

**Preludes to Armageddon:  
Apocalyptic Clamor and Complaint in Britain, 1850-1914**

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Believing as I do that man in the distant future will be a far more perfect creature than he now is, it is an intolerable thought that he and all other sentient beings are doomed to complete annihilation after such long-continued progress. To those who fully admit the immortality of the human soul, the destruction of our world will not appear so dreadful.

—Charles Darwin, *Life and Letters*

‘Some say it’s the end of the world, and be hanged if I don’t think it looks like it.’

—George Eliot, *Middlemarch*

Chaos, Cosmos! Cosmos, Chaos! who can tell how all will end?

—Alfred Lord Tennyson, ‘Locksley Hall Sixty Years After’

**I.**

The apocalyptic rhetoric and images in common parlance at the close of the twentieth century have deep rootstocks in ancient Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and other sources. Although apocalyptic art and literature have been common to Europe and (later) America since the rise of Christianity, they have taken on wildly diverse forms, each corresponding to specific cultural and political circumstances. Like all predominantly Christian cultures, Britain possesses a strong and varied tradition of apocalyptic expression, which can be found in both religious and secular writings. A crucial transformation occurred in this tradition between 1850 and 1939, particularly during the First World War, when rapid technological and social changes of previous decades were compounded and highlighted by the immense human and material cost of the conflict. A survey of religious and literary publications of the period yields evidence that the aesthetic and linguistic transformation that occurred in apocalyptic writings imbued the tradition with substantial political influence, most evident today in right-wing Protestant Evangelical pressure groups in the USA. The nearly universal adult literacy of England the late nineteenth century brought apocalyptists large general audiences for the first time, and they absorbed new scientific and political terminology in order to legitimize what were generally outlandish claims about the

end of the world. The use of scientific and political idioms during the war led, by the war's end, to a prototype of modern-day apocalyptic texts, some of which sell in the millions. These best-selling apocalyptic texts are, however, anomalous cases, and will be treated as largely peripheral, even vestigial, for the purposes of this survey, which concentrates on the British tradition between 1850-1914, offering a thorough grounding for those interested in either the burst of apocalyptic enthusiasm during the First World War or its consequent reverberations evident everywhere around us today in the USA.

Prominent authors of the First World War turned on occasion to biblical language of the "end" in order to depict the horrors of trench warfare. Wilfred Owen and Isaac Rosenberg made significant use of apocalyptic language in their war poems; Ford Madox Ford used apocalyptic motifs in his post-war fiction. Non-combatant authors such as D.H. Lawrence used similar themes to depict a comprehensive spiritual and moral change that they believed had occurred during the war. The highly-stylized and nuanced use of apocalyptic language by canonical authors offers a contrast to the more belligerent and political use of the same language by religious authors who sought to convince their audiences of Britain's divine role in the conflict and the necessity of heeding signs of the approaching end of history.

Although there exists no precise evidence that authors like D.H. Lawrence ever directly encountered the writings of strictly religious apocalyptic writers (Aldous Huxley would appear to be one exception; consider the unambiguous case of *Crome Yellow*), the writings of both share too many traits to be entirely disassociated. If one recognizes that there are no unconditional boundaries between these two bodies of literature—that of canonical authors and that of now almost wholly forgotten religious authors—one comes closer to viewing both as part of a sweeping response to both the human degradations of the war and even the young twentieth century itself. Religious authors did not hesitate to employ very vivid if now too-often clichéd apocalyptic metaphors, while one finds in poems and novels of the period valuable historical information. Consider, for instance, the little-known William Pascoe Goard's description of the war as an "age-long conflict between the Babylon kingdoms of the Devil, and the Israel kingdoms of the Lord," going on to cite Prussianism as "our Antichrist, just as Nero was the Antichrist of the Christian martyrs."<sup>1</sup> At the very least, this must be seen as a very literary reading of the events of 1914-1918. On the other hand, readers of Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* quaternary or Siegfried Sassoon's fictionalized autobiography *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* are offered an opportunity to glimpse into the day to day lives of front-line English soldiers, documentation that stands as substantial historical record. This approach, a blurring of boundaries, is by no means original, but it serves as a valid point of departure for an account of a peculiar and hitherto overlooked aggregation of texts preoccupied with endings, of various understandings of civilization, the universe, or less dramatically, a way of life, of certain beliefs that seemed to be deeply imperiled. While no canonical author (aside, perhaps, from D.H. Lawrence) foresaw the immediate end of human history in a larger cosmic drama, many believed that the war represented a distinct historical juncture and also that something was passing from the world. The biblical language of endings, so thoroughly practiced in religious writings, served very well toward this end. What is important is that they chose not only to express these beliefs so clearly when they did, but also that they chose to do so in a strikingly similar manner.

That such a great number of religious and secular authors would be bound up by the same concerns in this period is not in itself compelling. One of the ways in which epochs are defined is

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<sup>1</sup> William Pascoe Goard, *New light on the Old Paths and the Fifth Gospel* (London: Marshall Brothers Limited, 1917) 362

through the tracing of a system of shared beliefs, even if principal proponents assumed antipodal attitudes toward the same subjects. What is intriguing about these years is that they inspired such a volume of fatalistic and discouraging commentary. Not until the late 1970s in the USA would there again appear such a frenzied group of apocalyptic envoys, most notably Hal Lindsey, author of *The Late Great Planet Earth*, probably the most widely distributed work of apocalyptic commentary in the second half of the twentieth century. Although the post-hippie-era doomsayers were reacting to an altogether different set of circumstances, they tended to express their concerns in a manner remarkably similar to that of English apocalyptists a century before. Unfortunately, these excited doomsday manifestos of the second half of the century fall beyond the scope of this article and could easily occupy the whole of another.

## I.i

A newspaper headline proclaims “experts anticipate an increase in apocalyptic cult activity as the century comes to a close.” Another, “how long do we have left?” If a nineteenth-century reader were to happen miraculously upon a warehouse filled with late twentieth-century newspapers and had a mind to read through them for some clue to what the future would hold, he would encounter what appeared to be a world on the brink of destruction. He would be amazed by reports of Doomsday weapons, millennial cults, and imminent Armageddons. He would find pages emblazoned with end-time pronouncements. A range of topics from global warming to Cold War politics would be treated in distinctly apocalyptic terms. He would also be surprised by the ease with which such language was used, how frequently and insistently the grand drama of the Last Days was evoked with what seemed like complete sincerity. He would see a world fast approaching ruin, but he would also notice other things no less curious. Reading over several decades of headlines, he would find a world that had been actively ending from the late 1960s right up to the turn of the millennium. It would gradually become apparent that the apocalyptic nomenclature used by some with fierce religious intensity was used by others with casual ease. The newspapers themselves would not seem very different from those to which he was accustomed, but the news would feel more unsettling, more desperate. What he probably would not know is that the origins of this late twentieth-century apocalyptic fervor could be found in his own age.

