most other forms of contemporary popular music through its highly conspicuous use of religion and the supernatural as a primary source of lyrical and aesthetic inspiration. Indeed, one could even go so far as to argue that religious themes and imagery in general have developed into an integral component of metal's lyrical and aesthetic conventions on the whole (see Moberg 2009a: 122-24). When metal bands have drawn on themes inspired by the world of religion, and by biblical eschatology and apocalypticism in particular, they have typically used them in combination with other key 'chaotic' themes such as war, chaos and madness. An early and obvious example of this would be Black Sabbath's 'War Pigs' (*Paranoid* [1972]), which, although it is intended to be an anti-Vietnam War song, ends with the day of judgment and God's punishment of the wicked. Another obvious example would be Iron Maiden's controversial song 'The Number of the Beast' (*The Number of the Beast* [1982]), which tells the story of a man not being able to tell reality from his nightmares about the end-time and the rise of the Antichrist.

In the early 1980s, metal music and culture started to diversify and fragment as it became divided into the two main contrasting subgenres of glam and thrash metal. While the glam metal movement represented a turn toward 'lighter' sounds and a much greater emphasis on 'pop' sensibility, the largely underground thrash metal movement, strongly inspired as it was by the emergence of punk in the late 1970s, largely developed in the opposite direction as bands such as Metallica, Megadeth and Slayer created a decidedly more fierce form of metal 'characterized by speed, aggression and an austere seriousness' (Kahn-Harris 2007: 3). For the purposes of this discussion, it is of particular import to note that the thrash metal movement was characterized also by its almost exclusive emphasis on metal's 'chaotic' themes, particularly the destruction of the world as a consequence of (often nuclear) war and environmental disaster (see Weinstein 2000: 50-52).

Thrash metal also laid the foundation for the subsequent development of so-called 'extreme metal' styles such as death and black metal in the mid-1980s and early 1990s. Developments of these subgenres also brought with them a much more sustained engagement with esoteric, Pagan, satanist, and anti-Christian themes (Kahn-Harris 2007: 3-5; Moberg 2009a: 116-20). Even so, biblical apocalypticism has continued to function as an important source of inspiration within most extreme metal subgenres, although, as in thrash metal, mostly as a rhetorical device (see Weinstein 2000: 39). For example, this can be observed in album titles such as Hellhammer's *Apocalyptic Raids* (1984), Slayer's *Soundtrack to the Apocalypse* (2003, CD box set), and Megadeth's *Countdown to Extinction* (1992), as well as in the lyrics of songs such as

Metallica's 'The Four Horsemen' (*Kill 'Em All* [1983]) and Megadeth's 'Ashes in your Mouth' (*Countdown to Extinction*); both of which are directly inspired by narratives found in Revelation, but both of which also clearly utilize these narratives in order to convey a general sense of chaos and impending doom rather than to endorse these narratives as prophecies of *actual* events to come. As Weinstein observes, in this context biblical themes provide 'resonance, a cultural frame of reference, for the imagery of chaos itself' (2000: 39). So, although biblical themes and narratives continue to be used for rhetorical purposes in thrash and other extreme metal subgenres, the *type* of apocalypse presented is rarely a purely supernatural one but more often *human-made* in the form of nuclear annihilation or ecological catastrophe.

Moreover, extreme metal's emphasis on war and chaos is vividly reflected also in the extreme metal aesthetic with its characteristic portrayals of dystopian futures and the often violent depiction of the end of the world. Examples of album cover artwork directly inspired by biblical apocalyptic imagery and motifs include Celtic Frost's *To Mega Therion* (1985), a painting by H.R. Giger depicting a figure of Satan or the 'Great Beast' using a crucified Christ as a slingshot aimed at the viewer. This also clearly constitutes an early example of the mockery and inversion of Christian apocalyptic themes still commonly found in extreme metal imagery and aesthetics. More obviously drawing on Christian eschatological imagery, Slayer's *Hell Awaits* (1985) depicts human bodies being torn to pieces by demons in hell.

Judeo-Christian eschatological and apocalyptic ideas, particularly those pertaining to the impending end of the world and the last judgment of humanity, still abound in certain areas of popular culture. Notably, ever since it first emerged in the late 1970s, metal music and culture have always stood out in this respect.

Christian Metal Music and Culture: Main Traits and Characteristics

Christian bands playing heavier forms of rock started to appear in the late 1970s. During this time, early Christian hard rock bands such as Petra and Resurrection Band from the USA, as well as Jerusalem from Sweden, laid the foundation for the subsequent creation of Christian metal in the early 1980s by bands such as Stryper, Messiah Prophet, and Saint (Moberg 2009a: 128). It is important to point out, though, that when Christian musicians created Christian metal, they did so for missiological reasons, the primary aim being to evangelize secular metal audiences through the genre's styles, which were popular at the time. Thus, in a way typical of producers of evangelical popular culture more generally, Christian metal musicians were also very much driven by the idea of 'infiltrating' and transforming secular metal culture from within. Therefore, when accounting for Christian metal as a particular form

of heavy metal, it is, first of all, important to note that, from its very inception, it wholeheartedly embraced the defining musical, rhetorical, aesthetic and stylistic traits of its secular counterpart. Indeed, compared to most other forms of contemporary Christian music, the affinity between Christian and secular metal has always been exceptionally close. Following from this, it is metal music and culture and its lyrical and aesthetic conventions that constitute the musical and aesthetic backdrop against which Christian metal necessarily needs to be understood. For example, in typical 'metal fashion', Christian metal bands tend to choose names that reveal their Christian approach. Examples include Whitecross (USA), Sacred Warrior (USA), Demon Hunter (USA), Holy Blood (Ukraine), and Extol (Norway, disbanded).

In addition to Christian metal's close affinity to its secular counterpart, however, it is equally important to note that, during its formative period in the mid to late 1980s, Christian metal nevertheless developed more or less in parallel to the North American evangelical popular culture industry, betraying the conspicuous influence of its main aims and aspirations. As a consequence, like contemporary Christian music per se, Christian metal has become defined largely along the lines of three non-musical 'requirements': lyrical subject matter, artists and organization (Howard and Streck 1999: 8-13; Moberg 2009a: 135-46; cf. Romanowski 2005: 113; Hendershot 2004: 58-63).

This means that Christian metal has most commonly become defined as follows: (1) it somehow conveys a form of the 'Christian message' through its lyrics; (2) it is created and performed by people who are themselves professing Christians; and (3) it is produced and distributed through Christian networks (e.g. Christian record labels and distribution channels) that are guided by 'Christian principles'. However, as these 'requirements' (particularly the latter) have always been the subject of constant debate and negotiation, they should not by any means be understood as being fixed and stable. Rather, from the perspective of Christian metal musicians and fans, these requirements, or perhaps guidelines, have come to function as the primary means by which Christian metal is distinguished from its secular counterpart (Moberg 2009a: 136-37).

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Christian metal started to diversify musically through the creation of Christian extreme metal styles such as Christian death metal and Christian black metal or so-called 'unblack metal'. The early 1990s also witnessed the spread of Christian metal to a number of countries outside of North America (particularly to northern Europe and Latin America) and the gradual forming of a transnational Christian metal scene with an independent infrastructure of production, promotion, and distribution channels, specialized media, and festivals (Moberg 2009a: 172-75). Significantly, the spread of Christian metal to different countries around the

world and the forming of a transnational Christian metal scene in the early 1990s also brought with it a considerable degree of *ideological* diversification, as Christian metal became increasingly embedded in new social and cultural contexts that were different from the cultural and religious atmosphere of the USA. These developments did not, however, bring about any significant changes in Christian metal's general evangelical orientation, although, generally speaking, contemporary European Christian metal bands appear to be somewhat less interested in outright and aggressive evangelism than their American counterparts.

In addition to always having shared all basic musical and aesthetic tenets, the similarities between Christian and secular metal has continued to extend to an interest in similar types of lyrical subject matter, in particular Judeo-Christian eschatological and apocalyptic themes. Indeed, in contrast to most other forms of contemporary Christian music and their often overly saccharine and upbeat lyrics, Christian metal bands have always preferred a much more straightforward, and sometimes even radical, approach to lyrical style and subject matter. This, however, should not necessarily be interpreted as reflecting the actual views and attitudes of musicians themselves in clear and straightforward ways (Moberg 2009a: 160). This is because writing lyrics in this uncompromising style also has much to do with genre-specific notions of authenticity and adhering to metal's general lyrical conventions (Moberg 2009a: 140, 145).

Christian metal's quite strong concentration on stark biblical eschatological and apocalyptic themes such as the fall from grace, the rise of the Antichrist or the last judgment do, of course, fit this lyrical approach well. Moreover, as noted in the previous section, these types of themes are far from reserved for Christian musicians: they are also long-standing 'metal themes'. Therefore, following from its close affinity to its secular counterpart, it is quite natural for Christian metal bands to focus also on these types of themes, albeit from their own Christian perspective or point of view (Moberg 2009a: 146-48).

Eschatological and Apocalyptic Themes in Christian Metal Lyrics and Aesthetics

As with secular metal, the main lyrical themes of Christian metal can be divided up roughly into a set of frequently overlapping main categories (see C.M. Brown 2005: 130-33). These include evangelism, the atoning crucifixion of Christ, rebellion against sin, spiritual warfare, social and cultural issues from a Christian perspective and, conspicuously, biblical eschatological and apocalyptic themes such as the fall from grace, the end-time and events connected to the biblical apocalypse such as the battle at Armageddon and the last judgment. Of course, not all Christian metal bands write lyrics on *all*

of these topics. It is also worth noting here that, although there has been a considerable increase in the number of bands who do write lyrics in their own native languages as Christian metal scenes have developed in different parts of the world, most bands have continued to write according to themes that clearly fit into the above-mentioned main categories. Indeed, there are many bands that have developed a special interest in biblical eschatological and apocalyptic themes. Some have even dedicated entire concept albums to the exploration of such themes. More recent examples of this include Swedish unblack band Admonish's *Den yttersta tiden* (The End Times [2005]) and from the Christian metal pioneers Saint, *The Mark* (2006). Saint's *The Mark* is particularly notable in this regard as the album provides a narrative that takes the listener on a journey through the apocalyptic events depicted in Revelation. The album starts out with songs such as 'The Vision', moves on to songs such as 'The 7th Trumpet', 'The Mark', and 'Bowls of Wrath', and ends with songs like 'Reaping the Flesh' and 'Alfa & Omega'. The album does not, however, strive to communicate a specifically evangelical interpretation of these prophetic narratives. For the most part, the lyrics instead basically just paraphrase Revelation.

As illustrated by Saint's concept album, when Christian metal bands explore end-time-related themes, they mostly tend to focus on the 'end', so to speak. That is to say, they tend to concentrate on apocalyptic events and battles themselves rather than on the events believed to precede them such as the period of Tribulation. Explicit references to dispensationalist ideas such as the rapture are rare in Christian metal lyrics, and especially so in the lyrics of bands from countries other than North America, countries in which evangelicalism has been less influenced by dispensationalist teachings. In general, Christian metal bands instead tend to base their exposition of such themes directly on biblical narratives themselves, often through simply retelling these narratives in slightly different, shortened, simplified, poetical and often exaggerated ways. Again, Christian metal bands typically explore these themes utilizing a type of language and rhetoric that is in line with metal's lyrical conventions in general (they are, after all, *metal* bands). Nevertheless, it is not at all unusual for bands to include biblical references in the liner-notes of their record sleeves in order to underline that their lyrics strive to convey a 'Christian' message (Moberg 2009a: 146-61).

Moreover, and in quite sharp contrast to secular metal bands, Christian bands also tend to focus on these types of narratives with the aim of illuminating or explaining the Christian understanding of the human condition and the Christian eschatological understanding of time (see C.M. Brown 2005: 125). There is thus often an expressed *educational* aspect to many Christian metal bands' exploration of such themes and narratives. One example of this can be found in the last two verses of Saint's 'Primed and Ready' (*Time's End* [1986]):

Soon the earth will burn in flames
And wickedness will stake its claim,
What's to come out from the east
the son of death, the mighty beast,
Sinful men will hear his cry
On judgment day they all will die,
Evil's got them by the tail
And with their gods they'll burn in hell.

When it all has come to pass
When the first have become last,
When evil's lost the final fight
To the king and all his might,
Memories will fade away
The horrors of forgotten days,
Except the one who's chosen wrath,
He tasting death who's laughing last.[11]

Although in a much compressed form, these lyrics basically just retell, and indeed paraphrase, the events prophesied in Revelation. Also noteworthy is the uncompromising and blunt style in which these lyrics are written, a style that is not only revivalist in character but also fully in line with metal rhetoric in general or the 'metal-way' of putting things. Another example of these types of lyrics, in this case written in Swedish, can be found in Admonish's 'Den yttersta tiden' ('The End Times', *Den yttersta tiden*):

Hans änglar skall sändas till himlens alla gränser
(His angels will be sent to all borders of the heavens)
De heliga skall samlas inför hans tron
(The holy shall gather before his throne)
Men änglarna skall rensa ogräset från vetet
(But the angels shall separate the weeds from the wheat)
som getter ifrån får skiljs de onda ifrån de heliga
(like goats from sheep are the evil separated from the holy)
Tillsammans med Satan och hans demoner
(Together with Satan and his demons)
Slängs de i eldsjön för evig död
(They are thrown in the lake of fire for eternal death).[2]

Like the lyrics by Saint quoted previously, these lyrics also basically summarize parts of the prophecy of the last judgment as depicted in Revelation. Further, like the Saint lyric above, these lyrics do not depart significantly

1. Reproduced with the kind permission of Retroactive Records/Armor and Saint/
2. My translation from the Swedish original. Reproduced with the kind permission of Admonish.

from the original biblical narrative, or at least do not make any significant additions to it. However, in addition to general portrayals of the biblical apocalypse and last judgment such as these, one also finds lyrics dealing with these topics that are written in more of a story-like fashion, often in a first person narrative form. This is also a lyrical form that is quite distinctive to Christian metal, as it also connects to another central revivalist evangelical theme, namely the importance of accepting Jesus as *personal savior* before it is too late and of living one's life as if Christ might return at any moment. A classic example of this can be found in Deliverance's 'No Time' (*Deliverance* [1989]):

> No time, no time
> That's my constant cry
> No time to help those in need
> At last it's time to die
> No time
>
> At last before the Lord I came
> I stood with downcast eyes
> He held a book in His hands
> It was the Book of Life
> He opened up the book and said,
> 'Your name I cannot find
> I was once going to write it down
> But I couldn't find the time.'[3]

As in the lyrics above, in order to convey the urgency of accepting Christ as one's personal savior as soon as possible, Christian metal's first person lyrical narratives of the last judgment typically take the perspective of the sinner or the damned. These lyrics also tend to be written in a straight-talking style. Indeed, in the final lines of the lyrics quoted above, the band even includes a dark humorous spin. In a sense, these types of lyrics can also, therefore, be viewed in relation to the concept of 'apocalyptic media' (Hendershot 2004: 179) discussed above, in that they typically contain direct warnings of consequences faced by those who have not accepted Christ at the parousia. This has also become encapsulated in the Christian metal slogan 'Turn or burn!'

In ways that connect more closely to the other central Christian metal themes of rebellion against sin and spiritual warfare, lyrics dealing with dystopian futures and the biblical apocalypse and last judgment sometimes also express a longing for these cosmic events to come about. Such lyrics are, of course, premised on the notion that we are already living in the very end of the end-time and that the cosmic battle between good and evil is imminent. The biblical apocalypse and the cosmic battle between good and evil

3. Reproduced with the kind permission of Retroactive Records and Deliverance.

are not only explored in Christian metal lyrics, however. As in secular metal, apocalyptic imagery and motifs have developed into an integral, and indeed central, part of the Christian metal aesthetic. This is clearly illustrated by the type of apocalyptic imagery and motifs that Christian metal bands commonly utilize in their album artwork. Once again, the book of Revelation has served, and continues to serve, as a particularly important source of inspiration. For example, the artwork of Saint's classic album *Time's End* is directly inspired by the apocalyptic visions of events to come as related in Revelation. The cover depicts the leopard-like beast with 'a mouth like that of a lion' rising from the sea as related in Rev. 3.12. To take another classic example, the cover of Bride's *Show No Mercy* (1986) depicts the cosmic battle between the archangel Michael and the dragon or Satan as told in Rev. 12.7-9.

More recent examples of album artwork portrayals of apocalyptic events directly inspired by these same Revelation themes include War of Age's *Arise and Conquer* (2008), which depicts a knight driving his lance down the throat of a large dragon. The dragon most probably stands for the dragon (i.e. Satan) as related in Rev. 12–20. On the other end of the knight's lance there is a banner with the head of a lion, which is most probably a reference to the 'Lion of Judah' (i.e. Christ) as recounted in Rev. 5.5-6—a central symbol of messianic expectation. In line with this interpretation, the knight himself would then be the archangel Michael, who, as told in Rev. 12.7-9, will fight the dragon in the heavens and hurl him down to earth.

Another, more recent example of the utilization of apocalyptic motifs in album artwork can be found in Impending Doom's *There Will Be Violence* (2010), which depicts the earth from the perspective of space being engulfed in what appears to be some form of 'cosmic' flames. As with the albums of many other Christian metal bands, the apocalyptic references in the artwork for this particular album become even clearer when understood in relation to the album title and the name of the band itself.