Apocalyptic “experts” and pamphleteers at the end of the nineteenth century constructed a prototypical apocalyptic text that would be imitated by Doomsday prophets to come. Their apocalyptic rhetoric—representing a unique and representative reaction to modernity—was adopted by novelists and poets. The urge to understand history according to unambiguous stages of development and progress has been a widespread and enduring phenomenon in Europe since the Middle Ages. The notion of meaningless events scattered along the course of what could only be called a history of chaos is difficult for many to accept. History—understood teleologically, advancing toward a perfected state, either a utopia or a millennium—necessarily implies an eventual state of closure, a distinct ending. Eschatological readings of history, based on apocalyptic scripture and sometimes fraudulent contemporary prophecies, provide a lens through which interpreters can comprehend events according to their own biases and lend those events a degree of moral depth. It is a form of historical mapping that allows a single community to envision itself as chosen for perfection and survival. The idea of imminent (and violent) divine intervention in human affairs is generally perceived as a comforting prospect for groups or individuals that believe themselves distressed by forces beyond their control. Apocalyptic writing, originating over three-thousand years ago in Zoroastrian scripture, has throughout

history provided a political and spiritual brace for communities facing hardship, loss, and uncertainty. That is precisely the role it played in pre-First World War Britain. Apocalyptic expression has always involved a highly adaptive form of rhetoric; it continually modernizes itself, stylistically and substantively, in order to retain a sense of relevance. Immediate political and social concerns are absorbed and transformed into incessantly contemporary brands of Doomsday speculation. When confronted with the notion of the Kaiser as the Antichrist pursuing a Satanic program through the execution of the war or the divine role of Britain in the Last Days, readers would have found the invocation of the end-times more pertinent than they might have at first believed. Perceived without the benefit of critical-historical perspective, such claims can appear irrefutable to readers hoping to understand events in their own presumably benighted age of deteriorating moral conduct and looming natural or military disaster.

Information about the end of the world can be found today in supermarket checkouts, television programs, and Internet web-sites. Authors and broadcasters promise a looming cataclysm from which only true believers will be spared; they tell of insidious world-conspiracies led by satanic forces and of an unavoidable nuclear holocaust. The credulous and desperate are targeted at every turn with tales of a new world to come. In Victorian England, the primary channel for Doomsday speculation could be found on the bookshelf. It is there that Britons encountered enticing descriptions of Germany's evil purpose and England's Christian destiny, and it is there that one finds a common line of inquiry and reference arising from the aesthetic of endings.

### **I.iii**

One could argue that the deep roots of this conviction could be traced to 16th- and 17th-century England and Northern Europe. One could equally argue for deeper roots in pre-Reformation Germany and Bohemia. Others would look further still, to the early Church and pre-Christian Jewish apocalypses, but the most important sources are much closer, both culturally and politically, than most suspect. The modern religious apocalyptic text—highly technical, confidently scientific, stridently ideological, consciously political, even openly militaristic—emerged in England during the First World War. This emergence can be traced textually, through stylistic and structural changes that appeared during and because of the war. Pressures stemming from new technology and the negotiation of national and ideological identity forced apocalyptic writers to alter their ages-old formula in order to meet a new mass-market, one facilitated by universal adult literacy and changes in the publishing industry. Although apocalyptic popularisers wrote books for broad consumption, curiously, no actual social movements—millennial or otherwise—paralleled this publishing boom in England. This permits a study of the texts themselves more closely, unhindered by broader sociological concerns. It is important to consider the ways in which apocalyptic language was used not only by Anglican apocalyptists with such delightful names as F.L. Rawson, Henry Goudge, and Fuller Gooch, but by novelists, poets, and even economists of the period to describe a wide variety of events and circumstances both secular and religious, a phenomenon that may have accelerated the natural absorption of apocalyptic terms into mainstream language. While authors such as Wilfred Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, and Ford Madox Ford were appropriating apocalyptic language in a self-conscious and literary manner, many others continued to exploit the same language to develop a politically-charged rhetoric of Doomsday inextricably linked with conceptions of national destiny. The repercussions of this can be observed primarily in America, where English apocalyptic writing was quickly assimilated and where millennial enthusiasm continued to burgeon long after similar

trends in England had waned. During the First World War, apocalyptic writing experienced an intense phase of maturation, and a comparison of this period with the present could tell us a great deal about contemporary American apocalypticism and its political consequences.

#### **I.iv**

Two distinguishing qualities define the modern religious apocalyptic text. The first is the use of scientific and technological terminology, often in an attempt to legitimate otherwise preposterous claims. The second quality that defines the modern apocalyptic text is its preoccupation with ideological or national interests. The original Jewish apocalypses were highly political. Apocalyptic texts were also applied toward political ends in the Middle and early Modern Ages. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century, however, that the urgency of scientific advance and ideological placement became concentrated enough to compel Doomsday authors to alter their ancient but enormously pliant formulae in new and fascinating ways. Ironically, it is the ability to transcend these specific concerns that distinguishes the better writers of the period.

The scientific dimensions of twentieth-century apocalyptic writing can be traced at least as far back as the seventeenth century and Thomas Burnet's *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681). Burnet applied contemporary scientific idiom to prophetic discourse, describing the final days of the earth in geological terms. Other scientists also wrote extensively on the subject, including Sir Isaac Newton, who devoted a great deal of his later life to the interpretation of *Daniel* and *Revelation* and William Whiston, whose *Vindication of the New Theory of the Earth* (1696) "argued that a comet's close passage had caused Noah's flood, and that the earth's prophesied destruction by fire would be by the same means."<sup>2</sup> As numeracy became more common and even necessary for survival in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, lay students of scripture tended to practice rigid systematic forms of interpretation; this gave impetus to the previously retarded acclimation of apocalyptic writing to scientific language and structure. Today, pseudo-scientific vernacular is used in numerous commonplace capacities, from the sale of vacuum-cleaners to explanations of the most basic aspects of human behavior. It is no wonder that the same language would be used by those selling Doomsday, and it becomes a particularly potent force when mingled with the complexities of biblical prophecy.

In the decades leading up to the First World War, extremes of patriotic sentiment were not uncommon in England, finding expression in many forms, including religious pamphlets and Future-War novels. Upon the outbreak of the war, however, apocalyptic religious writers immediately formed a chorus of nationalistic rhetoric. Along strictly theological lines, they defined Germany as an agent of evil, of Satan himself, preparing the way for Armageddon (which was often seen as looming in the post-war years); England was portrayed as divinely ordained, given her empire by God, to protect as a shepherd his sheep; according to loosely-interpreted passages of scripture, England was even transformed into Israel itself, a notion anticipated by Blake, who proclaimed in the now-controversial introduction to his epic *Milton*:

I will not cease from mental fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,  
Till we have built Jerusalem,  
In England's green and pleasant land.