Finally, it should be noted that Christian metal album artwork quite frequently alludes to apocalyptic themes also in ways that are not as obviously directly inspired by biblical texts. Stryper's debut EP *The Yellow and Black Attack* (1984) provides a classic example of this. The picture on the cover depicts missiles on their way toward earth from space directed by what is presumably the hand of God. Another example can be found in the cover for Mortification's *Post Momentary Affliction* (1993). The surrealistic cover picture depicts white stairs in the midst of a barren landscape leading up to a white throne, against which a large sword is leaning. A human heart (depicted in anatomical detail), bearing what appears to be a crown of thorns, is falling like a bolt of fire from the sky toward the throne, while a devilish hand is breaking through the stony ground below. Although it is unclear what *precise* idea or notion this cover is intended to convey (if it is indeed intended is to

convey any precise idea at all), it nevertheless clearly brings to mind the biblical narrative of the cosmic battle between good and evil.

The preceding discussion has covered only a few examples of how apocalyptic, end-time and last judgment themes are portrayed in Christian metal. As we have seen, Christian metal lyrics and aesthetics often draw directly on biblical narratives when dealing with these types of themes. Sometimes, however, biblical and Christian references appear in 'coded' and convert ways, which is common in other forms of contemporary Christian music as well (Häger 2005). Arguably, in a time marked by the decline of institutional religions and increasing religious detraditionalization, these types of coded references might not be as directly recognizable to the 'unchurched' as they are to evangelical audiences. As noted above, the coding of Christian messages, however, is a conscious strategy commonly employed by many Christian bands. In the case of Christian metal, bands usually do not want to come across as overtly Christian, since that is often regarded as hampering their chances of wider success in the secular market. As we have seen above, however, there are plenty of Christian metal bands who have not made any compromises in this regard.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has provided a primarily descriptive account of how end-time, apocalyptic and last judgment themes and narratives are typically portrayed in Christian metal music. On the whole, Christian metal's lyrical and aesthetic explorations of these themes have remained governed by the rhetorical and aesthetic conventions of metal music in general. However, as we have seen, Christian metal's portrayals of such themes, through both lyrics and aesthetics, tend to be directly based on biblical texts in a way that is uncommon in secular metal. Moreover, Christian metal's treatments typically also tend to focus on the conclusion of the apocalyptic narrative in Revelation. Whereas biblical apocalyptic battles are explored in both Christian metal lyrics and aesthetics, the particular theme of the last judgment tends mostly to be explored in lyrics, and often in a first person narrative form designed to address the listener directly. As noted, these types of lyrics can also be viewed in relation to the notion of 'apocalyptic media' (Hendershot 2004: 179-80) since they contain direct warnings about what awaits those who have not accepted Christ when the last judgment is at hand. Further, this style is also typical of evangelical revivalist homiletics more generally (e.g. Hendershot 2004: 97, 124). Arguably, the 'straight-talking' style of Christian metal lyrics might be interpreted as connecting to a long-standing particular masculine revivalist culture that laments the 'emasculation of Jesus' (Morgan 2007: 199), celebrates traditional gender roles and elevates the notion of the strong male

'warrior of Christ'. This, of course, also fits well with metal culture's general emphasis on male power and 'machismo' (Moberg 2009a: 292).

What, then, may be said about how Christian metal should be situated in relation to the previous scholarship on the relationship between apocalyptic themes and popular culture discussed in the beginning of this chapter? For one thing, it seems clear that, while secular metal culture's frequent reworking of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic themes in close relation to various other ideas drawn from esotericism, Paganism and satanism certainly can be viewed in relation to Partridge's concept of 'dark occulture', its connection to Clark's more ambiguous and North America-specific concept of the 'dark side of evangelicalism' is less obvious. We should note here that, not only has metal always been particularly popular in Europe, but it also started to become increasingly globalized at a relatively early stage. Consequently, its long-standing fascination for the 'dark' side of religion cannot appropriately be understood in relation to the proliferation of evangelicalism in the USA alone.

With Christian metal, however, the reverse is rather the case. Of course, since it essentially constitutes a combination of evangelical Christianity with the particular and characteristically 'dark occultural' popular musical form of metal, Christian metal might at first appear to be quite 'occulture-friendly' (Partridge 2004: 186). Generally speaking, however, the Christian beliefs and ideas that Christian metal bands strive to convey and communicate are far from detraditionalized and are rarely combined with any non-Christian religious/spiritual ideas of any sort.

What is more, we should keep in mind that Christian metal has remained expressly distinguished from secular metal and has been represented as providing an *antidote* to its perceived promotion of 'destructive' themes and ideas (e.g. esotericism, Paganism and satanism) commonly explored in many forms of secular metal. Tentatively, therefore, one could perhaps even describe Christian metal as 'anti-occultural'. There is, however, an obvious connection between Christian metal and Clark's notion of the 'dark side of evangelicalism', since Christian metal bands always, although to varying degrees, have engaged secular metal culture with the aim of communicating an essentially evangelical Christian understanding of good and evil and the cosmic implications they believe this has for the ultimate fate of the whole of humanity.

6. 'When Rome Falls, Falls the World': Current 93 and Apocalyptic Folk

Sérgio Fava

Introduction

The musical genre dubbed 'apocalyptic folk' fuses a large array of eschatological expressions and themes.[1] With origins in 1980s England and appreciable commercial success in Europe and North America, this genre has influenced a generation of musicians in North America and Europe. Apocalyptic folk has also influenced genres as diverse as ambient, new age, martial pop, neofolk, and dance music. The thematic fusion is accomplished through the central aggregating element of religious apocalypticism (mostly biblical, but integrating Thelemic, Buddhist, runic, gnostic and Pagan features). Its musical enactment of the apocalyptic tradition is achieved through an uncanny dark bucolism, at times appearing paradoxical, if not absurd. This makes its success all the more intriguing.

As a postmodern enactment of apocalypticism, it appeals mostly to a young, urban, music-savvy audience. Its origins, success and influence invite questions about the historical dynamism and current appeal of apocalyptic narratives and tropes. Do these work, despite the extreme disparities of soteriological and dystopic sources used? If, instead, the narratives and tropes work *as a function* of those very disparities, what might this contribute to interdisciplinary music studies? What is so appealing in a georgic apocalypse to a largely secular urban audience, and what might this reveal about our postmodern relation to religious canons?

In the Beginning Was 'Noise'

In exploring these matters, I want to argue that the study of 'apocalyptic folk' is successful only if it abandons the label at the very outset. There are several reasons for this. First, apocalyptic folk emerged in an environment that could

1. I would like to thank David Michael Tibet for his time, stimulating conversations and insights into factual, artistic and apocalyptic matters.

be, at first, seen as diametrically opposed to folk (in content as well as designation): industrial music.[2] Second, those who coined the term and developed the style soon abandoned it, not because they lost interest in folk culture, or in apocalypticism but because the designation appeared to be a reductive label, which, they felt, inadequately communicated the developments and nuances of their particular apocalypticism. Third, as a consequence, the study of this apocalyptic folk is best tackled by avoiding the essentialist use of the genre as a coherent category (if not *explanans*) of a particular artistic expression.

The first of the reasons enumerated above forms an apparent contradiction. With the demise of British punk, 'industrial music' surfaced with an agenda of cultural subversion that aimed to achieve what punk could not. The band Throbbing Gristle has been credited with establishing industrial music in 1976, through their Industrial Records label. As a reaction against the cultural and political establishment, industrial music offered extreme soundscapes composed of barrages of noise, electronic distortion, feedback, and harrowing tape loops, all layered with disturbing lyrics about murder, sexual mutilation, drugs, anomie, misogyny, misanthropy, and the usual assortment of atrocities that post-punk delved into. Its iconoclasm made punk seem tame and formulaic by comparison.

Abrasive and unremitting noise was an effective sonic barrier against the public omnipresence of mainstream and popular media. As personal stereos (mostly Sony's Walkman) grew in popularity, industrial music offered the urban dweller the possibility of immersion into another world, one that—regardless of its infinite possible variations—had the ability to shut out the commercial and political realm others identified as 'the real world'. '[N]oise jams the code, prevents sense being made . . . This is why noise groups invariably deal with subject matter that is anti-humanist—extremes of abjection, obsession, trauma, atrocity' (Reynolds 2009: 55).

Industrial music was, however, more than a barrier or the use of simple shock tactics. It was also a statement in its own right. Jacques Attali notes that listening 'to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that it is essentially political' (2006: 6). Industrial music sought to avoid the possibility of mainstream appropriation, using uncompromising, extreme soundscapes, pointing to other possibilities of cultural signification, opening a space of alternative meanings. This wasn't new. The relation of noise and music was well established but had not been used—with any appreciable momentum—in popular culture. Edgard Varèse

2. Some call it industrial rock, but the first ten years of industrial can hardly be classified as rock music. The later development—in the late 1980s and mostly in the 1990s—of industrial rock further justifies the distinction. Some might even dispute the existence of anything called industrial music besides the body of work of Throbbing Gristle.

asked in 1962, 'what is music but organised noises?' to identify the concept of noise as a response of 'stubbornly conditioned ears [to] anything new in music' (2009: 20; see also Serres 1995, and Russo and Warner 2004). 'Noise' is a term used to define meaningless sound, and the unusual definitions of 'noise' by bands like Throbbing Gristle carried with them a wider cultural and political statement that challenged the mainstream boundaries of meaningful sound. The point is that such definitions are founded on ideologies. Against mainstream interpretations, industrial music offered 'nothing short of a total war', as Throbbing Gristle proposed. And if the 'absence of meaning is in this case the presence of all meanings, absolute ambiguity, a construction outside meaning' (Attali 2006: 33), the audiences of industrial music were, markedly, not the same as those of Varèse—or those of Feldman, who defined noise as a the most powerful form of resistance (Feldman 2009).

Speaking of post-punk industrial noise, Mary Russo and Daniel Warner have pointed out that

> Western musical discourse has as its foundation the notion of a structural difference between noise and signal. Western music's 'noise' is virtual acoustic noise (the non-periodic vibrations of ambient or concrete sounds (and its 'signals' are the tones (periodic vibrations) . . . This structural distinction . . . is often the strategy with which Western music holds at arms length its 'others'—jazz, world musics, rock, and folk music (Russo and Warner 2009: 49).

This is still true of noise music today. Masami Akita (of Merzbow, one of the most prolific and famous noise acts) notes that '[t]he effects of Japanese culture are too much noise everywhere. I want to make silence by my Noise' (quoted in Hensley 2009: 61). John Cage, who has been deemed the initiator of noise music with his 4'33" (Hegarty 2007), first spoke of his plans for the piece in the late 1940s as a means of selling silence to Muzak Co. (Pritchett 1993). As these examples show, noise can be a tool to disrupt or cancel other noises. One can, therefore, invert Simon Reynolds's statement that noise 'occurs when language breaks down' (Reynolds 2009: 56) into 'language breaks down when noise occurs'. This makes noise into more than a barrier. It opens up spaces of signification.

As to the relation of this to 'apocalyptic folk', it might be worth mentioning that there are direct historical relations between folk customs and noise. In the Middle Ages, the *charivari* (or rough music) was noise as resistance against unwanted social practices (adultery, single mothers and other *contra natura* behaviours).[3] Despite the historical connections, twentieth-century noise music (industrial or other forms) still seems very distant from a form

3. 'Long before it was given this theoretical expression, noise had always been experienced as destruction, disorder, dirt, pollution, and aggression against the code structuring messages. In all cultures, it is associated with the idea of the weapon, blasphemy, plague.

of music centred on religious eschatological themes, expressed through folk melodies, traditions and myths. The connection, however, is one of development, or maybe emergence.

When Throbbing Gristle 'terminated their mission' in 1981, frontman Genesis P-Orridge started Psychic TV with David Michael Tibet and John Balance. Tibet did not stay with Psychic TV, as he wanted to 'combine the eviscerating noise of Whitehouse and Throbbing Gristle with esoterica' (quoted in Keenan 2003: 37).[4] Tibet formed Current 93 with this is mind. However, this project was musically very different. In time, Current 93 would, single-handedly, define 'apocalyptic folk', by both coining the term and creating the musical style. Although the band's early output was not industrial music, it retained some of industrial music's technical toolbox and much of its intense iconoclastic drive. The audience was, to a large extent, the same. On the other hand, the concern with the end of the world was, from the outset, a crucial differentiator, especially in the depth and detail of its engagement with religious literature, including the canons of several religions. Their first LP, released in 1984 under the title *Nature Unveiled*, consisted of only two tracks, 'Ach Golgotha (Maldoror Is Dead)' and 'The Mystical Body of Christ in Chorazaim (The Great in the Small)'. Based on a loop of Aleister Crowley chanting 'Om', 'Ach Golgotha' was intended to be 'sped up as we came to the end because at the time I was obsessed with the apocalypse' (Tibet in Keenan 2003: 116). In the following LP release, *Dogs Blood Rising* (1984), Tibet is credited as Christ 777, as well as Isidore Ducasse. Side A of the vinyl release was etched with the words 'He is near . . .', followed on side B with the words '. . . at the door' (cf. Mt. 24.33). The sleeve notes included the following:

> Surely the Thousand Year Reign of The Mystical Body of Christ Himself is about to commence.
> Surely that place and time where all things rush together has been reached
> Yet how much bling night there is in the hearts of men.
> (And then he com'th)
> How much sadness is yet to fall . . .
>
> The Shadow falls.
> And Jesus wept.
> But look to Chorazim; look to Bethsaida.
> For we know who you are.

'Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, the which whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle' (Jeremiah 19.3)' (Attali 2006: 27; see also B. Johnson 2008)

4. The band Whitehouse is famous for its unique explorations into some of the most extreme noise and lyrics, unparalleled even in the world of industrial noise music.

Pope: Antichrist!
Government: Antichrist!
You lords and clergy: Antichrist!

At the time, Tibet's specific interest in the apocalypse had to do with the Antichrist (Tibet, pers. comm. 2010), and the following releases were devoted to the same themes: *Dogs Blood Rising* features tracks such as 'Christus Christus the Shells Have Cracked', 'From Broken Cross, Locusts', 'Raio No Terrasu (Jesus Wept)', 'St. Peter's Keys All Bloody'. Again the sleeve notes include the following: 'As ye sow, so shall ye reap, and reaping time has come', a central motto for the album and for subsequent releases by Current 93. This agricultural metaphor prefigures the folklore approach that would dominate Current 93's later work. At this time, however, the sound was still composed of eerie tape loops, sinister background sound and intense, even strained, vocal deliveries. It was groundbreaking; it merited critical acclaim and was successful enough to deserve several re-releases over the years. But all was to change.

'Puppet Theology'

During 1987 and 1988, Current 93 took a turn unexpected by most, including many of Tibet's closest followers. Over that period, the release of *Imperium* (1987), *Christ and the Pale Queens Mighty in Sorrow* (1988), and especially *Swastikas for Noddy* (1988), Current 93's sound changed dramatically. After Tibet experienced hallucinations of Noddy crucified in the sky above London, Noddy came to represent, in Current 93's work, a gnostic icon of the lost innocence of childhood. He became the deity of a 'puppet theology'. The shift from dark, hellish, noisy soundscapes to a folk ambiance has been explained by Tibet as follows:

I needed to return to what moved me, which was nursery rhymes and folk music. Not folk rock, just really simple unadorned melodies, maybe no choruses, just direct, a minute or two long. So *Swastikas for Noddy* marked my decision to rethink the way that I expressed the emotions that I felt about the things that were moving me (quoted in Keenan 1997).

Loss of a state of happiness is a pervasive feature of apocalyptic narratives, and apocalypses configure a judgment that recuperates a lost cosmic balance between creator and created, and between the creatures themselves—a return to a prelapsarian state of innocence (e.g. Isa. 11.6-10). Likewise for Tibet, apocalypse and prelapsarian states are connected (Tibet, pers. comm. 2010): 'we carry within us a belief in redemption, that we can redeem ourselves somehow, and I think, harking back to the innocence of childhood, there's one way that we start to do that . . . We paint the past in a way that appeals to our sense of recovering the paradise that we've lost' (quoted in Keenan 1997).

In this context, 'Noddy was the total epitome of innocent childhood' (quoted in Keenan 2003: 151).

It may be asked, of course, how serious Tibet's Noddy discourse was. Current 93's output suggests a certain ambiguity. Tibet's engagement with religion has always been serious. Similarly, there has been no attempt to hide the influence of drugs, belief in supernatural entities, and the inspiration of hallucinations. Again, there have been many occasions when members of Current 93 have made it clear that dark humour is an integral part of their creative process. Neither the visible and audible presence of Noddy as a deity (among others, like Christ and Odin) nor the issuing of a compilation entitled *Looney Runes* (1990) has made their audience take them less seriously or, indeed, less devoutly. Current 93's fans have taken the project as a serious artistic endeavour and a sustained and sincere spiritual exploration. Hence, far from leading to ridicule, *Swastikas for Noddy* became the catalyst for Current 93's commercial success.

More importantly for this chapter, the figure of Noddy indicates something crucial in the development of Current 93's apocalypticism. Indeed, it enacts the typical apocalyptic emphasis on temporal transcendence, which suggests that the present has lost its meaning, resulting in a sense of alienation (Collins 1979: 11). The apocalyptic is, then, not just an eschatological preoccupation with future outcomes but a projection—onto past and future—of meanings 'lost' in the present. The alternative realities of a New Jerusalem and a Garden of Eden (asymptotically situated at temporal extremes) impose meaning on the present from beyond and morally justify—or exculpate—alienation. This makes the apocalyptic a powerful resource for appropriation by established powers and by those who challenge them (see Lincoln 2000). The alienation of the believer becomes the fault of the corrupted world, rather than being the believer's fault (or that of the believer's community). Cultural subversion, popular revolt, imperialistic projects, can all thus be justified by the purity of the past and the need to clear the path towards a purified future. Noise, as barrier or statement, is no longer required, since both a before (Eden) and a beyond (New Jerusalem) are superior, more truthful (and in that sense more real) than the present.

The alienated can thus become the chosen. Hence, alientated British youths in the 1980s who awoke from the nihilism of punk to the economic and political reality of Thatcherism, found in such music, an identity and, essentially, a hope. Lawrence Grossberg has stated that 'viable images of opposition and protest have virtually disappeared, but when present they are often defined by investment in issues of identity and victimage' (2002: 44). It is significant that Tibet chose to leave noise behind: 'industrial just means really abrasive noises, violent, unpleasant sounds that are meant to sound like machines' (Tibet in Kelly 2006). He chose not to identify himself with aliena-

tion: 'if people are alienated then they must want to belong to the thing in the first place' (quoted in Keenan 2003: 168).[5]

By appropriating the sounds, styles and themes that have historically harked back to a georgic golden age, to an uncorrupted bucolic time, Current 93 successfully juxtaposes two seemingly contradictory elements: future-oriented contemporary urban cultural struggles, and past-reviving historical rural idyll. The oppressed are no longer the alienated needing to resist cultural oppression through noise but the bards of other realities. Noise as a breach opener becomes irrelevant. Alterity is already extant. Notwithstanding the shift from Current 93's early intense and distressing soundscapes, conspicuous on *Nature Unveiled*, to the beautiful string arrangements of *Swastikas for Noddy*, the underlying themes changed little. The apocalypse was still central to Current 93's music. Tibet would later state that his interest in the apocalypse never changed, but 'the nature of its expression has changed. Tracks like "Maldoror Is Dead" and "The Mystical Body of Christ in Chorazim" aren't very different from what I am doing now in terms of intensity, aesthetic and vision' (quoted in Keenan 2003: 115). So, however humorous or hallucinatory, Current 93's 'puppet theology' can indeed be taken seriously as an integral part of the most successful creative vein of Tibet's Current 93. Moreover, although their iconoclasm became far more resonant once it was immersed in English folk tradition, it was still mapping out an alternative reality (Keenan 2003: 167), after industrial music had suggested the possibility. Its uniqueness was in bringing together contemporary unveilings of other possible worlds and age-old narratives of returning to an Edenic past. *Swastikas for Noddy* opens with an a cappella 'Benediction':

> Now cursed be thee
> Who would ruin our fair land . . .
>
> And cursed be thee
> That abandon the god's hands . . .
>
> That have blackened the harvest
> And closed the old ways
> To the joy and the light

Current 93's work is, then, about belonging to an alternative reality, one that can be musically sought or expressed in gentler tunes. Their message is founded on these alternative future and past realities. The present is commented on indirectly (if not directly judged), by a rooting of their discourse in the temporal alterities of a more authentic past and a truer future.

5. It is noteworthy that Simon Frith sees folk music as 'an idealised response to the experience of mass consumption (fragmented, passive, alienating)' (Frith 2007: 32).

True Fictions

Popular music studies, as well as cultural studies more generally, have for decades grappled with the recurring matter of authenticities and the myth of authenticities. Tia DeNora and Simon Frith (among others) have helped the discussion move from authenticity as myth to the production of authenticity. Studies of apocalypticism have something to afford to those developments. In the West—and markedly in Britain, at least since the Reformation—the apocalypse has been mobilized to create, develop, reinforce and enshrine traditions and cultural roots (chiefly religious identity and political allegiance). These mobilizations of narratives might be arbitrary or contrived at first, but their propagation over time, over generations, makes them into real roots. Early modern apocalypticists (such as John Dee, John Napier and James I) used a diverse array of sources (sometimes disparate, if not incoherent) to sustain their calculations, declarations, expectations and admonitions. These sources were mobilized in a variety of ways, sometimes factually or literally, sometimes metaphorically or allegorically, sometimes necessitating exegetical or numerological decoding. Regardless of the actual usage, declaring England to be the seat of the 'true church' (and Rome the seat of the Antichrist) was sustained more by the resonance of the sources adduced than by their historical or religious integrity or the accuracy of their translation. The commonly held belief that Constantine I was of English origin, for example, recreated the past in order to redefine the present and to influence future action.

Equivalent processes occur in many, if not all, current apocalyptic pronunciations, including those of Current 93. 'I am aware that we romanticise the past and that's fine. Maybe having romanticised it, *it becomes true*. We have created it in our own image, we've made it what we want it to be' (Tibet quoted in Keenan 1997; emphasis added). Allegory, according to John Law, crafts new realities. It does not merely suggest them; it creates them, even if 'the realities made manifest do not necessarily have to fit together' (2004: 90). So, a crucified Noddy in a 'Final Church of the Noddy Apocalypse' (lyrics on 'Final Church' from *Swastikas for Noddy*)[6] is not an insoluble paradox, or an absurd contradiction. It is, in line with the apocalyptic tradition, an innovative juxtaposition of diverse elements that is meaningful to audiences because its elements already hold cultural currency. Culturally ascribed value gives it the power to travel, to be transmitted, to be recognized in mediation. The wider the circulation the more it becomes part of the cultural background and language shared by a generation, the more it sets into a past in the making.

6. Also featuring prominently in the comic book accompanying the CD, *The Apocalyptic Folk in The Nodding God Unveiled* (1993), credited not to Current 93 but to The Nodding Folk.

The past, as Tibet says, is produced, it becomes true. More precisely, it is made true. The authentic is always made, never found.[7] Practices craft realities, and realities produce statements (Law 2004).[8] Religious rituals, as practices, have been particularly effective at making realities and inscribing absolute authenticity into them. In the case of music, the power of crafted realities is most apparent in its organizing of our sense of time, with 'songs and tunes often the key to our remembrance of things past' (Frith 2007: 266). In religion, as in music, those realities become precarious if the rituals do not enact them repeatedly. Their production needs to be continued. No reality has an existence independent of the practice that sustains it. As long as the perceived realities (e.g. Eden, New Jerusalem) are seen as producing the statements themselves, the messenger, the prophet, the priest, the artist can be a mere transmission vehicle, a transparent filter ('and He sent and signified [it] by his angel unto his servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw' (Rev. 1.1-2). Tibet has spoken of his artistic practice as 'channeling' (Tibet, pers. comm. 2010).

Agency is thus displaced from the person or device enacting the reality (i.e. making a new past authentically old) to the object itself, allowing it to make statements about the future, untouched and untainted by the fallen human soul. The ontological anteriority ascribed to the produced authenticity veils its continued production (in practices and their rituals) and grants it the stability required for propagation without excessive deterioration. The making, the telling and the re-telling become describing. As Ninian Smart says, 'traditions are handed down, but also interpreted and projected back. Provided you can suppose that what is handed down is forgotten you can shape it as you please' (1999: 86). Or, if not forgotten, possibly replaced or recast, and therefore mutated or partially forgotten. In this sense, music is an

7. In the Third Reich, composers had to 'turn away from "cerebral constructivism" and re-assert their belief in the elemental power of folk-song' (Levi 1994: 12), a trend also apparent during the Soviet regime. Grounding cultural, political and ethnic identity in newly formed (or re-formed) 'old' traditions has used folk song—and particularly the acoustic guitar—as a 'technique of authenticity' (Moore 2001). Simon Frith notes the transformation of vague ethnic affiliations into ethnic identities through shared myths and memories that are articulated through folk music (Frith 2000: 316-17). Georgina Born calls it 'the desire to reinvigorate the present by reference to principles of earlier musics', noting how 'Kodály, Stravinsky, Falla, and Vaughan Williams turned to the folk musics that were increasingly available from ethnographic studies and archives as influences on their distinctive nationalist modernisms' (2000a: 13).

8. The folk tradition in which Current 93 is grounded was itself once created, 'reflecting not existing musical practices but a nostalgia for how they might have been' (Frith 2007: 32), a pattern Frith identifies in many political cultures of the world. Philip Bohlman has investigated how, in Peru, folklore is invented as form of anti-modernity resistance (Bohlman 1997).

especially powerful cultural medium, since '[t]he past, musically conjured, is a resource for the reflexive movement from present to future, the moment-to-moment production of agency in real time' (DeNora 2000: 66). Through music's inherent temporality and its reflexive generative relation to pasts and futures, Current 93 makes new pasts old (and real), anchoring them in pre-existing traditions, recasting and 'reinventing traditions' (Smart 1999: 86).

In religious eschatological narratives, the prophet or seer, as mediator, imposes no entropy on the message and generates no excrescence. In art, however, creativity is inherent in the narratives, allegories and metaphors, so that the additions, transformations, fusions, elisions and so on are explicit and *sine qua non* parts of the crafting. 'I have never told the truth, so I can never tell a lie' claims Tom Waits.[9] I am, therefore, arguing here neither for an interpretation of Current 93's work as prophetic, nor for its coherence with any theological position on the parousia, or as indexable to any categorization of the apocalypse as a literary genre (see Collins 1979; also Robinson 2000). It hardly even qualifies as an apocalyptic narrative. It is a continued spiritual exploration through narratives, a search for coherence more than a coherent narrative. In the musical expression (and its continued international success) of the lived experiences of an obsession with the end of the world lies great wealth for those interested in the analysis of apocalyptic culture, be it from a phenomenological perspective or from the perspective of the analysis of everyday practices.

There are clear traces linking Current 93's music with historic apocalyptic preoccupations, mostly the utopian and dystopian ideals of England, its past, its character, its promises. To David Keenan, this could be Tibet's main creative pulse, articulated in *Swastikas for Noddy*, in *Earth Covers Earth* (1988), and in *Of Ruine and Some Blazing Starre* (1994), yet having 'less to do with England itself, and more to do with a Blakean construct, part new Jerusalem and part unattainable paradise of childhood' (Keenan 2003: 15). Contrary to Keenan's view that such a pulse is 'sometimes buried in an album dense with disparate imagery' (2003: 168), I would propose, in light of the above, that the disparate imagery is indissociable from the pulse. The pulse could not be the same, or as successful, if it did not juxtapose disparate elements. Coherence is, therefore, a misplaced criterion for artistic evaluation or for measuring cultural impact.

Tea and Toast and Apocalypse

The contrast between Current 93's apocalypticism and the use of the 'apocalyptic folk' designation was part of David Tibet's decision to abandon it.

9. 'Whistlin' Past the Graveyard', from *Blue Valentine* (1978).

'"Apocalyptic folk" was a phrase I coined which had several layers to it, and not all of them were serious, and one was self-mocking' (Tibet, pers. comm. 2010). In stating that he didn't like folk music, he meant 'folk' as a group of people: 'it stuck, and now it seems to cover a lot of doomy folk' (quoted in Kelly 2006).

Current 93 has defied and avoided labels since, and today does not play music that could be called 'folk'. However, the apocalypse is still its most recognizable thematic focus. As Current 93 moved away, in the mid to late 1980s, from 'the loop atmospheric thing and moving to a simpler form', the focus was not so much on folk music itself as on its aesthetic, 'the *simplicity and purity* of narration', and the emotions: 'jealousy, betrayal, murder, lust, searching for God' (Tibet quoted in Barnes 2001; emphasis added). These personal and spiritual dimensions of the apocalypse are the core of Current 93's work. We are all (in) this fight between good and evil, and apocalypses happen everyday, in choices, in terrible events, regardless of (but not unrelated to) a final, total and decisive event (Tibet, pers. comm. 2010).

It was in Shirley Collins that Current 93 found the ultimate expression of that 'simplicity and purity': 'She just sounded like somebody's heart singing without coming through their mouth' (Tibet in Keenan 2003: 170), even though she was 'not even using her own words, using words that had been sung by 100,000 people' (quoted in Keenan 1997). Here, a voice—as if unmediated even by its own body—is the most authentic of sounds: no worldly filter, no translation to the language of fallen humans, just the purest, most authentic enactment of the voice of many. 'The category above Shirley is Jesus' (quoted in Keenan 2003: 170). A pure voice linking innocence and purity with the end, since our humanity is inseparable from suffering, melancholy and endings:

> For me, folk music was all about endings and the effect that endings have on our lives. It would be easy to overstate the point and say yes, folk music is the 'working man's apocalypse', or whatever. It's not the case at all, of course, but there was that incredible sense of beautiful melancholy. So moving and so pure, so honest and so human. That's what I really wanted to express with Current, the importance of our humanity. If we don't have our humanity then we've got nothing, it's all that we have and yet, in that, terrible things happen. And folk expresses that and also a way of coming to terms with that, and seeing beyond it, going on: life continues (quoted in Keenan 1997).

The allegories and metaphors and tropes of crucified cartoons, or the impending arrival of reaping time, of 'The Descent of Long Satan and Babylon' (from *Thunder Perfect Mind* [1992]), express concerns through (but beyond) linguistic and musical styles. This apocalypticism is not a plan for the individual as part of a greater ideal, or a culture, ethnic group or a nation, but apocalypticism as the lifelong 'game between the individual and the mystery

of existence', the simultaneity of fatality, evil, love, absurdity and frailty that permeate our existence (Tibet, pers. comm. 2010). Endings are a matter of daily existence and not solely a future cataclysm. We live knowing that the foundations of our existence are as beautiful as they are precarious. And so the concept of falling returns time and again to the lyrics of Current 93, both as the world falling and as personal Fall. In 'Rome (For Douglas P)' (from *Earth Covers Earth*), he recuperates the Venerable Bede's words '*quando cadet Roma, cadet et mundus*':

> We wandered through the rubble
> In the last breaths of morning
> In the empty cathedrals
> In a world that has ceased
>
> And when Rome falls
> Falls the world
>
> And then make me feel
> That the world shall turn
> When broken is the faith
> That kept us alive
> And where shall I go?
> And if I do will I stumble?
> Will anyone catch me
> When I fall as I must?

As Current 93's apocalypticism evolved and became more refined in its focus on the precariousness of the personal spiritual path, it distanced itself from basic pronunciations. A compilation entitled *SixSixSix: SickSickSick* (2004) is a long way from their early pronunciations of 'Pope: Antichrist! Government: Antichrist!' (from *Nature Unveiled*). Current 93 felt they could no longer be identified with a diluted designation ('apocalyptic folk') that amounted to little more than misrepresentation. Their interests had always been far more complex than what 'apocalyptic folk' had become, especially as the genre banded Current 93 with groups using apocalyptic tropes mostly for their aesthetic appeal, some of them in rather formulaic ways.[10] The 1987 EP *Crowleymass*, a disco tribute to Crowley and 'a piss-take of Crowley and Crowley worshippers', became something other than the original idea intended. It was taken seriously by many (Tibet quoted in Barnes 2001), as 'apocalyptic folk' had been.

10. An interesting matter in itself but beyond the scope of the present study. Death in June is an example of the aesthetic (and political), and Ordo Rosarius Equilibrio an example of the formulaic renditions of apocalyptic folk.

The complexity of Current 93's apocalypticism kaleidoscopically refracts miriad influences, from Jacobus de Voragine, the Eddas, to Grimm Brothers; from runes and Klaus Nomi to Love's *Forever Changes* album and Buddhist chants; from Yes to anthropological studies of menstruation, Louis Wain, Noddy, the Nag Hammadi, Francis Yockey, Diamanda Galas, nursery rhymes, Russell Hoban—the list is long. The way influences such as these flow into Current 93's work is to some extent unfathomable, yet there are indications of the depth of serious creative engagement with them:

> [M]y interest in the life and the passion of Christ was becoming very strong and I saw in menstruating women some bizarre re-enactment of the passion of Christ. It was a letting of blood for us because without the letting of blood there would be no birth (Tibet quoted in Keenan 2003: 138).

Current 93's intellectual, emotional and spiritual involvement with the supernatural, the divine (and its creative/destructive relation to the human and the world) is, at once, reflexive, hallucinatory, associative and also lived, experiential. 'I believe absolutely in the intrinsic existence of Satan and demons and just as often as people like to party with them, they like to party with us' (Tibet quoted in Keenan 2003: 155). The artistic involvement with apocalypticism has shifted progressively to include more scholarly depth and theological import. Current 93's most successful album, *Thunder Perfect Mind*, draws heavily on the Nag Hammadi texts, in particular 'The Thunder, Perfect Mind', in Codex VI: one always has to 'go into the discarded and the hidden to find it, hence my attraction to apocalyptic and apocryphal literature from when I was a child' (quoted in Keenan 2003: 147). This has brought him, recently, to the study of the Greek and Coptic languages. The title of his 1988 album *Christ and the Pale Queens Mighty in Sorrow* is 'derived from the Enochian research group *Aurum Solis*' (Keenan 2003: 174) and 'the idea of sorrowful mysteries is absolutely the point. They're passing sorrows and are actually the key to a greater joy' (Tibet quoted in Keenan 2003: 174). The apocalypse is, then, a joyous outcome, for the believer and for the divine. In the song 'Patripassian' (from *All the Pretty Little Horses* [1996]) Nick Cave sings Pascal's *Pensées*:

> The rivers of Babylon flow,
> and fall, and carry away . . .
> Jesus is alone on earth,
> not merely with no one to feel
> and share His agony,
> but with no one even to know of it.
> Heaven and He are the only ones to know.
>
> Jesus is in a garden, not of delight,
> like the first Adam,
> who there fell and took with him all mankind,

> but of agony,
> where He has saved Himself and all mankind
>
> He suffers this anguish and abandonment in the horror of the night
>
> Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world. There must be no resting in the meantime . . .

On *Thunder Perfect Mind*, 'The Descent of Long Satan and Babylon' expresses similar ideas through the tale of two emissaries of Satan, with closer reference to the biblical text and Christ's suffering until the end of time. On *Black Ships Ate the Sky* (2006), Current 93 gives musical expression to Tibet's vision of 'the end' brought about by black ships that progressively turn the sky black, a vision Tibet believes will be fulfilled—maybe literally, maybe not (Tibet, pers. comm. 2010).