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More, Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (London: Harvard University Press, 1992) 67

Along what could be considered more ideological lines, apocalyptists viewed autocratic and militaristic societies, embodied in Prussianism, as a direct threat to liberal democratic ones. Some also believed that freedom of trade and market economies were the way of the future and that this freedom would actually prevent war altogether (an idea first posited by Sir Norman Angell in *The Great Illusion* four years before the First World War and which was chiefly disregarded at first). Most apocalyptists, however, were more pessimistic. In an age when the creed of progress prevailed, they saw a world that was deteriorating rapidly. They identified a wide range of conditions and events that foretold the imminent return of Christ. As a result, the assimilation of ideological and strictly eschatological doctrines was an inevitable but virtually unrealizable endeavor. Many attempted this unification, and their example prepared the way for apocalyptists of following years, each formulating scenarios appropriate to his own time.

#### I.v

Rather than speak strictly of the apocalyptic author or apocalyptist (except as a convenience, sometimes a necessity) it is preferable to speak of the apocalyptic impulse exhibited by an author, exhibited in observable and often repeated patterns. The presence of the term apocalyptist in this article should not be confused with an insistence that any of the authors in question was entirely and merely an apocalyptic writer; to do so would be to reduce the author to a radical, a two-dimensional zealot or ideologue. Many of the religiously-affiliated authors are by dint of their roles as members of the clergy primarily apocalyptic, but it would be incorrect to think that they are only this. Their apocalyptic stripes may be more conspicuous than those of, say, a poet like Isaac Rosenberg, whose reluctant apocalypse must be teased out through analysis, but they often turned their attentions to other subjects, some entirely unrelated to the apocalypse. It follows that an author can be at one time or another an apocalyptist, if even for the briefest of moments, and so a critic need not be accused of essentialism when treating his subject.

The decision to record the burgeoning of this apocalyptic impulse chronologically stems from two related rationales. First, it is appropriate to approach a history-centered reflex specifically in historical terms in order to catch it in its natural environment, so to speak; and second, it is desirable to do so considering that the very nature of apocalyptic observations and anticipation is one defined by the marking of signs and of gazing as much into the past as into the future; thus it is necessary to trace its workings through a broad diachronic lens in order to allow for commentary on the flux of apocalyptic ardor in light of passing events, expectancies, disappointments. The authors covered in this article ordinarily shared the following beliefs:

- That history was to be viewed as eschatologically driven, thus yielding moralistic readings of events
- That any one of a number of Golden Ages had preceded a more corrupt or fallen state and to which the present age could be unfavorably compared
- That current events represented the beginning of a new epoch and that the world was on the cusp of either an unremitting dark age or approaching millennial perfection
- That there had occurred or would occur a divine intercession into the earthly realm, either metaphorically or essentially

## I.vi

The shock of the new stirred the apocalyptic imagination as much then as it does now. Most apocalyptists in England during the reigns of Victoria, Edward VI, and George V were reactionary and opposed to all things that could be considered modern: seemingly unbridled technological advance, cries for sexual and economic parity, the emergence of new art forms, global economics, encounters with new cultures, apostasy and paganism, even “Nietzschism” were all perceived as clear signs of the coming end. The parallels with our own age are apparent. As strange as the world seemed to have become, as precarious as moral and cultural values appeared to be, all would be redeemed at the approaching end of history, when Christ would make a new heaven and a new earth. Responses varied, but many echoed the apocalyptic belief that a world, if not *the* world, was passing away. Many intellectuals wrote of the changes taking place in Europe in apocalyptic terms; poets and novelists writing during the First World War saw a dark future in which nations would “trek from progress” and “all memory dies.” It is also in this era that religious apocalyptic and what have been termed secular apocalyptic conceptions of historical destiny diverged. The religious apocalyptic remains anchored to an eschatological foundation to this day, while secular apocalyptic expression involves the belief that history will eventually end not by the will of God but through human recklessness. The prophecies of the latter are still couched in moral terms evocative of biblical notions of punishment, but humankind’s sin is against nature, the earth itself, and sin takes the form of pollution, nuclear escalation, overconsumption.

It is in this same era, if one includes the tumultuous twenties, that the arts experienced a radical stage of experimentation and transformation, evident in the works of Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque, Emilio Marinetti, Marcel Duchamp, Guillaume Apollinaire, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Arnold Schoenberg, Igor Stravinski, and so many others. In the always precarious literary world, the Georgians were displaced by the Modernists; speculative fiction as a genre would change from militaristic and propagandistic to pacifist and anti-establishment. Apocalyptic writing would become more bleak, more belligerent, and in the end, more professional, eventually finding large audiences around the world. Before one can grasp the full range of apocalyptic writing that emerged during the war, it is necessary to examine closely apocalyptic authors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in order to grasp the ways in which perceptions of the world’s end familiar to us today came into being.

## II.

While a doctrine of progress may have prevailed in Victorian Britain, particularly within scientific circles, certain religious and political communities fostered less optimistic, more agitated responses to the events and marks of this self-same progress. There were preludes, great and small, to the immense outpouring of apocalyptic writing of the First World War. Doomsday passages in religious pamphlets, sermons, and longer works of scriptural exegesis offer a glimpse at the frequently overlooked apocalyptic temper that characterized the second half of the nineteenth century in Britain, shadows cast by the light of science. Some of these would appear to have been a belated reaction to the decisive Prussian victories in 1870, although others that emerged later seem to have been a response to a widespread malaise that settled over Europe, exacerbated by the state of general military escalation, problems with colonial administration, and seemingly endless making and breaking of treaties. This would, however, be paralleled by a similar reaction to industrial and scientific growth, distinguished by a tendency to associate

technology with a gradual aberrant decline from an Edenic state or a more theocratic, provincial past.

In 1870, the Rev. Alfred Jones preached a sermon in Aske's Hospital Chapel that began with an excited response to the Franco-Prussian War:

Our Church calls upon us to-day to look for the second Advent of Christ, and this solemn season has never dawned upon the Church amidst such wonderful political convulsions as are taking place in the world at the present moment. A few months ago there was nothing in the political horizon to alarm the sons of men: but how changed is the face of the world now!<sup>3</sup>

The war offered an occasion for considerable exaggeration and considerations of the fragile state of any period of peace in Europe. He went on to explain that

in a moment the world was convulsed with the gathering together of peoples and nations to battle, and such gathering together as the world has never before seen. More than a million of men were gathered together with almost superhuman rapidity, with all their terrible scientific appliances for modern warfare.<sup>4</sup>

Jones's reaction offers a preview of the overwhelming apocalyptic response to the First World War. Although most military historians consider the American Civil War the first modern war, a similar case could be made for the Franco-Prussian War. Its proximity to England sparked an appropriate interest among the English. The conflict saw massive troop movements by way of elaborate rail systems in western Europe (it should be noted that comparable use was made by opposing forces during the Franco-Austrian War in 1859), breach-loading rifles, heavy artillery, and new tactics developed to deal with these advances. It is easy to see how the war drew attention to technological developments, but more benign related developments had been sending ripples across Europe for decades. The Rev. Edward Hoare, whose apocalyptic writings were revived immediately before and during the First World War, published *The Time of the End* in 1846. He expressed unease with the march of science, warning that "just before the advent, there shall be an increase of science and traveling,"<sup>5</sup> a passage drawn from *Daniel* 12:4 that would become very popular among anti-scientific apocalyptists to come. To move just outside the proposed scope of this article and into a more political vein, in 1848 the Rev. A.J. Steed published *The Second Coming of Christ: Its Certainty and Supposed Nearness*, in which he attempted to link existing European nations with kingdoms in the Bible in order to define their relation to the apocalypse. These are two lines of interest that would flourish by the century's end, the scientific and political Armageddons.