Speaking of the function of metaphor in the context of apocalyptic rhetoric, Stephen O'Leary calls attention to Paul Ricoeur's view of myth as performing an ordering function through its cosmological import (1994: 21). In Current 93's work (*Black Ships Ate the Sky* serves as a good example), music plays a role in the ordering of the dynamic relation of the individual with the complexities of spiritual paths, in their multiplicity and intersections, their relation to autobiography, suffering, visions and hallucinations. Music is a device of social ordering (DeNora 2000) and of temporal and worldview ordering, on the largest scale. Lived experience is thus linked with what Walter Benjamin has called 'origin as goal'. The autobiographic comes through, revealing the aesthetic dimension of human agency (DeNora 2000), and the most important human questions in trivial affairs: '"toast and tea and judgment . . . What always struck me about the world is the great mystery that surrounds us in the middle of absolute banality" . . . The profound is intermingled and interwoven with the banal constantly' (Tibet quoted in Kelly 2006).

Fractal Apocalypse

Apocalyptic folk (at least in its original Current 93 sense) reveals itself as a kaleidoscopic confluence of the historical in the personal, the eschatological battle in the personal decision, the total meaning in the hallucinatory dream, *The Great in the Small* (the title of Current 93's 2001 release). 'I think we are all judged by God . . . Mortality and judgement, for me they are two things that human beings should constantly consider' (Tibet quoted in Barnes 2001). This constant presence in Current 93's music, and the increasing level of personal spiritual expression in it, support Grossberg's emphasis on the need to study music in relation to 'other forms and practices of popular culture or from the structures and practices of everyday life' (2002: 27).

Kaleidoscopic confluences fractally reflect their surroundings, like a monad of infinitesimal complexity (see Law 2003; also Kwa 2002) whose coherence emerges from its own reflection of its environment and not from any of the many forms of extraneous coherence (scientific, moral, theological, political). The main creative pulse is not in spite of the disparate imagery (in which Keenan finds it 'buried') but is indissociable from it, *interwoven*. 'Analysis shows that a relation (always social) determines its terms, and not the reverse, and that each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relational determinations interact' (Certeau 1984: xi). The apocalypse can be found in the banalities of life. This confirms the (apocalyptic) object of study as always relational, and only existing as an enacted relation of the myriad elements that form its environment. Its ontological coherence results from its very kaleidoscopic representation of the world. There is no apocalypticism more potent than that which—drawing on an array of cultural resources in a novel way—resonates with audiences and their lived experience. To seek in the object of knowledge a clear, defined, recognizable representation of its environment—especially when the object is an artistic body of work—is to project expectations, or categories, or typologies, onto the object. The object's complexity always exceeds our ability to know it. This is a social sciences methodological matter, also made explicit by Tibet:

> The whole nature of the world is suffused in mystery and unknowability, and I think to me, that is really beautiful, sometimes it's really terrifying, but it does make everything incredibly special, that we're surrounded by mystery upon mystery and yet we say that we know someone else or we know something, but it's all . . . everything is wearing a mask and we ourselves are wearing an infinity of masks one after the other (quoted in Kelly 2006).

Analyzing an infinity of masks—or artistic expressions of masks that tend towards infinity—is much better achieved by taking analysis as a relational activity in which there is no one point of perfect perspective (Walser 2003; see also Korsyn 1999). Since Julia Kristeva, it is accepted that 'any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations', and the musical text that occupies us here is a kaleidoscopic mosaic of quotations as 'building material of self-identity' (DeNora 2000: 62), configuring an ordering device at several intersecting levels (biographical, social, mythological, ritual), with the ultimate objective of navigating the unknowability of the world. Music, 'a device for the generation of future identity and action structures, a mediator of future existence' (DeNora 2000: 63), is especially apt at dealing with personal engagement with endings, or the End. '[T]he reflexive aesthetic process enhances ontological security' (DeNora 2000: 69) in the face of the essential mysterious nature of human existence, in what could be seen as 'the coexistence in the music self of contradictory states and multiple subject positions' (Born 2000b: 38). Accepting the contradictory or multiple states of subject positions might be a

way beyond expecting a coherent object. However, fractional objects, in their kaleidoscopic reflections of their world, seem a much more fruitful analytical approach than the contradiction/coherence dualism.

Indeed, if DeNora is correct in her thesis that the temporality of music informs experience and identity (social and biographical) (2000: 66-67), then music is a privileged location for expression of the apocalyptic. One should not ask if apocalyptic folk is contradictory (in its fusion of cartoons, the apocalypse, menstruation, Ecclesiastes, cats, nursery rhymes and many other elements of which we have only mentioned a few), but rather one should enquire as to how to investigate the complex correlations (and co-causations) between its multidimensionality and the multidimensionality of audience's everyday lived experiences. No apocalyptic narrative is successful without integrability into lived experience, and no lived experience is unidimensional or coherent. Concepts such as contradiction, isomorphic representation, hybridity, and tools such as typologies and matrices serve mostly to grasp a slippery object and to determine it in the process, dulling the complex glare of its kaleidoscopic nature.[11] The expectation of isomorphic (if not reverberating) relation to the world has been discarded in music sociology, but the belief that there is a homology between music and the world, or between music and the social and cultural context, has not disappeared. It still determines, sometimes and to some extent, the analytical expectation of coherence, or even the projection of coherence onto the object of study. The results of such an approach are, inevitably, arbitrary representations that do not account for their own epistemological assumptions.

Reclaim the Threat

Apocalyptic music and its audiences appropriate strategies and rituals that produce and sustain authenticities and make them their own. They thus generate statements about ownership of narratives, about what is authentic, about who owns and carries the myths that (in)form our imaginations and cultures and stories (see Bohlman 1997). If both pasts and futures are created, then no one has exclusive ownership of the narratives. The use, re-use, mutations and additions to apocalyptic narratives situate artistic projects like Current 93 in the negotiating arena of narrative ownership and meaning making, retrospective and prospective. The role of music in negotiating cultural supremacy is an old one. Christian hymns were, and are, an important tool in erasing, adapting, claiming and overriding aboriginal foundational narratives. Colonial sites, like all sites of musical interpretation and perform-

11. Hybridity is an appealing concept, but one that suggests starting points from which the hybrids evolve. All orgins are fluid; there are no static starting points. Hybrids evolve from hybrids and so everything is a hybrid: the concept empties itself.

ance, were sites of active negotiation, not mere repetition. Attali notes that music is a form of myth with order as the fundamental function, operating as a simulacrum ritual sacrifice, idealizing society by affirming that ritual rules are possible. 'Without a doubt, music is a strategy running parallel to religion' (2006: 30). The extreme nature of industrial music tries to avoid what Attali calls the normalization and repression by dominant codes (2006: 33). But even if normalization fails, neutralization through time might succeed, if the meaning of new noises does not carry with it sufficient resonance to invade and infect and disrupt the existing order. That has been the case with industrial music.

Some Throbbing Gristle merchandise marketed by Mute Records (a label famous for its industrial music re/releases) carried the slogan 'Reclaim the Threat'. Throbbing Gristle was considered a threat, even considering it an honour to be called the 'wreckers of civilisation' by Conservative MP Nicholas Fairbairn. That eponym of cataclysmic threat no longer belongs to music, however. Today, the space of cultural threat has been fiercely colonized politically by narratives of terrorism, of invisible enemies who profess a religion of evil. If 'subversion in musical production opposes a new syntax to the existing syntax, from the point of view of which it is noise' (Attali 2006: 34), industrial music's extreme sonic language makes it inaccesible to most; its threats are in a language most people discard as meaningless. There has to be a minimum amount of intersection between the syntax of subversive threat and that of the established language[12] for the subversion to work. Now, if the threat is understandable *and* also sounds pleasing, like an invitation, then it is much more likely to be successful.

Music has, over the last 50 years, had an important role in social change. In the face of terrorism and ecological catastrophism, music's refreshing challenges to the status quo still exist but get very little attention and very little cultural traction. As John Armitage says in his introduction to Paul Virilio's *Art and Fear,* 'contemporary artists should reclaim the evacuated space of the art of representation, the space of symbolic yet crucially sympathetic images of violence' (2006: 4). What forms of artistic intervention are today possible, in terms of social change? The apocalypse has always been a powerful tool for either social change or social conservatism. How can it, today, reclaim the threat in a positive way and resonate with audiences? Is Current 93 an apocalyptic invitation, one that successfully mutates old tropes to appeal to current audiences? Their work articulates the apocalypse as a return to lost innocence, in a syntax that is understandable by wider contemporary audiences accustomed to end-of-the-world scenarios and postmodern mashing-up

12. Or, as Michel Serres puts it, 'Turbulence is a median state between a slightly redundant order and pure chaos. It is a state of birth, a state of nature, in a temporary state. It is also a death threat' (1995: 121).

of narratives. Musical apocalypses create visions of endings, of liminal states that wider audiences can not only recognize but also be attracted to (nursery rhymes, rural idyll, well-established folk myths). Folk musical traditions have been widely created and used as an instrument of identification, an invitation to 'belong'; an affirmation of authentic belonging (Frith 2007). Current 93's apocalypticism offers audiences a serendipitous search for lost meaning, discarding the celebration of violence of industrial music's most successful acts and dismissing other 'apocalyptic folk' acts' infatuation with extreme politics, holocausts, murdering and torture.

Simon Reynolds argues that 'the whole discourse of noise-as-threat is bankrupt, positively inimical to the remnants of power that still cling to noise. Forget subversion. The point is self-subversion, overthrowing the power structure in your own head. The enemy is the mind's tendency to systematize, sew up experience' (2009: 57). And Philip Bohlman, while noting that the contestation at the intersection of music and religion takes place 'between everyday religious practices, performed through song and bodily practices that themselves constitute the cultures of contested sites' (1997: 83), asks how the interaction of musical and religious practice enables the individual to reclaim music and religion? (1997: 84). Speaking to Jennifer Kelly about music, meaning, life and death, sin and salvation, Tibet made the following point:

> Well, if the answer is on the basis of, have I clarified anything, then I guess it's been a really bad way . . . But if it's do you know any other way, then I would have to say, 'No, it's the only way I know.' It's the best way for me. It just keeps on taking you into yourself and within oneself, just as without oneself, there are plenty of dead paths. We just do the best we can to make sense of the world and make sense of ourselves, and hopefully with some kindness and understanding. Getting to know oneself is very difficult, but it's something that we all have to do. We eventually have to find out what's behind all the masks we've worn (quoted in Kelly 2006).

7. The Number of the Beast: The Adoption of Apocalyptic Imagery in Heavy Metal

Rupert Till

Introduction: What is this that stands before me?

This chapter asks in what ways apocalyptic imagery, characters and other material from the book of Revelation, and more specifically reference to the devil or Satan, are evident in heavy metal occulture. It asks in what way the original meanings of the text have been sustained or altered, and why it is that this is the case. It asks what implications this has for our understanding of how religion and meaning operate in contemporary society, and what this tells us about changing patterns of belief and consciousness in popular culture.

The essay begins by outlining the origins and nature of the devil in Revelation and apocalyptic Christian writing. It discusses the popular conception of a single contemporary character known as the devil, Satan or the Antichrist, and how he fits into apocalypticism, drawing upon Norman Cohn (1995) in particular. It goes on to investigate briefly how the blues became associated with the devil, before moving on to discuss how a popular (oc)cultural conception of the apocalyptic has come to be a key feature of heavy metal. Headbanging, a heavy metal dance form, is then considered alongside the Jungian concept of the shadow. This is followed by a study of the incorporation of the apocalyptic into the work of the band Black Sabbath, who are usually credited as being the inventors of heavy metal. This develops into a more detailed look at the lead singer of the band, Ozzy Osbourne, the implications of his being known as 'the Prince of Darkness', discussing the characters he and other rock stars play in the popular imagination. This paper will focus on the origins of the apocalyptic in heavy metal. Black and death metal acts focus on the satanic themes more specifically, some time after the musical period that this chapter covers. These forms of extreme metal, which developed from heavy metal along with speed and thrash metal, although more overtly linked to apocalypticism, are not discussed here in great depth (see Kahn-Harris, 2007).

Focusing on western European culture, and on the development of heavy metal culture in Britain in particular, this chapter does not claim that apoca-

lypticism and links to subjects such as the demonic or to death are what defines or uniquely explains the genre, but that they are clearly and often present and are an interesting feature that is not inevitably negative. It is acknowledged that metal has various elements of light and optimistic material, but this chapter aims to focus on its dark side, its shadow.

Gerd Bayer (2009a: 2-6) provides a useful survey of scholarly books on the popular music genre of heavy metal, providing a relevant bibliography (pp. 9-13), and Deena Weinstein has provided a useful definition of metal (1991: 22-35). It is an international cultural field with a history of at least 40 years, with innumerable cultural operators and outputs and millions of participants and fans.

Figure in Black That Points at Me: The Apocalyptic Devil

Before we can discuss the devil, we must first look at who he is and where this familiar apocalyptic character comes from. The book of Revelation, often attributed to Jesus' disciple John the apostle but almost certainly not written by him, was probably written about 95 CE (Cohn 1995: 212). It is perhaps the primary apocalyptic text of Western Europe of the last eighteen hundred years. (The dubious nature of this link to Jesus reinforces an implicit criticism by heavy metal of the Christian approach to the apocalypse that will be discussed later.)

Revelation is a typical apocalyptic document. Cohn explains in some detail its position in the history of apocalypticism. Over the years, the narrative it describes has been elaborated and expanded upon, filled with beasts, otherworldly creatures, devils, demons and other unpleasantness (Cohn 1995: 21). Christopher Partridge tells us that 'personifications of evil in the form of demons, devils, spirits and malign entities can be found across the religious and cultural spectrum and for as far back as history takes us' (2005: 207). In traditions other than Christianity, in many cases, 'the lines between the demonic and the angelic, the good and the evil, the benign and the malign, are not easily drawn' (Cohn 1995: 207).

The Hebrew Bible features no single 'devil', or at least no single powerful personification of evil that opposes the work of Yahweh. The serpent is an animal and Satan is an angel. The contemporary Christian devil and associated demons have developed from a complex mix of sources, and it would surprise many Christians to learn that Zoroastrian beliefs, or its later form Zurvanism (Cohn 1995: 222), had a key influence in the apocalyptic tradition. This approach combined with a duality that has roots in Augustine's Manichaean beliefs, resulting in a Western Christian European culture with a simple distinction between good and evil. The Manichaean religion is based on the warring powers of good and bad, light and dark, and Augustine's importation of this dynamic, was reinforced by the revival of his influence

among post-Enlightenment thinkers. (Augustine's background is described in many texts, including Marrou 1957.)

Partridge illustrates this duality: 'Christian demonology . . . which, for the most part, has shaped popular Western demonology, makes a clear distinction between the demonic and the angelic, the forces of light and the forces of darkness' (2005: 207-208). Partridge goes on to explain (2005: 208-16) how figures such as Satan and various demons, existing in a sphere between God and humanity, are drawn together in New Testament apocalyptic thinking as a singular Satan who is synonymous with the devil, and that a stratification of demons and devils exists underneath this primary satanic figure, the Great Beast. Popular culture now portrays the devil as surrounded by demons, often given the hairy legs, horns or hooves of Pan and Dionysus, gods of revelry and fun, and the trident of Poseidon, Neptune or Shiva. Partridge tells us that this description of so-called 'pagan' deities as devils or fallen angels has a specifically Christian apocalyptic source. Indigenous religious figures, along with the darker biblical characters, end up in apocalyptic writing as agents of a personification of evil, trying to corrupt humans and lead them astray. Apocalyptic demons are 'embodiments of danger and destruction' (Cohn 1995: 53), and we will see later how heavy metal creates its own embodiments, surrounded by this archaic imagery. 'Hence, Jewish apocalyptic demonology, which was subsequently developed in the New Testament and systematized in early Christian thought, eventually shaped Western demonology in general' (Partridge 2005: 213).

Apocalypses feature war, fire, demons and also the resurrection of the dead (including the 'living dead', such as in Iron Maiden's 'Eddie', whom we will meet below), and metal reanimates the horny Pagan gods. The apocalypse is about revolution, about the old order, the mainstream being replaced by a new order (Seed 2000: 6; Cohn 1995: 105). Apocalypse, understood as combat myth, is not just about good and evil but, more specifically, about evil versus good, or the fight to define who chooses the good and the bad. In Revelation it is the devil against Christ, and chaos threatening order. Christianity has a particular approach to eschatology, which is what happens at the end of the world, those things relating to the final destiny of humanity. Christianity looks forward to eschatological peace and the overthrow of the forces of chaos. Metal does not; it rather celebrates a transgressive philosophy that rejects a Christian eschatology.

Hellhound on My Trail

This oppositional approach to Christianity is influenced by the blues roots of heavy metal (see Walser 1993: 8–9; Till 2007). 'Blues became the voice of rejection of so-called respectable, but ultimately phoney, church-going society' (Farley 2009: 75). Reed tells us that 'whites thus labelled the blues primitive

and detestable, while conservative, church-going blacks called it "the Devil's Music"' (2003: 39). Associated with 'juke' or 'jook joints', the music was bound up with 'spontaneous forms of interactive, African-derived folk expression' (ibid.: 11), involving deities such as Esu (ibid.: 2) or Legba (ibid.: 96). It was also associated by contemporaries with drug-taking, gambling, drinking and prostitution. Blues and related forms of black secular music were criticised particularly strongly by African American Christian culture, although in fact, many artists were involved in both blues and gospel, and the two influenced each other in various ways. Some blues artists, however, became particularly associated with the demonic.

Robert Johnson, for example, has often been described as having sold his soul to the devil in return for musical skills. This legend may have been circulated in Europe by Son House and others to excite European audiences (Farley 2009: 76). In fact, it was Tommy Johnson who claimed that this had happened to him as recounted by his brother LeDell (Evans 1973: 22). The association with the devil and the transmission of the Robert Johnson story seem to have been later exaggerated in books written about blues such as those by Greil Marcus (1975) or Robert Palmer (1982). Some of the other reasons for Robert Johnson's association with the devil including his cataract (an evil eye), jealousy of his playing skills and links with blues player Zinnerman, who had also courted a dark reputation, are described by Wardlow and Komara (1998). The story was enhanced by being mixed with the European legends of Faust or Dr Faustus, in which the main character sells his soul to the devil in exchange for power and knowledge. All of these different elements were gradually combined into a myth of blues being the devil's music.

> Heavy metal adopted not only the musical virtuosity of British blues but also maintained the occult themes that had been carried over from American blues. The themes and, hence, the music found a ready market with fans feeling dislocated and dispossessed by the social and political upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. Heavy metal, with its rejection of Christian norms, expressed the fears and longings of these people. The new wave of British heavy metal in the 1970s continued this development, with the occult themes becoming more culturally specific (Bayer 2009a: 7).

Metalocalypse

In the apocalypses of traditional cultures, it was only supernatural beings that could destroy the world or cause famines, diseases, fires or floods. Human technology has made it possible for people to cause even greater destruction, and nuclear weapons, selfish individualism, runaway consumption, chemical warfare and ecological disaster are perhaps the apocalyptic demons of today (Seed 2000: 4). It is no surprise, then, that contemporary culture returns again and again to stories of the end of the world.

Popular music forms have some advantages for the creation of apocalyptic myths. As David Seed describes (2000: 4-5), apocalypticism is largely about analogy, the metaphorical and mythological being mixed up with the literal and real. Thus, the real is inevitably problematized in an apocalyptic narrative. Popular music is a mixture of reality and fiction, in which the rock stars are the main characters, real people, but are often presented and marketed using a level of fictionalization. This dramatized narrative allows popular music stars to be given superhuman qualities, to inhabit powerful archetypal narratives. Stars can be presented as idealized characters, engines of destruction, princes of darkness, superheroes or rock gods. Commercial pop stars are often presented as autobiographical, reflecting personal experiences or dramatization of the everyday, describing human emotions or relationships. Metal acts often address more grandiose subject material, related to gods and history, war and horror, or death and apocalyptic destruction. Rather than the personal devastation of the emotional conflict described in numerous pop love songs, metal focuses on world-shaking imagery of war, death and destruction, often associating metal stars with historic figures who epitomize, signify or represent such powerful narratives. 'Heavy metal's reification of power is evident in the way it puts mystical and mythological sources of devastation in the place of human ones' (Bayer 2009a: 8).

An apocalypse presents itself as a revelation of that which was hidden, and since the occult refers specifically to hidden or secretive knowledge, apocalypticism has many links with those things described as part of the occult. Metal also celebrates the secret, the hidden and the fantastical. The fascination that can be seen in heavy metal in a penchant for pentagrams, Wicca, magick, Crowleyana and the like is rooted in a desire to know the forbidden, that which is hidden or taboo, and a related desire to challenge what is seen as Christian hegemony concerning religion and ethics. Partridge has described a pervasive contemporary occulture that both feeds into and is fed by popular culture as well as a range of alternative and paranormal beliefs. Occulture may specifically oppose Christian thought or may sometimes become absorbed within Christian culture. Heavy metal is conspicuously occultural:

> Although hard-core satanic belief may represent a minority of the overall heavy metal subculture, the dissemination of occultural ideas is widespread. While we are not, for the most part dealing with institutional religion here, neither are we dealing with the secular mind. Indeed, even if the world is not literally re-enchanted for some of the artists themselves, dark occulture is helping to re-enchant the world for some of those who listen to their music, particularly when the demonic becomes iconic (Partridge 2005: 255).

Partridge describes this kind of metal as 'dark occulture', a form of occulture that specifically draws on demonological themes. As he tells us, the dark spir-

ituality of heavy metal in the West, like other manifestations of Western dark occulture, usually has Christian roots.

> While formal, institutional Christianity (church attendance etc.) is experiencing erosion, aspects of Christian thought and influence are, in various ways, continuing to permeate and inform contemporary Western religion and culture. That is to say, notions of the demonic other and the iconic rebel, fears and phobias relating to the paranormal and madness, the monsters and aliens of popular imagination, and the overall fascination with 'the dark side', are shaped principally by Christian demonology (2005: 208).

Heavy metal represents a rebellion, the opposition of the young against the control of the mainstream, which is recognized as being shaped by Christian hegemony. Metal embraces chaos, and it adopts what it perceives as the other. Christianity uses the promise of heaven to assuage the fear of death, offers eternal life and demonizes the afterlife of unbelievers. Christian eschatology is based on an escape from pain, death, nothingness, fear and discomfort. As a result, it creates a separation from the everyday and steps away from engagement with the body and the Earth. Metal accepts a human physicality and so death and associates with the underworld and its imagery and culture, although these are largely sourced from Christian iconography. It engages with hardship and difficulty; it embraces both positive and negative elements of human existence. These attitudes affect the worldviews, philosophies and behaviours of both groups, one promoting a disengagement, rejection or repression of the dark side of the human character, the other promoting a connection with and an understanding of these concepts.

Members of metal scenes participate through the acquisition of what Keith Kahn-Harris calls 'transgressive cultural capital' (2007: 127-29). This includes elements such as body-piercings, tattoos, distinctive makeup (such as corpse paint), long hair, extramarital sexual activity, drug taking and a comprehensive knowledge of metal musical styles and artists, all of which are perceived as being alien to mainstream tastes. The use of images related to the devil is perhaps the most powerful and immediate method of achieving such transgressive cultural capital.

> [Heavy metal] mediates social tensions working to provide its fans with a sense of spiritual depth and social integration . . . The rebellious or transgressive aspects of heavy metal, its exploration of the dark side of social life, also reflect its engagement with the pressures of a historical moment . . . Heavy metal's fascination with the dark side of life gives evidence of both dissatisfaction with dominant identities and institutions and an intense yearning for reconciliation with something more credible (Kahn-Harris 2007: xvi-xvii).

Kahn-Harris is here describing extreme metal (2007: 29), but this process of acquisition of transgressive cultural capital can be seen in heavy metal

generally, and also to some extent throughout the history of postwar African American-influenced pop music.

Heavy metal courts death and associates with representations of death. As Kahn-Harris tells us, 'the inescapable *telos* of the most transgressive practices is in the oblivion of death' (2007: 49). Metal purposely explores nothingness, oblivion, and the notion that one can 'escape from thought' or 'get out of your head', as will be discussed later in relation to headbanging. Associating itself with the devil, a signifier of death, heavy metal opposes the Christian God, presented by Christians as providing eternal heavenly life. Heavy metal fans do not want to die—and in most cases do not want to kill. They do, however, want to explore death as a concept and an inevitable conclusion

Kahn-Harris describes the increasing transgression at the heart of extreme metal. He describes how transgression of the boundaries of binary opposites, such as good–evil or moral–immoral is at the heart of the power of metal. Metal engages with the 'wrong' side of these boundaries and so explores and erodes such boundaries. The dualism required for such binaries to operate has its roots, at least within 'Christian occultures', in the kind of binaries exemplified in apocalyptic writing, and so it makes sense that it is these writings that are iconographically drawn upon within metal. Discussing black metal, Helen Farley observes that

> most bands and their fans are neither Satanist not neo-facist. The symbolism, extreme lyrics and diabolical imagery are intended to shock and as such are a protest against the pervasiveness of societal norms . . . One of the appeals of this music is that it is inaccessible to adult society . . . Satanic references within the lyrics only signify a form of subversion (2009: 83-84).

Christian apocalypse is balanced by heavenly perfection afterwards. Heavy metal is presented as secular and does not believe in a future utopia brought about by some second advent. Consequently, metal remains in the time frame of purgatory and the end-time. Heavy metal has no afterwards; it is focused on and frozen in the now, the moment, and thus the body rather than the mind. Metal presents no solution, predicts no imminent or immanent happy ending. It situates itself in what Christianity presents as hell on hearth, the earthly existence with its trials and tribulations. This iconographic freeze-frame is a dystopian narrative in that it 'never entirely precludes the possibility of hope, and thus maintains at least a modicum of progressive potential—serving as a warning, not a death sentence' (Taylor 2009: 90). The dystopian history presented by metal serves as a warning for the future, rather than the apocalyptic end of the world. Dystopia is a secular contemporary adaptation that has evolved from apocalypticism. It presents a warning about an apocalyptic disaster, without an alternative positive conclusion for its narrative. It does not encourage a separation from day-to-day existence except for an embracement with the void in the momentary oblivion of musical or substance-induced self-loss.

It is beyond the scope of this discussion to discuss postmodern, high modern, liquid, post-historical or post-Enlightenment theories. It will suffice to say that many writers have discussed that in contemporary culture, which is sometimes described as postmodernity to differentiate it from what comes before, paths and narratives often take more complex trajectories, rather than a simple, direct route. In postmodernity, time similarly no longer simply progresses eternally onwards in one direction from age to age. 'The End of the Age will dawn in the discovery, the deep acknowledgement, that there are now no Ages, that things are forever' (S.R.L. Clark 2000: 41). The idea of an ending is no longer necessary. With no utopian ending, culture exists in the forever, as well as remaining in the cataclysmic, in the world of pain. The sustained battle between chaos and order becomes eternal.

I'll Cast a Shadow: Jung and Headbanging

As we have seen, metal addresses the bodily and embraces the void, seeking an escape from the usual passage of time. This is epitomized in a principal heavy metal dance form, headbanging. This is the rhythmic, often violent and exaggerated moving of the head backwards and forwards in time to the music. Although at a surface level this is merely a way of making the long hair prevalent among metal fans, it also operates at a deeper level. The head is not merely moved backwards and forwards, it is moved gradually at first and then thrown forward vigorously on each beat, as if hitting an invisible surface a little way in front of the face as hard as possible with one's forehead. Why is it that heavy metal fans do this? Such rhythmic head movements are common in many trance practices. They act to still thought, to stop the head from being a place of rationality and to make the head a physical object, forcing it to behave as a part of the body instead of the body's ruler. Headbanging forcibly entrains the brain to music, making the head and the brain move rhythmically, synchronizing them, integrating them into music. As Gilbert Rouget puts it,

> To dance is to inscribe music in space, and this inscription is realized by means of a constant modification of the relations between the various parts of the body. The dancer's awareness of his body is totally transformed by this process. Insofar as it is a spur to dancing, therefore, music does appear to be capable of profoundly modifying the relation of the self with itself, or, in other words, the structure of consciousness. Psychologically music also modifies the experience of being, in space and time simultaneously (1985: 121).

We have seen that the apocalyptic is often about the end or suspension of time. Music exists in different time frame to daily life, in *kairos* rather than *chronos,* time that has quality, that is a moment, that is static, rather than being like an ever-rolling stream. As within the apocalyptic, time can stand still in the moment in which one is lost in music.

By headbanging, the metal fan, like a cult member, becomes a part of the music, in synchrony with other headbangers. The dominance of the head over the body is disrupted, transforming the relations of the self and body, the structure of consciousness. The repeated impulses in the head help to overload the input systems of the brain—headbanging usually occurs with the eyes closed and is accompanied by music played very loudly. The entire body becomes dominated by the aural, by sound. The brain, the visual and the rational are associated with the conscious mind and the ego. Headbanging allows the emergence of the body, the aural and the instinctive, which are more readily associated with the subconscious and the id.

However, as indicated above, there is also a social dimension to headbanging, a cult of headbangers, so to speak. For example, in *Jung on the Dance Floor: The Phenomenology of Dancing and Clubbing*, Beate Peter (2009) suggests that a group of clubbers dancing at an EDMC (Electronic Dance Music Culture) or rave event are plugging in to the collective unconscious and participating in a form of group therapy, dissolving their differences and experimenting with a ritualized form of self-loss. Just as clubbers participate in such a collective trance experience, headbangers are participating in a similar practice, and in doing so connect to the warnings that emerge from the collective unconscious, enmeshed in the apocalyptic references with which metal occulture is littered. It is in the collective unconscious, the human subconscious, the id or the instinct, that we connect with archetypal images, and that we store or access a range of influences and conditioning that we pick up culturally or unknowingly. These agencies can have a powerful effect on our behaviour without our knowing it.

In the midst of a loud, aggressive, visceral metal communal headbanging experience is the stillness of the internal voice, an immersion in oblivion, an engagement with nothing, a communion with the void and an engagement with death. Just as many traditional trance rituals have reference to communication with ancestral spirits or the dead, here also this heavy metal trance ritual relates to death and the underworld. The headbanger begins to be entranced to a greater or lesser extent, moving into a different perception of time, a sense of the *kairos* moment, of qualitative time, rather than *chronos*, quantitative time.

It is interesting to consider Jung's concept of 'the shadow' in relation to this subject. He described part of the human subconscious as the shadow, a dark side of the personality linked to instinct and the content of dreams and visions. He also relates the shadow to the collective unconscious and regards repressing the shadow as likely to cause psychological problems (see Abrams and Zweig 1990). The point is that apocalyptic writing is intrinsically linked to this shadow side of human nature. Death is perhaps the ultimate shadow that haunts humanity, and apocalyptic writing is often the result of dreams and visions acting as the projection of the fears and uncertainties of a person

or culture. As apocalypticism is a projection of popular culture's segment of the collective unconscious, it is possible to read within popular apocalyptic forms the nature of the fears of the collective unconscious, what it is that the world worries about.

Metal is a cultural form that is willing to embrace and explore the shadow. It has been criticized in various quarters for addressing fear, horror, death and negativity (Walser 1993: 137-71). Such engagement is perhaps a more healthy approach than one of fear and repression, as long as such shadow play does not become an obsession that consumes and overshadows the rest of life. A number of court cases have been launched against heavy metal bands, including accusing Ozzy Osbourne (originally the lead singer of Black Sabbath) of causing a fan's suicide.

Sabbath Bloody Sabbath, Nothing More to Do

Three heavy rock bands in Britain in the 1970s were key in inspiring the genre of heavy metal. Of these groups, Led Zeppelin's guitarist was interested in Alistair Crowley and various related black arts, but this interest was not overtly expressed in the music. Deep Purple pursued pseudo-classical virtuosity, headbanging, a bodily focus and getting out of one's head, but they did not use overtly demonic imagery. Black Sabbath quickly established an overtly apocalyptic theme in their work and made specific reference to the devil.

Black Sabbath's dark apocalyptic sound was born out of their tough industrial upbringing in the British midlands town of Aston and reflects the apocalyptic devastation that was still visible from the Second World War. Drummer Bill Ward has said that Aston is

> a no-frills place. It's a hard-core very old area of the city that was bombed in the war . . . When I was growing up . . . the landscape was all bombed out from the Germans. And I've seen tough things, lots of stabbings, men coming out of the pub and literally dropping dead, and things like that . . . It is on a par with Pittsburgh or Detroit. It's full of industry. They make cars, guns, bullets and all kinds of metal stuff. It is a really big industrial place. During the Second World War the Germans knew what was going on in Aston, so it was blitzed. Growing up in Aston, there were a lot of buildings that were blown up but not demolished. I would walk out of my door and there were all of these green fields for two or three blocks that were filled with structures that were left over from the war (McIver 2006: 5-6).

With this background, we can understand how it was that the band's bass player Geezer Butler became interested in dark subject material. Butler remarks that

> people feel evil things, but nobody ever sings about what's frightening and evil. I mean the world is a right fucking shambles. Anyway everybody has

> sung about all the good things . . . We try to relieve all the tension in the people who listen to us. To get everything out of their bodies—all the evil and everything (McIver 2006: 73).

One can perceive immediately a focus on the shadow and apocalyptic, as well as a focus on the body. He continues,

> I was brought up an incredibly strict Catholic, and believed in hell and the Devil . . . but though I'd been taught about God and Jesus, no one ever went into what the devil was all about, so when I was 16 or 17, I went about trying to find out. And because I wrote most of Black Sabbath's lyrics, some of that ended up in the songs . . . but it was never advocating Satanism. It was warning against evil (McIver 2006: 82-83).

We see here a dystopian warning, as well as the Christian roots typical of contemporary apocalyptic imagery.

In their early career, the band rehearsed across the road from a cinema. According to Osbourne, 'whenever it showed a horror film the queue would go all the way down the street and around the corner' (Osbourne 2010: 82). Noticing the interest in horror films, guitarist Tony Iommi commented to the rest of the band, 'Isn't it weird how people like to go to the movies and get scared? Why don't we start making music that scares people' (McIver 2006: 82). This led to the band writing the song that was to be called 'Black Sabbath' after the 1963 Boris Karloff film of the same name. Eventually, it became both the band's name and the title of their first album.

Discussing overtly demonic imagery Butler says,

> That stuff came along with the band name . . . which we took from the first song we wrote together . . . We thought, we like this name, it sounds good, we didn't even think of any black magic connotations. Some of the lyrics are concerned with the occult, of course, but it's not like we came out with this huge black magic image or anything. The record company came up with the artwork for the first album and had that inverted cross on the inside, plus the verse on the inside. That was out of our control, we weren't allowed to have anything to do with mixing or album sleeves or anything like that (McIver 2006: 83).