Corresponding to these negative views was a no less literary one in which the world was seen moving toward utopian perfection. This was not entirely new. Lakshmi Mani writes that during the Romantic era the "millennium came to be interpreted as revolution," and the American Revolution came "to be hailed on both sides of the Atlantic as the harbinger of a renovated world order."<sup>6</sup> Despite reliance upon either the progressive or destructive values of science, no author of the period could have accurately predicted what was to come, the triumph of medicine over disease as well as aerial bombardment of civilian populations. We even find

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<sup>3</sup> Rev. Alfred Jones, *Armageddon* (London: William Macintosh, 1870) 1

<sup>4</sup> Jones, *Armageddon*, 5

<sup>5</sup> Rev. Edward Hoare, *The Time of the End* (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1846) 13

<sup>6</sup> Lakshmi Mani, *The Apocalyptic Vision in Nineteenth Century American Fiction* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1981) vii

ambivalence on the part of Alfred Lord Tennyson, who offered a Janus-faced vision of the future in 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After', when he wrote that beyond the "coming changes" earth will be something other "than the wildest modern guess of you and me. / Earth may reach her earthly-worst," or may "gain her earthly-best."<sup>7</sup>

## II.i

In 1853, four anonymous works appeared whose themes were enormously apocalyptic but whose rhetoric appears not to have been politically motivated. The first, *A Guide to the Apocalypse*, is an extensive and close interpretation of *Revelation*, lengthy and scientific in approach. This would have suited the scientifically optimistic nature of the era in its reliance upon scientific method and forms of description. The second, by Aliquis, a curate of the Diocese of Durham, was entitled *Development of the Apocalyptic Types of the Red Dragon and Beasts*. The text was aided by fold-out charts, and its style was again phrased in a highly scientific manner:

Sacred history, (whether recording events that are past or prophetic of the future), being comprehensive and condensed in the extreme, whilst it imparts an account of the world from its creation to the final dissolution of all sublunary things, epitomises and fasciculates them into epochs, tied up in parcels by distinctive bands of ligatures.<sup>8</sup>

While both of these works evidenced an interest in the end of time, neither fixed a date or cited specific political situations. The third, *The Antichristian Kingdoms of Europe; or, the Present State and Future Prospects of the Nations of the Symbolical Earth*, was equally non-specific and non-alarmist. The fourth, *Armageddon: or, the Battle-Field on which the Antichrist and his armies are to be overthrown, as seen through the telescope of divine prediction*, was predictably more pessimistic. The author insisted that "the present state of our world" indicates "the near approach of extraordinary events, and that we are on the eve of some momentous crisis."<sup>9</sup> These four present the range of apocalyptic writing that would continue, ranging from hermetic scholarly to actively political works, of both positive and fatalistic bearings.

Curiously, no more works of this nature appeared for several years, until a number were published in the period 1858 to 1862. In 1858, after a period of relative calm for apocalyptists, another anonymous work entitled *Armageddon* appeared that dwarfed its predecessors in scope and size. It was published in three volumes with an accompanying appendix replete with fold-out maps and charts. It was an exhaustive attempt to correlate political relationships of the period with both metaphorical (mystical, numerological) and historical elements of *Revelation*. It embodied concern with both the unchecked advance of technology and the militaristic tenor of the period. Citing the same passages from *Daniel* as the Rev. Hoare in 1846, the author proposed that the

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<sup>7</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After', ll. 231-233

<sup>8</sup> Aliquis, *Development of the Apocalyptic Types of the Red Dragon and Beasts* (London: T. Seely, 1853)

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous, *Armageddon: or, the Battle-Field on which Antichrist and his armies are to be overthrown, as seen through the telescope of divine prediction* (London: Houston & Stoneman, 1853) 4

signs given by the prophet Daniel, as certain indications of the fast approaching time of the end, are to all appearance so manifestly fulfilling in addition to those already mentioned, as to deserve our most serious attention.<sup>10</sup>

The author went on to list the steam-carriage, the electric telegraph, telescopes, and chloroform as signs of the coming apocalypse. The development of large continental land armies also appears to have been a central concern, as the author wrote of “1,500,000 regular soldiers” that were then

arrayed on the Continent ready for mutual slaughter, and awaiting only a signal from their respective cabinets to direct their united hostility against any country which may have provoked their resentment.<sup>11</sup>

This sort of grim anticipation became increasingly common before the Franco-Prussian War. Other apocalyptic tracts that followed on the heels of *Armageddon* (1858) include the anonymous *The Second Coming of Christ, and the Manifestation of Antichrist* (1859), Benjamin Newton’s *Duty of Giving Heed to the Predictions of Scripture Respecting Events that are to Precede the Return of Our Lord* (1861), Edward Holblyn’s *The Millennium: What is it?* (1862), the Rev. George Lovely’s *Lessons on Unfulfilled Prophecy* (1862), and Thomas Freeman’s *The Great Prophetic Question* (1862).

Another period of calm followed the war. 1888 saw the publication of a series of pamphlets: J. Junr’s *Evidence Respecting Hell and our Way Thither* and William Gow’s *The Apocalypse Unveiled*, followed in 1889 by Samuel Garret’s *Coming Conflict of the Church; or, Present Truth for the Present Day*. Anxiety in regard to militaristic antagonism expressed in earlier apocalyptic tracts had fermented into the conclusion for many that war was inevitable. Even in 1883, Lord Wolseley stated that “he did not believe in universal peace” and that “most sensible people” must feel “that there was coming over the world some terrible war.”<sup>12</sup> In 1903, the Rev. J. Ellam wrote in *Prophetic Studies or Some Present-Day Fact as Seen in the Light of Prophecy*, that

Throughout Scripture the closing period [. . .] is marked as a time of conflict. Wars and rumours of wars are amongst its features. Certainly the state of Europe is, and for some time past has been, remarkable in this respect; for not only has it seen some terrible conflicts, as the Franco-German War in 1870, the Servian [sic] War in 1876, and the Russian War against Turkey in 1877; but it is at the present time armed as it never was before. This state of unrest and preparation has been continuous during the whole closing period, until it culminates in the great final crisis predicted by Ezekiel.<sup>13</sup>

1913 and 1914 saw another resurgence of apocalyptic tracts. The Rev. A.J. Steed’s *The Second Coming of Christ: Its Certainty and Supposed Nearness* was an attempt to link scriptural evidence with contemporary circumstances. The Rev. James Davidson’s *The Second Coming, Christ’s Prophetic Discourse, Key to its Interpretation* treats what the author believed to be