The apocalyptic was prominent in the culture of the day. Osbourne writes,

> At the time there was an occult author called Dennis Wheatley whose books were all over the bestseller lists, Hammer Horror films were doing massive business at the cinemas, and the Manson murders were all over the telly, so anything with a 'dark' edge was in big demand (Osbourne 2010: 91).

The band continued to use dark imagery and demonic references. The controversy this caused provided excellent free marketing for the band. As Osbourne put it, 'the good thing about all the satanic stuff is that it gave us endless free publicity. People couldn't get enough of it' (2010: 100).

The band's roots were in blues music, which, as we have seen, has often been associated with dark subject material and the devil. It was a logical extension to enlarge this subject material and develop an even darker genre. Various other elements were part of this process. Lyrics continued to refer to the devil or to demons but also addressed other apocalyptic tropes. Butler explains:

> [W]e hid our real message in the satanic lyrics. The message was very often about the war or the madness of it . . . We wrote a lot of science fiction lyrics, anti-Vietnam war songs . . . There were a lot of environmental issues that we were talking about years ago . . . We sang about all kinds of things—fiction, political, environmental, occult. (Mciver 2006: 83-84).

The sound of the music became dark for a number of reasons. Iommi tuned down the strings of his guitar by a semi-tone to make the strings slacker, in order to make the instrument easier to play. This was because his playing was affected by two of his fretting fingers being damaged in an accident at work (McIver 2006: 15). This made his guitar sound harder and darker. On the album *Master of Reality* (1971), they tuned down three semi-tones, but when playing live they tuned down a semi-tone or a tone. Lighter gauge (thinner) strings were used to help Iommi's adapted technique, which further changed the guitar tones.

Heavy metal bands have followed and developed these practices, and extreme metal bands have taken this significantly further. In the 1980s, bands made Iommi's Eb tuning standard practice, and later death metal bands have tuned down as far as C or B. Such bands also began to play seven-string guitars with an extra string added that was tuned a fifth lower than the lowest standard guitar string. Meshuggah, a Swedish death metal band, use an eight-string guitar with an extra string a fifth lower than a standard seven- string guitar, with the whole instrument also tuned down a semitone, the lowest string tuned down from F sharp to F natural (see McIver 2006: 33). This results in a dark and thick sound that suits the music.

Iommi also played power chords with no third, again initially largely for practical reasons due to his being able to use only three fingers to fret chords, but the resulting sound was characteristically powerful. It was also very successful, being now a key musical feature of heavy metal. Indeed, it is perhaps appropriate that its roots were in an industrial accident that crushed fingers. Another factor was that Black Sabbath was disturbed by club audiences who talked during their performances, especially in the United States. In response they played the instruments harder and louder to drown out this noise, again making the music louder, harsher and more sonically apocalyptic (McIver 2006: 33). They also began to destroy their instruments on stage. An art school graduate, The Who's guitarist Pete Townshend pioneered this approach, having been taught by auto-destructive artist Gustav Metzger. Hav-

ing seen The Who perform, Jimi Hendrix copied this idea. Black Sabbath did the same to enliven US audiences, the destruction adding further to the apocalyptic culture of the band (McIver 2006: 34).

As we have seen, apocalypticicm is conspicuous in the music of Black Sabbath. The song 'Paranoid', probably their best known (the title track of their second album [1972]), deals with paranoia and insanity, clearly addressing the shadow and dark side of human culture. However, the key track on the album from an apocalyptic perspective in terms of lyrics is 'War Pigs'—in fact, this was the original title of the album. Almost eight minutes long, it is an epic song that features air-raid warning sound effects, syncopated offbeat rhythms, a complex structural form, extended guitar solos and an accelerating ending. The track has a particularly apocalyptic lyrical theme. Comparing generals to 'witches at black masses', it is an anti-war song that departs from the typical hippie anti-Vietnam anthems of the 1960s and 1970s and explores darker and more apocalyptic ideas.

It is the song 'Black Sabbath' that provides perhaps the clearest indication of the band's references to the apocalypse in general and the devil in particular. It begins with horror-film-like sound effects, including a tolling bell, rain and thunder, which were added by the sound engineers. The first musical sound features a simple augmented fourth/diminished fifth riff on the guitar and bass. This interval is known as the *'diabolus in musica'* and is often associated with the devil, mediaeval superstition suggesting that, by playing this musical interval one could summon Satan. The melody line also features this interval. The song is in G minor, and Osbourne's verse melody rises stepwise up a minor scale from the G root note, before leaping up to a higher G. He then drops to a C-sharp, an interval of an augmented fourth down from the tonic, before gliding up a semi-tone to a D. He then falls back to either a C-sharp or D, or one then the other, varying this in different lines (see fig. 1).

Osbourne slides up and down, and he sings notes between the pitches. The tonality is uncertain, like the lyric, and lurks outside of conventional equal-tempered tonality. The song lyrics describe a 'figure in black', a demonic feature of a bad dream.

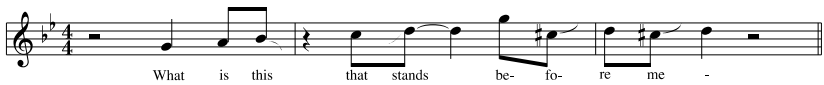

Figure 1. The first line of the song 'Black Sabbath'.

The song features all the heavy and dark techniques discussed above, providing a blueprint for a dystopian apocalyptic approach to heavy metal that is still followed today.

Life's a stage and we're all in the cast: Ozzy's Mediapheme

Norman Cohn describes the original apocalypse as based on the 'assault of the forces of chaos upon the divinely appointed order, and of the victory of the young divine warrior over those forces' (1995: 219). In the case of Black Sabbath's apocalypse, the warrior who fights these forces, who seems to suffer from resultant mental frailty and fails to emerge victorious, is Ozzy Osbourne. Interestingly, this can be compared to H.G. Wells's use of apocalyptic imagery. As Seed comments, 'Time and again, Wells would draw upon the religious imagery of the end of the world in his search for a language powerful enough, and urgent enough, to convey his sense of human frailty and human destiny' (2000: 73). Again, we have noted that this human frailty is also one of the key themes of Black Sabbath's lyrics, as seen in, for example, 'Paranoid'; it is also, of course, a famously recurring theme in Osbourne's life as revealed in the television series *The Osbournes* (2002–2005).

At the end of his introduction, Boyd Rice tells us that 'apocalyptic texts, then, tend to emerge from such accounts as riven by tensions between narrative closure and historical disclosure . . . as leading towards endings which are ultimately aporias or as self-destructive' (1987: 12). In a fictional apocalypse, if the story line or the characters are self-destructive, it does little harm, in that an actor is able to return to 'normal' life off screen. Rock stars such as Ozzy Osbourne are only semi-fictional, and the self-destructive nature of their stories often leads to early death or at least a significant level of self-harm or damage. Osbourne had the principal role in Black Sabbath, which involved conveying the messages in their music to the audience. Lead singers or 'frontmen' are often the primary focus for transmitting the mediapheme of a band to its audience. A mediapheme is a quick encapsulation of the underlying meaning of a band, of its nature and content, usually allied to an image, that can travel through the media at great speed. Fred Johnson, discussing the work of U2, provides a useful explanation of the term. 'The mediapheme, though, is a fleeting representation—one instance of signification staged at a particular moment and in a particular context, something equivalent to the fleeting significance of a Barthes myth' (2004: 85).

Black Sabbath's mediapheme involving apocalypticism and the devil is one that Osbourne was required to personify and which tended to bleed into his personal life. This is not unusual, since, in many cases it is the face of an artist that provides the iconic symbolism and a visual identity for such a mediapheme. The artist is surrounded by a semi-fictional world and, consequently, lives a curious mixture of fantasy and reality. This is not so much deceit as storytelling; it is theatre, and for popular musicians, quite literally, 'all the world's a stage'.

Unlike film stars, popular music stars usually play only one part, based on themselves, although those like David Bowie and Madonna, who have

acting experience, have managed successfully to create a series of successful pop star characters. The stars' appearances on stage add credence and authenticity to their constructed reality, which is also transmitted through songs, fanzines, fan websites, interviews in numerous music magazines, promotional activities, singles, albums, books, videos, concerts and television appearances. This material is not always factual, but it is not made obvious that it is entirely fictional. Fans assume that popular singers are singing about their real experiences and feelings, although this is often not the case. Pop stars carefully mix fact and fiction to create a hyper-real personality that is more interesting, and extravagant, than any real person. They draw upon cultural myths and archetypes for their media constructions, upon histories of other icons, and on numerous other media sources (see particularly Till 2010).

For the rock stars playing these characters it is easy for reality and fiction to become enmeshed. Consequently, it becomes unclear where the on-stage personality ends and the real person begins. Some stars have lived out their rock star lifestyles and have died as a result or have suffered as a result of drug and alcohol addiction (e.g. Jimi Hendrix, Bon Scott, Keith Moon, John Bonham and Tommy Bolin). Consider, then, the difficulty of being Ozzy Osbourne, for whom the difficulties associated with being the focus of a famous band were exacerbated by an intense insecurity, attention deficit disorder, dyslexia (Osbourne 2010), and the fact that the mediapheme he was expected to perform was linked to the devil. His lifestyle has been placed in the public eye by his erratic behaviour in public, and by *The Osbournes* reality television series, in which the deleterious effects of drugs and alcohol are clear in the shambolic behaviour of Ozzy, who struggles to cope with the rigours of everyday life. He developed a reputation for excessive behaviour, for example, biting the head off a live bat that was thrown on stage, biting the heads off of doves at press events, being arrested for urinating on the American monument the Alamo, and undergoing various periods of treatment for drug and alcohol misuse. In public, he is expected by his fans to behave like a character from a horror film on top of the usual expectations of rock star excess. As Osbourne himself says, 'I'd just do crazier and crazier things . . . When the crowd was obviously bored . . . that would be my cue to do something fucking mental, to get everyone's attention' (Osbourne 2010: 86).

He is also regularly referred to by the satanic title 'The Prince of Darkness'. It is interesting that Osbourne is presented, as much by the public as by himself, as the devil incarnate, the epitome of the Jungian shadow that his band musically explored. He plays the part of the dark side that lurks within us all, of the uncontrolled, instinctive, unthinking, excessive wild lunatic, as well as the 'paranoid', insecure, weak, helpless victim of the shadow, afraid of the darkness and unsure of what to do. This has been a difficult part for Osbourne to play, and one that he has played with great skill and at some

considerable cost to his own mental and physical health. In the final analysis, however, as Walser puts it, 'Osbourne plays with signs of the supernatural because they evoke a power and mystery that is highly attractive to many fans' (1993: 148). In songs, this living evocation of the apocalyptic devil, who is himself an embodiment of the shadow, speaks the words of the collective unconscious, the apocalyptic fears of popular culture, of war and oppression by evil and powers beyond our control. As Osbourne himself tells us,

> It's only a role that I play . . . Anybody who thinks Ozzy Osbourne is into Satan and all that doesn't know what they're talking about . . . I'm not a Satanist. It's just a theatrical role I play . . . Black Sabbath was never really a satanic band, although we did touch on topics like Satanism and devil worship in certain songs. It was just a different angle. If you think back to the late sixties and early seventies, it was all fuckin' flower power and how wonderful the fuckin' world is. That just didn't seem true to us. The world was fucked (McIver 2006: 87-88).

Iron Maiden and 'The Number of the Beast'

The heavy metal bands that followed Black Sabbath adopted a similar approach. Walser describes the band Iron Maiden as a typical example. 'The lyrics are less concerned with celebrating Satanic rituals than with exploring tensions between reality and dream, evil and power . . . Iron Maiden draws upon a variety of religious and philosophical traditions in order to explore and interrogate moralities' (Walser 1993: 152). Iron Maiden continues the metal tradition of making apocalyptic references through their music.

> Such eclectic constructions of power, which might usefully be called postmodern, are possible *only because* they are not perceived as tied to strict historical contexts. All can be consulted, appropriated, and combined, used to frame questions and answers about life and death. If religion functions both to explain the world—providing models for how to live, tenets of faith and empowerment, and comfort for when they don't work—and to offer a sense of contact with something greater than oneself, then heavy metal surely qualifies as a religious phenomenon (Walser 1993: 154).

I would suggest that metal is more like a 'cult' than a religion, embracing the term for its transgressive qualities, in preference to the more politically correct term, 'new religious movement' (see Till 2010).

Walser suggests that Iron Maiden offers 'experiences of community and feelings of contact with mystical meaningfulness', a 'utopia of empowerment, freedom and metaphysical depth' (1993: 154-55), which provides an alternative to the secular utilitarianism of school and work. The main aim of heavy metal bands is to sell records, and this is a cult and a culture that cannot be separated from consumption and the music industry, but the heavy metal cult has developed into a huge worldwide movement of some significance.

Iron Maiden is an interesting example, as their song 'The Number of the Beast' directly quotes from Revelation, clearly referencing the devil. It is an early example, and one that was fairly successful, a top-20 UK hit when released as a single. The song begins with a spoken voice,

> Woe to you O Earth and Sea for the Devil sends the beast with wrath because he knows the time is short. Let him who hath understanding reckon the number of the Beast, for it is a human number; and its number is six-hundred-and-sixty-six.

The first sentence of the song is adapted from the Revised Standard Version of Rev. 12.12b, where Satan is thrown down onto Earth. The words are slightly changed: 'has', for example, is changed to 'hath'. The second sentence is from Rev. 13.18. Iron Maiden makes it clear in interviews that they are not satanists, but that their work is certainly apocalyptic. This song alone refers to dreams, dark figures, and the devil, and other songs discuss war, madness and aspects of the Jungian shadow. Their mediapheme is personified by the mythical zombie character 'Eddie', rather than by their lead singer. Eddie appears as a giant animated figure at concerts and on marketing materials. On the cover of their album *The Number of the Beast* (1982), for example, Eddie appears pulling the strings of a devil marionette (see fig. 2).

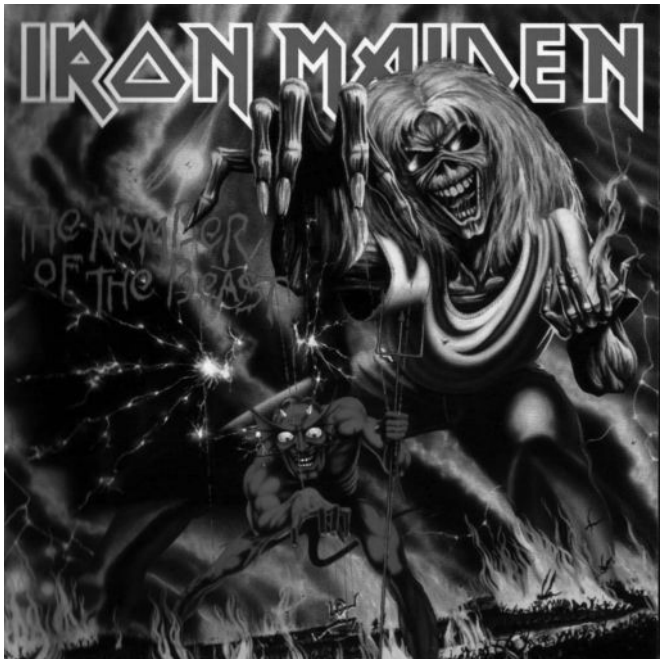

Figure 2. The album cover of *The Number of the Beast*, by Iron Maiden.

Conclusions: Heavy Metal Thunder– Popular Music Dystopian Apocalypse

There are of course many albums by later black metal and death metal artists that deal with the devil and apocalypticism. There are earlier blues artists who address a dark spirit or are linked to the devil, evil or the shadow, but Black Sabbath is the first of a type of specifically apocalyptic heavy metal artists; they chose to address this subject overtly and do so more specifically than early blues artists, who were rooted in folk traditions or who dealt principally in allusion and inference. Extreme metal continues to develop this European apocalyptic tradition.

Extreme, death and black metal bands have extended the living out of and performance of apocalyptic lifestyles. Fans project themselves into, and live out, fantasies that arise from the unconscious and the shadow, to a greater degree. Extreme metal bands have acted out sacrifices and satanic rites on stage, in videos and in publicity events. A group of black metal band members have been arrested and imprisoned for murder and for burning Christian churches. A number of fans were convicted of related offenses (see Moynihan and Søderlind 1998).

Extreme metal is also more extreme, using blast beasts, short intense bursts of sound; growled, shrieked or shouted vocals; very fast tempo; huge walls of distorted sound; double bass drum technique and complex time signatures and rhythms. Song subjects are more extreme; band names are like a catalogue of war, pestilence and dark imagery; costumes include corpse paint; and fans mosh, slam, stage dive and crowd surf as well as headbang, including the whole body as well as the head. This produces a more excessive overall effect, an increasingly apocalyptic whole, which further distinguishes metal from mainstream musical culture.

Finally, we have seen that, arguably, Christianity became dualistic and apocalyptic in part because of the integration of Zoroastrian, Zurvanist and Manichaean beliefs. This duality led to the emergence of the popular cultural figure of Satan, a personification of opposition to God and, later, Christ—a force of chaos and evil striving against the forces of good and therefore central to apocalyptic discourse. Over time this character has absorbed elements of various other folk beliefs, as well as integrating various dark parts of Christianity. Blues music was associated with this devil as a binary opposite to gospel music.