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<sup>10</sup> Anonymous; a Master of Arts of the University of Cambridge, *Armageddon; or, a Warning Voice From the Last Battle-Field of Nations, Proclaiming by the Mouths of Prophets and Apostles, that the Close of the Times of the Gentiles, the Second Personal Advent, and Millennial Reign of Our Lord and Saviour Christ, are Nigh at Hand* (London: Wertheim, Macintosh, and Hunt, 1858) vol. 3, 512

<sup>11</sup> Anonymous, *Armageddon; or a Warning Voice*, 489

<sup>12</sup> Lord Wolseley, *Standard*, 3 December 1883

<sup>13</sup> Rev. J. Ellam, *Prophetic Studies or Some Present-Day Facts as Seen in the Light of Prophecy* (London: Chas. J. Thynne, 1903) 10

“the general weakening of faith in the trustworthiness of many parts of the scripture,” although unlike Steed, he failed to establish any connection between specific historical events and the prophecies of *Revelation*. The Rev. Hoare’s scriptural interpretations, first published in 1876, were republished in 1913. Hoare believed the end was near thirty-seven years before; using the familiar figure of the dream statue in *Daniel*, he located the reader historically:

now the remarkable, and I believe I may say the indisputable, fact, is that, according to the prophecy, all these four kingdoms have arisen. They have followed each other exactly as it was predicted. Babylon was the head of gold, or the lion. The Medes and Persians were the breast of silver, or the bear. Greece, always called ‘the brazen armed,’ in classical poetry, was the belly and thighs of the leopard. And then the mighty power of Rome, far exceeding all the others in its terrible strength, with the legs of iron in the royal image, and the teeth of iron in the prophetic beast. Thus far there is an agreement almost unanimous among the students of prophetic Scripture; and the conclusion certainly is, that we have already been a long time under the last of the four successive empires of the world.<sup>14</sup>

In May 1914, the Rev. E.L. Langston published *Ominous Days! or the Signs of the Times*. It was reprinted in August 1914, February 1915, February 1916, and May 1918. In the preface to the 1918 printing, Langston asserted that

there is every indication that the coming of the Lord [. . .] is imminent; also, that signs for the setting up of a Great Antichristian Empire in the world governed by the Antichrist himself are even more clear than previously.<sup>15</sup>

Again, the student of apocalyptic subjects in any age will recognize this sentiment immediately and understand the persuasiveness of this conspiracy-oriented hunt for the AntiChrist.

## II.ii

A comparable anxiety was also expressed in a unique form of fiction that grew in popularity in the decades preceding the First World War. John Batchelor identifies “the invasion novel” as a “distinct sub-genre of the [Edwardian] period,”<sup>16</sup> but this “sub-genre” dates to long before Edward’s reign. These stories, many of them tertiary apocalyptic texts, presented an opportunity for writers to capitalize on current political concerns while also appealing to readers’ longings for excitement and adventure. Focus tended to be placed on decisive victories, and little attention was paid to any suffering involved. Battles were described as mechanized or at least highly systematized, therefore swift. Enemies were portrayed as being hideously and needlessly aggressive. A manifold rhetoric becomes evident in this, condemning war as a terrible and pointless activity, yet urging the escalation of military forces as a preventative measure. There was a sense among many of the period that advances in military technology were leading toward the obsolescence of war and were therefore positive humanitarian achievements. This has proved to be an enduring belief. The 8 March 1997 issue of *The Economist* featured a lead article entitled ‘The Future of Warfare’ in which the possibilities of a mechanized and wholly unmanned army were presented. Although the Future-War story was a popular sub-genre in the period 1850 to 1914, it must be noted that not all of these texts were necessarily apocalyptic in tone or structure.

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<sup>14</sup> Rev. E. Hoare, *Rome Turkey, and Jerusalem* (London: Chas. J. Thynne, 1913) 7-8

<sup>15</sup> Rev. E.L. Langston, *Ominous Days! or the Signs of the Times* (London: Thynne, 1918) from the preface

<sup>16</sup> John Batchelor, *The Edwardian Novelists* (London: Duckworth, 1982) 8

The Future-War story was the most popular form of apocalyptic discourse in the late nineteenth century. It is generally thought to have been “born with the publication of Sir George Tomkyns Chesney’s ‘The Battle of Dorking’ in May 1871”<sup>17</sup> in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, which describes a German invasion of England. New technology and the efficiency of the centralized nation-state allow a swift and decisive victory for the Germans. The story opens with what could be considered the formula for apocalyptic expression throughout the ages:

And yet we had plenty of warnings, if we had only made use of them. The danger did not come on us suddenly unawares. It burst on us suddenly, ‘tis true, but its coming was foreshadowed plainly enough to open our eyes, if we had not been willfully blind. We English have only ourselves to blame for the humiliation which has been brought on the land.<sup>18</sup>

It is a transparent exhortation to the reader for increased defense spending, but the core ideals expressed are very close to those of Christian and Jewish apocalypses. A retrospective account of the invasion, defeat, and subjugation of England, it is a generally dull description of military maneuvers leading up to an English defeat and a moralizing conclusion. Delivered in awkward prose, its importance as an historical document overshadows its value as literature, its moral underpinnings squeezing any life from the story. It ends with an admonishment very much like those that pervade religious apocalyptic writings:

Truly the nation was ripe for a fall; but when I reflect how a little firmness and self-denial, or political courage and foresight, might have averted the disaster, I feel that the judgment must have really been deserved. A nation too selfish to defend its liberty could not have been fit to retain it.<sup>19</sup>

It is this pattern, one of warning, struggle, purgation, conservation, that would spring again and again from the works of very different writers in the next half-century, and this pattern must be traced with regard to its form rather than its necessarily religious or secular origins. It was as likely to pour from the pen of D.H. Lawrence as a maniacally apocalyptic Anglican prophet like C.H. Titterton. I.F. Clarke, whose *Voices Prophesying War* is the most comprehensive account of Future-War fiction, sees ‘The Battle of Dorking’ as the prototype for “a new literary device, which was admirably adapted to the new epoch of belligerent nationalism.”<sup>20</sup> Following in the tradition of officers who had published pamphlets addressing issues of national defense, Chesney introduced the novelty of presenting his case in fictional form, an experiment that proved vastly popular and profitable. By June, ‘The Battle of Dorking’ had been reprinted as a pamphlet and had sold more than 80,000 copies in a single month. Its message reverberated throughout the public and political worlds. The commotion was so widespread that William Gladstone felt compelled to deliver a speech at Whitby on 2 September that year, in which he denounced the commotion introduced by the story:

In *Blackwood’s Magazine* there has lately been a famous article called ‘The Battle of Dorking’. I should not mind this ‘Battle of Dorking’, if we could keep it to ourselves, if we could take care that nobody belonging to any other country should know that such follies could find currency or even favour with portions of the British public [. . .] Be on your

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<sup>17</sup> Richard Gid Powers, Introduction to *Armageddon*, Stanley Waterloo (Boston: Gregg Press, 1976) xi

<sup>18</sup> Sir George Tomkyns Chesney, *The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer* (Oxford: OUP, 1997) 3

<sup>19</sup> Chesney, *Battle of Dorking*, 48

<sup>20</sup> Clarke, *Voices*, 37

guard against alarmism. Depend upon it that there is not this astounding disposition on the part of all mankind to make us the objects of hatred.<sup>21</sup>

Aside from its political repercussions, 'The Battle of Dorking' had a significant literary impact. Five overseas editions of the story, eight foreign translations, and twenty-three related works (half of them anonymously authored) appeared as a result of the original publication. Although 'The Battle of Dorking' is not an exclusively apocalyptic work, it is the model for many later stories that extracted and developed its crisis-oriented tertiary apocalyptic tone. Chesney's story is prophetic; it is a warning; it resembles the political apocalyptic rhetoric of biblical apocalypses in that it is an attempt to sway opinion through the invocation of coming disaster.

### II.iii

1882 was a significant year for the student of apocalyptic writing. It is then that more apocalyptic books were published in England than at any other single time before 1914, and it was also a point at which the religious apocalyptic book temporarily gave way to its far more fashionable Future-War apocalyptic brother. The concerns centered chiefly on the proposed building of the channel tunnel and its possible use as a means of invasion by a foreign army. The idea of a channel tunnel was first proposed at the beginning of the nineteenth century by a French engineer who recognized the architectural possibilities inherent in the chalk floor. Napoleon showed interest, but intermittent periods of war prevented him from realizing any project along these lines. Private companies began digging a railroad tunnel near Folkestone, Kent, early in the century. A 6,000 ft. long tunnel was bored from the English side, but this project was halted after a national frenzy over the possibility of invasion from the mainland. While religious or primary apocalyptic authors continued to converge on issues such as the "Eastern Question", the future of the tottering Ottoman Empire, Future-War novelists, perhaps more attuned to popular opinion, set to work inspiring fear of a channel tunnel. *The Battle of Boulogne: or How Calais Became English Again, Another Version of the Channel Tunnel Affair*, by Hector Chauvin (writing under the pseudonym of the "Demure One", a one-time French demagogue), was one such venture. The "Demure One", the first-person narrator, confesses that he

had read all the publications in which English authors gave their opinions as to the ways in which the Channel Tunnel might be used against them; and in particular an article in which that distinguished general, Sir Garnet Wolseley, had prophesied that a demure man would spring up in France and seize the Tunnel without and previous to declaration of war. I resolved to be that demure man.<sup>22</sup>

The "Battle of Boulogne" was described in terms appropriate to the Napoleonic conflicts seventy years before, with the assumption of two armies lined against each other over a narrow and controllable front, with significant maneuvers revolving around the academic military model of a center on which two flanks pivot. Although military science had changed considerably in light of the relatively small colonial wars fought by Britain, these lessons were ignored; the British Army "held to sacred Napoleonic principles unadapted to developments which had occurred since Waterloo."<sup>23</sup> Chauvin described a decisive victory, resembling in this respect biblical descriptions of Armageddon or other divinely instituted or determined battles: "As for our army

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<sup>21</sup> William Gladstone, *Annual Register* (1871) pt. I, 108

<sup>22</sup> Hector Chauvin, *The Battle of Boulogne; or How Calais Became English Again, Another Version of the Channel Tunnel Affair* (London: C.F. Roworth, 1882) 7

<sup>23</sup> Gerard Degroot, *Blighty, British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996) 16

of 50,000 men [. . .] 5,000 of its men were dead or wounded; 40,000 were prisoners, and 5,000 had fled anywhere.” Typical of Victorian representations of war, the disaster was reduced to terms more suited to the playing field despite losses that would have been unacceptable even by First World War standards: “Once again I must exclaim: ‘What a Day!’”<sup>24</sup>

Concerns over the potential channel tunnel gave rise to pamphlets of a fictional nature that nonetheless stood as supposedly legitimate evidence of possible enemy exploitation of the tunnel. An author publishing under the pseudonym Vindex published *England Crushed; the Secret of the Channel Tunnel Revealed: Being the Literal Translation of a Secret Dispatch Recently Revised and Adopted by an August Federal Cabinet, Divulged to Vindex*. This was the work of a conspiracy theorist, and although it is not in the form of a fictional narrative, it carries the same message and embodies the same fears as fictive accounts of invasion. It ostensibly consisted of intercepted memoranda, addressed to an unidentified ‘Highborn Excellency’, from a German representative; the author of these memoranda suggested that the English work in collusion with them in order to defeat France in France’s “inevitable ‘Revanche War,’” but it is later revealed that the Germans intend to attack England as well: “The ‘West Saxon Army,’ numbering at least 100,000 men, will be landed on the coast of England near Deal (due preparations having been made there by filling the district with Germans incognito.)”<sup>25</sup> Although this is not fiction in the obvious sense, it is apocalyptic, written with the intention of inducing a sense of national crisis. Gerard Degroot writes that “‘invasion novels’ encouraged a paranoiac fear of rampant Germany imposing her sadistic will upon enfeebled Britain,”<sup>26</sup> but evidence suggests that, if it were written in a fictional form, it would be no more free from political bias. These two forms, paranoid political tracts and prophetic fiction, were more alike than different; both can be classified as apocalyptic literature and embody the same concerns, the same myths; both were highly rhetorical, intended to sway public opinion through fear for national security.

Also published in 1882 was *How John Bull Lost London or the Capture of the Channel Tunnel*, by an author writing as “Grip”. The political tone of the work is obvious from the outset. In this case it was to be the French and not the Germans who deviously plot and seize of the English side of a hypothetical tunnel. It embodied a fear of French aggression prompted by the example of the Franco-Prussian war, rising from the assumption that the French were in need of a militaristic outlet after their attempts to expand against Prussia had failed, that “under an adventurous and ambitious Frenchman, France, hopeless of ever beating back German legions from Alsace and Lorraine, might turn her attention to gaining laurels and consolation elsewhere.”<sup>27</sup> This novel was particularly bleak. The author saw an England isolated and pitted against a hostile world, one without hope of redemption: “all hope of crossing into the twentieth century in prosperity and peace is abandoned. A phase of trial must be endured.”<sup>28</sup> This is the apocalyptic pattern that can be distilled from so many works of this period. Like so many works of this genre, *How John Bull Lost London or the Capture of the Channel Tunnel* is apocalyptic in that it continually evokes a sense of approaching crisis if certain measures are not taken. Highly politicized and direct, texts like this can be viewed in the light of various models of the

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<sup>24</sup> Chauvin, *Battle of Boulogne*, 46

<sup>25</sup> Vindex, *England Crushed; the Secret of the Channel Tunnel Revealed: Being the Literal Translation of a Secret Dispatch Recently Revised and Adopted by an August Federal Cabinet, Divulged to Vindex* (London: P.S. King, Westminster, 1882) 9-10

<sup>26</sup> Degroot, *Blighty*, 2

<sup>27</sup> Grip (pseudonym), *How John Bull Lost London or the Capture of the Channel Tunnel* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1882) 14

<sup>28</sup> Grip, *How John Bull*, 14

apocalyptic as a form of persuasive rhetoric.