From blues has developed the musical genre of heavy metal, which overtly adopts apocalypticism. Black Sabbath and their record company developed the idea, inspired by the popularity of horror films. Lead singer Ozzy Osbourne played a 'Prince of Darkness' character, a personification of the band's apocalyptic mediapheme, replacing the role of the devil. In postmodernity, in a secularized popular culture, there is no end to the apocalyptic,

which instead acts as a dystopian warning about the fears that lurk in the collective unconscious. Fans connect with these fears and other elements of their dark side, their shadow, in a heavy metal pop cult that has spread across the world. Ritualistic headbanging is a collective dance form that allows fans to connect with each other and the music and to move into the time frame of the music, expressing their subconscious fears and engaging with their shadow. This dark side includes ecological disaster and the insecurities that result from a postmodern existence, a fractured sense of community or homeless self (Heelas and Woodhead, 2001; Heelas *et al.* 2005). The 1980s heavy metal bands like Iron Maiden developed this apocalyptic approach, and black and death metal bands took the idea even further.

Heavy metal musicians 'explore images of horror and madness in order to comprehend and critique the world as they see it', and this 'can be read as an index of attempts to survive the present and imagine something better for the future' (Walser 1993: 170-71). More specifically, heavy metal draws on an integration of various versions of the character of the devil and his associated minions, in order to oppose Christian traditions. This has created a heavy metal cult, a transgressive occulture that invokes the apocalyptic writings of Christianity, while stripping away the layers of social control of the individual available to primary institutions such as churches and denominations. This has extended the life of the book of Revelation beyond its written text and extrapolated it beyond the control of religious authority into the realm of popular cult and (oc)culture.

By investigating the warnings provided by a heavy metal popular dystopian apocalypse, we can see through this engagment with the Jungian shadow what is revealed about the fears of the collective unconscious, including the fear that irresponsible human behaviour could destroy the planet through war or ecological disaster, and the personal insecurities engendered by a Western secular consumer lifestyle lacking in spirituality or belief systems. In this case, such fears are transmitted to and by the audience, in music that screams the message as powerfully as possible, and that strongly rejects Christianity. To address the shadow, as in the occultural dystopian apocalyptic heavy metal, is healthier than to attempt to suppress it, which acts as a form of unconscious group therapy. There is still much to learn about how patterns of belief and meaning operate in contemporary popular culture, but heavy metal shows how, as membership in organized religions decreases, other structures emerge to meet some of the needs the religions used to fill.

8. Who Cares? Apocalyptic Thought in Extreme's *III Sides to Every Story*

Steven Knowles

Introduction

The funk-rock band Extreme,[1] from Boston, Massachusetts, rose to international prominence in the late 1980s. Probably most famous for their acoustic ballad 'More than Words', this mainstream secular rock band released four albums between 1989 and 1995. After disbanding in 1995 they ended a thirteen-year hiatus in 2008 by re-forming and releasing the critically acclaimed *Saudades de Rock*. However, although the band is relatively mainstream, a prominent theme in their work, particularly conspicuous on their third studio album, *III Sides to Every Story* (1992), has been apocalyptic discourse. Signalling a dramatic change in direction for the group, the album is certainly their most ambitious work to date. Set out as a concept album, it is split into three sections, referred to as 'sides': 'Yours', 'Mine' and 'The Truth'. Each 'side'/section features a quite distinct musical style and distinct lyrical imagery. Possibly because of this change in direction, it was a commercial failure compared to their previous work. Indeed, some rock critics were quite scathing about it, claiming it was far too self-indulgent.

In this essay, the context, content and reception of this work will be examined, and it will be shown that the album not only articulates a surprising amount of Christian imagery, but that it does so in a way that reveals the dark side of American culture. More specifically, the content of *III Sides to Every Story* is a good example of the American fascination with the idea of apocalypse.[2] Not only does some of the content of the album include references

1. Gary Cherone (singer), Nuno Bettencourt (lead guitar), Pat Badger (bass) and Paul Geary (drums). Following Geary's departure, Kevin Figuero (drums) joined.

2. Although here I am referring to the term 'apocalypse' in its broadest sense (secular and religious), what follows in this chapter is an analysis of a narrower religious understanding of it. For an introduction to how apocalyptic ideas have shaped American culture, see Rehill 2010. For a close reading of apocalyptic ideas in American politics, see Northcott, 2007.

to global and personal apocalyptic crises, but I will also argue that traces of Christian popular dispensationalism are evident.

It has been a fairly common practice among some scholars to dissect song lyrics in order to determine what the writers actually mean. Although lyrical analysis will be carried out here, the reception of the music by fans is also important, arguably more important. How have fans interpreted *III Sides to Every Story*? Using online ethnographic methods, I have interviewed fans and observed their interactions in online fan forums. Perhaps not surprisingly, my research uncovered both a great variety of opinion about the meaning of the album and its importance to fans. Indeed, for some, it has been a cathartic tool that has clearly benefited them enormously.

As to the meaning of the album, again, perhaps unsurprisingly, the lyrics are relatively ambiguous.[3] This ambiguity, of course, grants a more fluid interaction with the body of work and a breadth of interpretation. Indeed, this ambiguity appears to be a strategy.[4]

In examining the reception of the music, I have broadly incorporated elements of Stuart Hall's approach to reception theory (see Hall 2001: 507-17). That is to say, I will be implementing his basic principle of 'encoding' and 'decoding' texts in order to ascertain what the music means to listeners. For Hall (particularly in relation to televisual media), makers of shows, journalists and producers 'encode' a particular meaning into their programs. Hence, what is presented is not 'raw data' but an intentional interpretation of the data/story/headline, etc. However, just because certain messages are encoded into media (such as songs on an album), this doesnot necessarily mean that listeners will decode them in specific ways. Instead, when the material is 'consumed' and 'decoded', it is likely that a plethora of interpretations will result. Approaches to media interpretation, according to Hall, could entail three possible outcomes. First, the media may be understood and decoded in line with the encoded message. Alternatively, the decoding may encapsulate the majority of the original encoded media but may include some adjustments. Another approach is what Hall refers to as an 'oppositional' reading of the media. Here the audience may disagree greatly with the encoded message and, instead, take an opposite point of view. What is of fundamental importance here is that the position, cultural understanding and knowledge of an audience can differ radically. This difference, therefore, feeds into all media interpretation.

3. In an interview in 1993, the band, and Cherone in particular, confirm that they want to maintain an ambiguity with regard to the meaning of their lyrics. See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1MyXYdy3Fc&feature=related (accessed 31 August 2010).

4. See the 1993 interview: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1MyXYdy3Fc&feature=related (accessed 31 August 2010).

A Word on Dispensationalism

The form of dispensationalism to which I will be referring is a mutation of classical dispensationalism. Gary North refers to this form as pop-dispensationalism (1991: x). Classical dispensationalism, of whom one the founding fathers was J.N. Darby, although certainly interested in the prophetic, tended to shy away from date-setting and sensationalizing current world events in connection with biblical prophecy. Indeed, it has been argued that classical dispensationalism tends to operate with caution in regard to predicting dates despite world events at times seeming to take on apocalyptic proportions (see Sweetnam 2006: 173-92). It is the propensity directly to correlate contemporary events with biblical narratives and hence sensationalize prophecy that has proved immensely popular since the early 1970s and that distinguishes contemporary pop-dispensationalism from the classical version (e.g. Whisenant 1988). Leading pop-dispensationalists from the last 40 years would include Hal Lindsey, John Hagee, Jack van Impe, Jerry Falwell, and Edgar Whisenant.

The institution most notable for teaching dispensationalism today is perhaps Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS).[5] Its doctrinal statement, which can be found on their website, states the following: 'We believe that the dispensations are stewardships by which God administers His purpose on the earth through man under varying responsibilities.'[6] Notable figures connected with DTS who have been prominent advocates of pop-dispensationalism are John Walvoord, Charles Dyer, and Hal Lindsey.

With the above in mind, our attention will now turn to an examination of the context in which *III Sides to Every Story* was written and produced.

The Context

The beginning of the 1990s marked a globally volatile period, primarily because of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990. This violation of international law was met with widespread condemnation, and resolutions were quickly introduced in the United Nations Security Council to put pressure on Saddam Hussein and his government.[7] Led by the United States, a coalition of 34 countries joined forces to oppose Iraqi hostilities. On 29 November 1990, Security Resolution 678 was passed, which gave Iraq a deadline of 15 January 1991 to withdraw from Kuwait soil. If Iraq failed to meet

5. Moody Bible Institute in Chicago is also widely recognized as promulgating dispensationalist theology.

6. See Dallas Theological Seminary website at http://www.dts.edu/about/doctrinal-statement/ (accessed: 29 July 2010).

7. Resolution 660 was introduced condemning the invasion. Economic sanctions were imposed on Iraq with the passage of UN Resolution 661.

this deadline, an authorization of the use of force to liberate Kuwait would be effected. Despite attempts to broker a deal satisfactory to all sides, on 17 January the US-led Operation Desert Storm, as it became known, commenced with a series of air attacks. It was not until 24 February that ground troops were sent into occupied Kuwait. After only one hundred hours of fighting, the coalition forces succeeded in liberating Kuwait; Iraq accepted all the UN resolutions and withdrew.

The fact that this unrest was located in the Middle East brought to the fore some very interesting theories regarding motives and reasons for such conflict. Indeed, unrest in the Middle East has often caused conspiracy theorists to believe that such events presage the end of the world. Such conflict tends to give rise to apocalyptic interpretations or at least to intensify existing apocalyptic fervour. In particular, at this time, an increased interest in biblical prophecy became widespread in some sectors of the Christian right. For example, the former president of DTS, John Walvoord, revised and re-issued his *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crisis* (1990; originally published in 1974) and sold a further six hundred thousand copies in a ten-week period![8] His preface ended on a sombre note:

> [I]t is hoped that those who read this volume will be attracted to Jesus Christ as the only Saviour and Lord and will have an intelligent understanding of how history is moving to its climax. If these conclusions are correct, the rapture of the church, the coming of the Lord for those who have trusted in Him, may be expected momentarily (1990: 16).[9]

Again, Charles Dyer's book *The Rise of Babylon* claims that '[t]he Middle East is the world's time bomb, and Babylon is the fuse that will ignite the events of the end times' (see Dyer 1990: back cover). This type of rhetoric is common among those who look to biblical prophecy for answers to such conflict.

From the early 1970s, pop-dispensationalism, led by Hal Lindsey, became enormously popular. Lindsey argued that global events pointed toward the end of the world as foretold in the Bible. His *The Late Great Planet Earth* sold in excess of 35 million copies and the *New York Times* hailed it as the biggest selling work of non-fiction of the decade (1970s).[10] In a follow-up volume, *There's a New World Coming* (1973), he wrote, 'To the sceptic who says that Christ is not coming soon, I would ask him to put the Book of Revelation in one hand, and the daily newspaper in the other, and then sincerely ask

8. In addition to this volume, a number of books were published that examined the end-time in which we live (see Hunt 1990; Jeffrey 1994).

9. This book even contains a prophetic checklist that, it is claimed, corresponds to what will happen in the last seven years of civilization (Walvoord 1990: 221).

10. Nevertheless, there is, of course, a large question mark over the claim that this is a work of non-fiction.

God to show him where we are on His prophetic time-clock' (1973: 306). It is not surprising, therefore, that many of those who adhere to a similar and premillennial unfolding of biblical prophecy thought that the First Gulf War (Persian Gulf War) was the start of the countdown to Armageddon (see Wojcik 1997: 156).

Despite the failure of the First Gulf War to lead 'momentarily' to the end of the world, premillenarian enthusiasts have not been deterred, nor has there been a dearth of prophetic utterances from influential leaders from the Christian right.[11] Nevertheless, it is true to say that, when comparing the outbreak of prophetic conjecture during the First Gulf War with that of the Second Gulf War in 2003, far more restraint was shown at the time of the latter, and there seems to have been an almost anticlimactic feeling. As Timothy Weber notes, 'for many dispensationalists, the second war with Saddam was a bit too much like "been there, done that". However the situation may have looked in 1992, most interpreters did not see anything new looming eleven years later' (2004: 210).

Also adding to the conspiratorial mix of apocalyptic theories are statements made by key public figures. This is seen most clearly perhaps in the presidency of George W. Bush. For example, Michael Northcott provides some fascinating extracts from his public rhetoric that clearly indicate a belief that America is the land of God's people, chosen to lead the world in an apocalyptic struggle against 'the forces of evil' (2007: 1-13). However, it was some words that his father, George H.W. Bush uttered while president, just after the First Gulf War, that caused many to take note. Addressing the nation, he spoke of a 'new world order' (for a good introduction to ideas surrounding the notion of a 'new world order', see Barkun 2006: 16-39). The term 'new world order' is associated with prophetic statements in the biblical book of Daniel that relate to the unification of the Roman Empire. These words, however, have been applied promiscuously. For example, the formation of the European Union has been understood by dispensationalists as evidence of the Antichrist's plan for global government. Thus, when George H.W. Bush uttered these words, fundamentalists such as Pat Robertson argued that this signified the unfolding of biblical prophecy. Indeed, Robertson goes so far as to claim that the Gulf War was of particular importance because

> [it] transcends Kuwait; it even transcends the concept of a new world order enunciated by George Bush. The Gulf War is significant because the action of the United Nations to authorize military action against Iraq was the first time since Babel that all the nations of the earth acted in concert with one another. I find it fascinating to consider that this union took place against

11. For example, John Hagee, the pastor of Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas, has recently published a book entitled *Can America Survive: 10 Signs That We Are the Terminal Generation* (2010).

> the very place where the nations had been divided, the successor nation to ancient Babel' (1992: 252).

For Robertson, a new world government is inevitable, and once this has been established the so-called 'players' will simply be pushed out of the way and Satan will move his chosen leader in, as predicted in the book of Revelation. 'The real danger is that a revived one-world system, springing forth from the murky past of mankind's evil beginnings, will set spiritual forces into motion which no human being will be strong enough to contain' (Robertson 1992: 253). This new world leader will be wholly opposed to God and will persecute Christians; he will be the Antichrist; he will be far more evil and terrible than any other human leader in the history of humankind including Hitler, Stalin, Caligula or Pol Pot.

Thus, here we have the social, political and cultural context in which *III Sides to Every Story* was written. It was an atmosphere that was heavy with apocalyptic fervour, suspicion and suspense.

III Sides to Every Story: The Content

An interview with Gary Cherone proves to be very enlightening for those seeking to understand the influences informing the ideas articulated in the album. In 1993, Cherone talked openly about his Christian faith and acknowledged the influence of Charles Swindoll, who, he was aware, was about to be appointed president of DTS (Cherone 1993).[12] Given the close links to pop-dispensationalism that DTS has, it is not inconceivable that Cherone has been influenced by elements of such theology. Furthermore, when questioned about audience reaction to *III Sides to Every Story*, Cherone admitted, 'I don't know. When I think of *III Sides*, I think of the third side. You know where those lyrics are coming from. I wonder if our audience does, because I plagiarized the Bible with some of those lyrics, which I think is the only way you can't go wrong' (Cherone 2010). It is clear, by his own admission, that Cherone's interpretation of certain ideas in the Bible constitutes a large presence on the album. Another example of the strength of his convictions can be found in the form of an open letter addressed to Eddie Vedder, lead singer of rock band Pearl Jam (see Cherone 1999). The subject matter concerns the issue of abortion, which Vedder had spoken out in favour of. Cherone felt so strongly about Vedder's views that he issued a public and open letter stating why abortion is wrong and championing a pro-life stance. The unusual steps that Cherone took suggest deep conviction, not least because to publish such a morally conservative open letter to a fellow 'rocker' of equal international

12. Charles Swindoll was appointed president of Dallas Theological Seminary in July 1994, and he now serves as its chancellor.

repute is just not 'rock 'n' roll'! This forthright declaration of his evangelical beliefs is important to bear in mind when examining both the context and the content of *III Sides to Every Story*.

The album's first side or section, entitled 'Yours', contains six songs and suggests the opinion of a third party. These songs are very similar in style to previous Extreme compositions, being primarily driven by heavy guitar riffs that are typical of this genre of funk-metal. As a whole, this side deals with current political subjects of the day. The first song, 'Warheads', deals with war. The idea of peace is discussed in the second track, although its title suggests the grim consequences of its failure: 'Rest in Peace'. Next, government and politics form the basis for 'Politicalamity', and racism is the theme of 'Color Me Blind'. The subject of the media hits the headlines in the penultimate song of this section, 'Cupid's Dead'. The side closes with an intriguing song entitled 'Peacemaker Die', which could be interpreted as an anti-war song or a sarcastic commentary on the idea that to seek peace is a futile dream![13]

The second side, entitled 'Mine', is quite different. In view of the title of the section, perhaps this side represents the opinions of the band members. The textures and sound are quite a contrast to the heavy riffs of the first side, and the songs are more introspective. 'Seven Sundays' is the opener, followed by 'Tragic Comic', both attempting to voice aspects of previous or current personal relationships. 'Our Father' describes the experience of a child with an absent father, while 'Stop the World' treads philosophical waters and takes a more existential look at life. There is a yearning to 'stop the world from spinning round' in order to get off and take stock of life. The song has a sense of needing to take time out from 'life' in order to then make sense of one's place in the world. 'God Isn't Dead?' is followed by 'Don't Leave Me Alone', two songs that mark a rather pessimistic end to this side. This pessimism refers to the pain experienced in life and, more specifically, the pain caused by a crisis of faith in the face of suffering. This, of couse, is particularly poignant, given how many Americans were, at this time, very unsure as to how conflict in the Middle East would be resolved (see Boyer 1992: 326-31).

The final side, 'The Truth', consists of three epic songs gathered under the umbrella title 'Everything under the Sun'—which, of course, references the book of Proverbs: 'I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind' (1.14). Together, the three songs 'Rise N Shine', 'Am I Ever Gonna Change' and 'Who Cares?' seek to give answers to questions asked on sides 1 and 2. Particularly picking up on spiritual themes raised in 'God Isn't Dead?', the third side examines the self in crises and, moreover, incorporates apocalyptic imagery from the

13. It maybe that the lyrics of this song are intentionally ambiguous, particularly given that it is sung from the perspective of a third party. It is this possible ambiguity that makes the song difficult to decode and is something that may well be intentional.

book of Daniel. In this final triad of songs, however, no conclusive answer is offered to solve the problems raised in the previous two sections (which, to some extent, echoes the theme of Ecclesiastes). Nevertheless, as we shall see, a glimmer of hope does appear at the end of 'Who Cares?', which, I argue, offers a resolution to both personal and global apocalypticism in the context of the album.

Of these songs, there are a number that deserve closer examination, in that they indicate an explicit penchant for apocalypticism and elements of evangelical dispensationalism. From the first section, 'Yours', there are two songs that stand out,[14] 'Politicalamity' and 'Peacemaker Die'. The former opens up with a familiar biblical reference (e.g. Mt. 24.6; Mk 13.7; Lk. 21.9):

> Wars and rumours,
> Of wars no-one knows what for.

His next allusion, although not biblical, is a familiar political reference:

> Ask not what your country can do for a one world governmental zoo?
> Political, political, politicalamity.

This reference to President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address also introduces the conspiratorial notion of a one-world government, which, when linked with apocalyptic themes, takes us into a particular evangelical millenarian subculture. As the *Daily Telegraph* journalist James Delingpole comments: 'You have to be careful when talking about "One World Government." Sooner than you can say "Bilderberg", you'll find yourself bracketed with all the crazies, and conspiracy theorists and 9/11 Truthers' (2009). However, as I have already noted, this idea of a one-world government is a theory that some conspiracy theorists apply to the European Union, which, they believe, was foretold in the book of Daniel. Again, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 precipitated the growth of ideas pertaining to a new world order and, allied to this, the coming of the Antichrist. As fundamentalist apologist Dave Hunt has argued, 'the door seems to be opening to a *global* unification of nations and thus *global peace*. If the entire world is united, then we may be certain that the Antichrist will not rule over only a small part of it' (1990: 63). Likewise, although writing two years after this album was released, Grant Jeffrey epitomizes the obsession with such ideas in America: 'This confederated super state is destined to rule the world under the dictatorial control of the Prince of Darkness, the Antichrist' (1994: 123). Such speculation is

14. If space permitted I could have included other relevant themes such as references to the Sermon on the Mount found in 'Warmongers'. Lyrics in 'Rest in Peace' contain traces of biblical language such as 'sign of the times' and turning 'water to wine'.

representative of a frenzy of activity regarding end-time thinking (see Boyer 1992: 328). The reference to a 'one world government' in this song, I would argue, is the result of such influential teaching. The point is that it is difficult not to conclude that the use of the phrase 'one world government' in the Extreme song is influenced by right-wing fundamentalist discourse. Regardless of whether any members of the band adhere to such ideas, they are part of a larger apocalptic culture.

'Peacemaker Die' could be understood as an anti-war song. The cry of 'Peacemaker die', is repeated throughout the chorus, being interrupted once by 'I don't know why?' To some extent, the song vents frustration against those who are intent on foiling plans for peaceful resolution to conflict. This is reinforced by the sampled voice of the American civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, introduced toward the end of the song. Indeed, the inclusion of his 1963 'I have a dream' speech adds a certain poignancy to the song, in that it recalls the violent death of a peacemaker.

Yet there is some ambguity here. In pop-dispensationalism, the new world order is synonymous with a time of false peace and stability. For example, John Hagee makes much of a false peace that precedes Armageddon, a peace masterminded by the Antichrist.[15] This is also central to the narrative of the popular and inluential *Left Behind* series of novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. Again, pop-dispensationalist Dave Hunt claims that 'Earth's war-weary inhabitants will greet the first period of peace ecstatically, convinced that the millennium has dawned . . . It will, however, be a great delusion' (1990: 13). Walvoord, specifically writing about the Middle East crisis in 1990 stated that 'a peace settlement in the Middle East is one of the most important events predicted for the end time' (1990: 130). The deliberate ambiguity of Cherone's words allows this millenarian interpretation.

The second section, 'Mine', takes on a very different tone. Instead of the guitar-driven high tempo songs of 'Yours', we have a slower and more melodic start to this part. Indeed, the opener, 'Seven Sundays', contains no guitars at all and is played out in the three-quarter time of a waltz. However, the two most significant songs in this section are 'God Isn't Dead?' and 'Don't Leave me Alone'.[16] 'God Isn't Dead?' sounds like a desperate cry for help that emerges from the believer's loss of faith:

15. For an example of Hagee preaching on this issue at his church in San Antonio, see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lJe4INEcyU&feature=related (accessed 23 December 2010).

16. Don't Leave Me Alone is not included in the standard CD format owing to a lack of space. It was available only on the cassette and vinyl editions, and also on the *Tragic Comic* CD single (the 'Stop the World' single in the UK). It is believed that Nuno Bettencourt regards the song's omission as akin to losing an arm.

> Ah, look at all the lonely people,
> Losing faith, in a world full of despair,
> No-one who cares,
> Wandering where God disappeared.

The song represents a true lament to a hopeless world that, in the context of war in the Middle East, offers no glimmer of hope. It is a nihilistic understanding of the world, a personal apocalypse that sees no end in sight, only impending doom in what lies ahead.

> I, see the pain in everybody's faces,
> Asking why,
> The God up in the sky,
> Didn't say goodbye,
> Please tell me
> God didn't die.

Cherone sings, 'Please tell me God isn't dead, I want to know!', which represents personal turmoil and the pain of doubt in the face of impending crisis. Does God exist? If so, why doesn't he care enough to intervene to halt unfolding tragedy in the Middle East? What are the gounds for hope? Is there a theodicy to make sense of this?

'Don't Leave Me Alone' explicitly appeals to Christ. It continues the emotional atmosphere of the 'Mine' section, the central message of which is a passionate plea, directed to Jesus, not to abandon the individual:

> Doing the thing I should have known,
> Only to reap what I have sown,
> Jesus, please
> Don't leave me alone,
> Don't' leave me on my own
> I'm on my knees,
> Forgive me please . . .

These two melancholic and dark songs bring the second section to a close.

This album is a powerful reflection of a Christian's feelings, shaped by the pop-dispesationalist context of the United States and the Gulf War. From the articulation of diverse opinions in the 'Yours' section to the personal anguish that culminates in the songs in the 'Mine' section, the album resonates with elements of apocalypticism, whether personal or global. There seems to be little that, from a human perspective, can ameliorate the contemporary crisis. However, that does not mean that solutions cannot be found within such apocalyptic scenarios. Possible answers lie in the album's final section, 'The Truth'.

The subtitle of this final section, 'Everything under the Sun', with its explicit reference to Proverbs, sets the scene. Perhaps the principal song on the album, 'Rise N Shine' is dominated by biblical imagery, again, lifted

primarily from Ecclesiastes, as well as Daniel and Luke. Indeed, approximately three-quarters of the lyrics can be traced directly to these sources. The song deals with apocalyptic scenarios, as well as referencing Qoheleth's searching for meaning and the sense of ignorance and impotence in the face of death.

The first major excursion into biblical literature comes in the shape of a paraphrased quotation of Lk. 12.54-56. In alluding to these verses, Cherone is, of course, referencing the importance of reading 'the signs of the times'. Again, this is done in a way embedded within pop-dispensationalist theology. In addition, there are explicit references to the book of Daniel:

> I had a dream,
> Not unlike the one from old,
> Of a man king, whose head was made of gold . . .
> Dream, Daniel, dream,
> For what's yet to come,
> See, Daniel, see,
> For everything's under the sun.

This use of Daniel, central to much pop-dispensationalism, underpins and reinforces the apocalypticism in the song.

'Am I Ever Gonna Change' is perhaps the most introspective song on the album. Cherone laments that he is 'tired of being me, and I don't like what I see'. In what appears to be a losing battle, particularly given the evidence of what is before his eyes, this existential turn to the self is failing to provide answers to his personal questioning. In some respects one is reminded of the battle of the self against sin found in Romans 7.

> Am I ever gonna change?
> Will I always stay the same,
> If I say one thing,
> Then I do the other,
> It's the same old song,
> That goes on forever.
> Am I ever gonna change?
> I'm the only one to blame.
> When I think I'm right,
> I wind up wrong.
> It's a futile fight, gone on too long.

The seeming futility and existential angst found here are addressed, to a degree, in the final track of the album, entitled 'Who Cares?' Emerging from the quieting tones of 'Am I Ever Gonna Change', the song opens up with the question,

> Tell me Jesus,
> Are you angry?

> One more sheep has,
> Just gone astray
> A hardening of hearts,
> Turning to stone, Wandering off,
> so far from home.
> So many children,
> Losing time,
> Walk in darkness,
> Looking for a sign . . .

In a final cry of anguish, the final verse states,

> Here I am,
> A naked man.
> Nothing to hide,
> With empty hands.
> Remember me,
> I am the one,
> Who lost his way,
> Your Prodigal Son.

Cherone simply answers the cries with 'Who cares? Tell me who cares?' There is clearly a sense of futility in the words. What does it matter what one does? Who cares anyway? Nevertheless, the last three lines offer the post-apocalyptic hope that Revelation offers us:

> Rise, rise 'n' shine,
> A new day is coming
> Yes it is!

Despite the doubts of faith and the general roller-coaster ride of opinion and emotion contained in the album, this personal apocalypse and sense of hopelessness can be resolved. This is closely tied to repentance, a return to faith in the God who, in Jesus, will return to provide the final answer to conflict and suffering. The biblical references to the prodigal son, the sheep going astray, a hardening of hearts turning to stone all point to conflict resolution.

One of the central doctrines connected with premillennial dispensationalism is the 'rapture', the belief that all the faithful will be taken up from earth by Christ, while everyone else is left to face the Great Tribulation, which precedes Armageddon. Such ideas regarding the rapture have permeated large sections of American Christian culture (see Chapman 2009). For example, the *Left Behind* series by LaHaye and Jenkins has been a great publishing success. Written from an evangelical perspective, the basic premise of these novels is a dispensationalist understanding of the rapture. However, the point for us to note is that the emphasis on 'being ready for the rapture' necessarily

leads to the type of questioning of faith evident in Cherone's lyrics. Works by prominent evangelical dispensationalists, such as Hilton Sutton (1991), seek both to 'equip' the faithful for the coming rapture and also to encourage self-doubt.

The Reception: What Do Fans Think?

It is important to note at this point that an obstacle in assessing what music meant to a person during a particular period can be problematic because of the time that elapses between the release of the music and any empirical research carried out. In this case, there are over 18 years between the release of the album and this present study. Nevertheless, it is interesting to discover how listeners have interpreted the music and how it has become part of their personal histories.

As stated at the outset, in order to ascertain how people have identified with the content of this particular album I registered on two online forums. The first was Extreme's own fan website, and the second was a specifically Christian forum that catered to Christians who were fans of heavy metal, 'Christian Metal Heaven'. The latter identifies itself as follows: 'the Christian Metal Realm is a community made up of largely Christians who also happen to love heavy metal! You do not have to be a Christian to join but you must be respectful!'[17] Finally, I also registered with YouTube and followed comments about specific songs on the album. Overall, my analysis suggests that apocalyptic interpretations are popular. Both personal and global apocalyptic discourse peppers audience reactions.

As expected, on the Extreme fan forum there were already numerous comments on the content of *III Sides to Every Story*. It was no surprise to see that, compared to other topics, there was little in regard to themes and contexts that were related to elements of apocalypticism outlined above. Most comments were confined to general issues, such as musicianship.[18] However, there were a good number that touched on spiritual issues. On each forum a number of threads had been established that examined not only the album in general but also the possible meanings of certain songs. One of my favourite summations of *III Sides* is encapsulated in a comment on a thread that questioned if this album was Extreme's best to date:

III Sides is my favorite album to date because it helped me get through so much turmoil in my life. Everyone is different and has different musical tastes and backgrounds. Someone who has not been exposed to any kind of

17. This statement is published on the home page header: http://christianmetalrealm.niceboard.com/forum.htm (accessed 27 July 2010).

18. It is interesting to note that the vast majority of posts in regard to musicianship are comments on how good Nuno Bettencourt is on the guitar!

orchestral music may not appreciate the Third Side, which appears to be the most critiqued work they have ever written. I for one think that it is some of the greatest music ever written in the pop genre. Don't get me wrong, I crank SDR[19] every time I get the opportunity and it really gets me going, but when I need to think deeply about things in life, *III Sides* is always the album I turn to.[20]

Another, more startling comment reads as follows: 'this album helped me through a very rough patch in my life, and probably kept me from committing suicide.'[21] These are not untypical comments and raise some interesting issues. The album is emotionally and, arguably, intellectually significant (as much popular music is). However, *III Sides* seems particularly important in this respect. From this perspective, *III Sides to Every Story* is consumed and used as an important tool in caring for the self. As Tia DeNora observes, 'music is an active ingredient in the organization of self, the shifting of mood, energy level, conduct style, mode of attention and engagement with the world' (2000: 61). The album is significant in identity formation and redemption. A sense of redemption after intense crises is often associated with apocalyptic ideas of a religious nature. Whether connected to a wider narrative that views apocalypse as a struggle between good and evil that results in a new creation and connects to a wider global fatalism, or simply the product of severe personal stress overcome by experiences that can be understood in a religious sense, both have close connections to apocalypticism—such is the fecundity of the idea.

Another interesting comment taken from the Christian Metal Realm forum reads as follows:

> Although Extreme's musical style is not one of my favorites, after looking this album up, and listening to the songs while reading the lyrics, I think this album is both brilliant and deep. Theologically speaking, the biblical content in the lyrics is unsystematic and subjective, and in my opinion, is congruent with the album. Again the album is deep, sort of like looking through an exquisite diamond toward the light, turn it just a little, and you'll see something new and beautiful.[22]

As Robin Sylvan argues, in many circumstances music 'provides almost everything for its adherents that a traditional religion would. In the heat of the music, it provides a powerful religious experience which is both the foundation and the goal of the whole enterprise, an encounter with the numinous that is the core of all religions' (2002: 4). Rather than interpret what the

19. SDR refers to their latest album release *Saudades de Rock* (2008).

20. Comment from the Extreme forum website (accessed 31 August 2010).

21. Comment on 'Who Cares' on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXOpLiQrAgE&p=6ECC0F5304F2D1DE&playnext=1&index=2(accessed 24 August 2010).

22. Christian Metal Realm (accessed 24 August 2010).

listener writes as new revelation every time the music is listened to, I would rather argue that each airing of the music reinforces presuppositions that the listener already holds (see DeNora 2000: 46-74). In this sense, it is not so much new revelation as the reaffirming and reinforcing of current structures of belief that leads to stability.

Finally, what of the apocalyptic themes in the 'third' part of the album, 'The Truth'? The song that stimulated most comment was, unsurprisingly, 'Rise 'N Shine'. One forum user describes it as their

> favorite in regard to lyrics. The references to Daniel's dream and signs of our present age point to the Lord's timetable and eternal purposes, a reality, regardless of man's obliviousness or hostility to those times and purposes. When I think of [the] title of this album in the context of this song; the three sides to the story are yours, mine, and the Lord's.[23]

The song was also posted on YouTube on Christmas Day 2008 and attracted considerable comment. Some of it concerned the photographs that accompanied the song, which, as the author noted, were of Ground Zero and some military sites in the United States. This is interesting in itself, not only because it links the context of the original song with a post-9/11 world, but also because it links it to the symbolism of 9/11 itself and the image of apocalyptic violence that it represents. This is not surprising, when one considers some of the language used in public life at the time. George W. Bush's Undersecretary of Defense, Lieutenant-General William Boykin, reportedly said in reaction to 9/11, 'the enemy is a spiritual enemy, he's called the principality of darkness. The enemy is a guy called Satan' (Gray 2007: 161). Such overtly apocalyptic language is typical of the apocalyptic fervour prevalent since before the start of the First Gulf War and evident in the interpretations of Extreme's *III Sides*, particularly 'Rise 'N' Shine'. Extreme's work has been decoded according to the pop-dispensationalist context occasioned by a certain stream of American Christianity and politics.

Conclusion

I have argued that *III Sides to Every Story* can be located in a particular context. Although empirical evidence demonstrates that the album has been interpreted in a variety of ways, the prominence of apocalyptic imagery and biblical themes locates the album within North American pop-dispensationalist 'rapture culture', typified by the *Left Behind* series (see Frykholm 2004) and Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* (1971). Moreover, such is the power of the music: it can be understood as 'ministering' to fans, helping them, as religion often does, to rediscover themselves and bring stability to their lives.

23. Christian Metal Realm (accessed 24 August 2010).

DeNora notes that part of the power of music is that it helps people 'to shift mood or energy level, as perceived situations dictate, or as part of the "care of self"' (2000: 53). To a degree, this has redemptive power for those suffering personal apocalyptic experiences. As one fan put it:

> My personal opinion of this disc was that Gary Cherone, who writes the majority of the lyrics, was dead-on when this was released as far as content goes and it amazes me how this album could be released today and still have the same EXACT meaning and thought provoking ideas . . . [T]the lyrics are a lot more deeper than I originally thought and it amazes me the apocalyptic and current events theme that runs all over this album . . . Extreme was dead on with this album and it amazes me that when I play it how much meaning this album has.[24]

24. Christian Metal Realm (accessed 24 August 2010).

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Index