Admiral Thomas Symonds published a cautionary tract in the same year entitled *Our Great Peril, If War Overtake Us with our Fleet Deficient in Number, Structure, and Armament*. Like so many of the fictional and religious apocalypses of the period, Symonds foresaw certain defeat for England unless appropriate measures were taken to ensure the strength of her navy. It is rhetoric of a coercive and suspicious kind, inspiring fear of destruction of “Brighton, Worthing, Ventnor, Bournemouth, Torquay, and a hundred other peaceful towns on all our coasts!”<sup>29</sup> If this could be described as rearmament propaganda, it is of a less effective type than that created by authors of Future-War stories, some of which John Batchelor describes as being little more than “rearmament propaganda in fictional form.”<sup>30</sup> A telling example of this form of apocalyptic novel is the anonymously authored *The Invasion of England: Told Twenty Years After, by an Old Soldier*, which appeared the same year as Symonds’s *Our Great Peril*. The unattributed opening epigraph contains fantastic imagery similar to that of *Revelation*: “And I saw two hosts conflicting in the air, / And shadows doubtless of the unborn time, / Cast on the mirror of night.”<sup>31</sup> There is the apocalyptic sense of impending violence, as “portents of war were observable throughout the empire, and the air was filled with rumours of approaching tumult.”<sup>32</sup> This hardly prepares the reader for another turgid account of England’s unpreparedness in the face of unprovoked enemy invasion.

After 1882, the allure of the channel tunnel diminished perceptibly but was again awakened in 1888, when religious writers would emerge alongside novelists to become a potent political force. While two Future-War novels hit shelves that year, Francis Lester’s *The Taking of Dover* and the anonymously-authored *Repulse of the French*, religious authors were responsible for no fewer than eight principal works of apocalyptic writing, including William Birch’s *Prophetic Events Between 1898 and 1901*, the Rev. Ernest Chachemaille’s second book *Daniel’s Prophecies Now Being Fulfilled*, William Gow’s *The Apocalypse Unveiled*, and the Rev. M. Baxter’s *The Great Crisis from 1890 to 1901*. All of these books pointed to the Bible and predicted a period of hardship for the English. So while at the height of her imperial power, voices from within Britain were beginning to raise the warning that a darkness lay ahead for those who did not heed the warnings of religious and political observers of a particular disposition. This was inspired more by fears of military encounters with the continent than with any specific event, but particular events, such as war between foreign nations or a conspicuous instant of brinkmanship, could also set the apocalyptic pen to paper. In an address to the House of Commons on 27 June 1888 in support of the channel tunnel, William Gladstone condemned these Doomsday writers:

The literary authorities were brought to back up the military authorities [. . .] The military host and the literary host were backed by the opinion of what is called ‘society,’ and society is always ready for the enjoyment of a good panic.<sup>33</sup>

Thirty years later, at the end of the First World War, Arthur Conan Doyle considered the failed

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Symonds, M.C., G.C.B., Admiral of the Fleet, *Our Great Peril, If War Overtake Us with our Fleet Deficient in Number, Structure, and Armament* (London: W. Kent and Co., 1882) 9

<sup>30</sup> Batchelor, *The Edwardian*, 8

<sup>31</sup> Anonymous, *The Invasion of England: Told Twenty Years After, by an Old Soldier* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1882) title page

<sup>32</sup> Anonymous, *The Invasion of England*, 5

<sup>33</sup> William Gladstone, *Channel Tunnel: Great Speech by the Right Honourable W.E. Gladstone M.P. in the House of Commons on June 27th, 1888* (London: C.F. Roworth, 1888)

channel tunnel project a great detriment to the English cause in the war. In the preface to the first anthology printing of his 1914 pre-war short story, *Danger!*, which describes the devastating use of submarines, he wrote

The title story of this volume was written about eighteen months before the outbreak of the war, and was intended to direct public attention to the great danger that threatened this country [. . .] Apart from food, however, when one considers the transports we have needed, their convoys, the double handling of cargo, the interruptions of traffic from submarines or bad weather, the danger and suffering of the wounded, and all else that we owe to the insane opposition to the Channel tunnels, one questions whether there has ever been an example of national stupidity being so rapidly and heavily punished.<sup>34</sup>

Doyle's use the apocalyptic formula of transgression and justified punishment in his interpretation of events appears unaffected, an apocalyptic formula embedded in the most obvious of places.

## II.iv

It is natural that ideas of an apocalypse—animated by the Gospels' warnings that there will be “wars and rumours of wars”—would surface in a time of extensive preparations for war. With the exception of Britain, whose army reached its greatest size during the Boer War (1899-1902) and a decrease in the size of the Italian army in the last decade of the nineteenth century, there was a clear pattern of escalation among what would be the belligerent nations of the First World War. The historian Fritz Fischer writes that

the populations of all those countries, influenced to a greater or lesser extent by social-Darwinistic assumptions, came to expect that in such a turbulent world a conflict was unavoidable and should, moreover, be prepared for.<sup>35</sup>

Concerns involving the English army's supposed state of unpreparedness were often expressed, as an unidentified “staff member” wrote the previous year in the June 1887 issue of *Murray's Magazine* in ‘A Prophecy and its Fulfilment’: “In the first place, since war continues to be waged, it is well that we should be prepared for it.”<sup>36</sup> There was an inevitable conflation of “serious” propaganda—in the form of pamphlets by upper-echelon military figures—and the more persuasive examples that appeared in Future-War stories. Novelists came to rely on charts and maps like those used by military pamphleteers. Richard Gid Powers notes that eventually the

political leaders used future war to create a support for military preparedness. Admiral Sir Philip Colomb wrote *The Great War of 189-* (1892) as political propaganda, and Field Marshall Roberts encouraged and introduced William Le Queux's *The Invasion of 1910* (1906).<sup>37</sup>

The latter was serialized in *The Daily Mail* and sold a million copies in book form. Donald Kagan notes that it made “a deep impression” and caught the attention “of the Foreign Office, where Sir Francis Bertie asserted that ‘the Germans’ aim is to push us into the water and steal

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<sup>34</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, *Danger! Other Stories* (London: John Murray, 1918) i

<sup>35</sup> Fritz Fischer, from the foreword to *The War Plans of the Great Powers, 1880-1914*, ed. Paul M. Kennedy (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1979) ix

<sup>36</sup> Anonymous, ‘A Prophecy and Its Fulfilment’, *Murray's magazine*, June 1887

<sup>37</sup> Powers, *Armageddon*, xii

our clothes.”<sup>38</sup> I.F. Clarke identifies 183 accounts of Future-Wars published in England between 1871 and the start of the First World War, and although nearly all are apocalyptic in some respect, most are myopic in scope and immature in style. One of the most clearly successful apocalyptic works to emerge from the pre-war period in England is *The World Set Free* by H.G. Wells, written in 1913 and first published in early 1914. In the 1921 preface Wells admits that “under the immediate shadow of the Great War” every “intelligent person in the world felt that disaster was impending and knew no way of averting it.”<sup>39</sup> *The World Set Free* was unique because, like Doyle’s *Danger!*, it was, in a sense, prophetic. He predicted the development of atomic weaponry and described a world-wide atomic exchange taking place in 1953. Wells was one of the very few apocalyptic writers of the era who successfully predicted the consequences of Einstein’s and Rutherford’s equally apocalyptic achievements in the realm of physics without succumbing to the nationalist sentimentality so common to the genre.

Popular tertiary apocalyptic works were nearly always of an ephemeral nature, catering to a public eager for sensationalized accounts of very possible near-future wars. When serialized these extravagant fantasies sometimes overshadowed the news itself. Odd as it may seem, this type of apocalyptic text may have indirectly helped to precipitate the First World War. Clarke suggests that it “encouraged entirely illusory expectations about ‘the Next Great War’ which had a major part in shaping a mental geography of the future.”<sup>40</sup> A nationalistic utopian element usually pervaded these stories, and authors frequently sought to vilify any perceived national enemy. In cases in which nationalist fantasies are fulfilled, this form can be termed reaffirmative in that the only transformation is of the host nation from beleaguered to ascendant, as are the Jews and early Christians in biblical apocalypses. In other cases, the host nation is destroyed or subjugated and the apocalypse stands as a warning against possible future events; this was often an appeal for defensive measures in the immediate future and to maintain vigilance in times of peace. The narratives were usually structured around an obvious series of binary oppositions, good and evil, civilization and barbarism, progress and stagnation, honor and cowardice, and they made thorough use of symbols of military and scientific strength such as armored trains and dirigibles bristling with Maxim guns. The fiction was a means to a political end. The stories consequently demanded of their authors a familiarity with many rhetorical techniques of the propagandist. By the start of the First World War, the works of apocalyptic authors had been thoroughly entwined with nationalist concerns, but this is one part of a strong tradition of nationalist millenarianism that can be traced back several centuries in England; Richard Popkin points out that when Oliver Cromwell opened Parliament in 1653, he christened it “the Parliament of Saints, who would bring about the New Israel in England,” a sentiment that filtered down to “popular millenarian movements of Ranters, Diggers, Levellers.”<sup>41</sup> Of course almost never predicting future events with any degree of accuracy, this type of apocalypse can tell us a great deal about concerns of the period. It is risky, however, to think of apocalyptic literature as a social force that directly influenced opinion to the point that it actually precipitated events. With the rare exception of genuinely apocalyptic societies—such as the Qumran sect, authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls—apocalyptic assertion is but one of many motivating forces at work in a society. Although invasion literature was “responsible for stirring anti-German feeling in the decades before the Great War,” its popularity can be explained by the “healthy fascination

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<sup>38</sup> Donald Kagan, *On the Origins of War and the Preservation of Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 1995) 153-154

<sup>39</sup> H.G. Wells, from the preface to *The World Set Free* (London: Odhams Press, Limited, 1921)

<sup>40</sup> Clarke, *Voices*, 59

<sup>41</sup> Popkin, ‘Seventeenth-Century Millenarianism’, 117

for intrigue and espionage” with a believable enemy, a trend that continues today in the form of techno-thrillers such as Tom Clancy’s *Red Storm Rising*, which depicts a confrontation between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces. Narrative accounts in this category before the First World War tended to be intensely unrealistic and predictable and were usually, although not always, short stories or novels. Subject matter was handled with a great deal of specificity. Wave upon wave of geographic, military, technological, scientific, and political detail were typical. It is rare, however, that a work from this category is thought to have any literary merit.

Future-War stories generally fell into two categories: accounts of future war with a political object, akin to religious works in their emphasis on the moral side of matters, and those with a technological object, that is to say concerned primarily with new scientific and industrial achievements. The former, concentrating on national concerns, ignoring or treating peripherally aspects of new technology, have been discussed. The technologically-oriented were also common, and they tended to be more optimistic. The best example of the technologically-oriented narrative is Hugh Arnold-Forster’s short story ‘In a Conning Tower’, published in 1888 in *Murray’s Magazine*, one of the first of its kind. The story involved an imaginary battle of iron-clad ships in the Mediterranean, and while Arnold-Forster went into great detail when describing the ship, the H.M.S. *Majestic*, the enemy remained anonymous. We may guess at the identity of the enemy inasmuch as its fleet is based in the Mediterranean, but this is beside the point. There is no mention of a particular national enemy. Enemies were often of no particular nation, and this was a matter of protocol in an age when wars of words were frequent among the European powers. Arnold-Forster’s audience was expected to be fascinated by the very modernity of his central character, which was not a plucky warrior, but the H.M.S. *Majestic*: “Here in this spot is concentrated the whole power of the tremendous machine we call an ironclad ship.”<sup>42</sup> Agog at the spectacular scientific achievements embodied in the ship, politics fell to the wayside for most readers. Although many invasion and Future-War novels contained apocalyptic properties, those with a technical object were for the most part not apocalyptic. They were more of an indication of the Victorian fascination with technology than of any sense of imminent ruin.

## II.v

Thoughts of coming wars were not limited to the realm of popular boy’s fantasies, the dry outpourings of officer-class authors, and the hermetic murmurs of Anglican vicars. W.B. Yeats’s *The Wind Among the Reeds*, published in 1899, is in many ways an apocalyptic book, filled with descriptions of a dying and decayed world, as well as explosive descriptions of violence and imminent catastrophe. Although an apocalyptic tone permeates the book, the central apocalyptic poem stands out as ‘The Valley of the Black Pig’, which first appeared in April 1896. It has the tenor of a dream, written when “the dews drop slowly and dreams gather.” Through use of nightmare images, Yeats prophesies a great battle, an Armageddon from which Ireland will emerge victorious over its enemies. Yeats is not very clear about the origins or exact meaning of this myth, but he does explain that “all over Ireland there are prophecies of the coming rout of the enemies of Ireland, in a certain Valley of the Black Pig, and these prophecies are, no doubt, now, as they were in the Fenian days, a political force.”<sup>43</sup> In his own notes to *The Wind Among the Reeds*, he writes that for the “purposes of poetry” the battle is a symbol “of the darkness that will destroy the world.”<sup>44</sup> He never focuses on the subject matter with any degree of specificity,

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<sup>42</sup> Hugh Arnold-Forster, ‘In a Conning Tower’, *Murray’s Magazine*, May 1882, 62

<sup>43</sup> William Butler Yeats, *The Wind Among the Reeds* (London: Elkin Matthews, 1889) 95-96

<sup>44</sup> Yeats, *Wind Among the Reeds*, 7

relying instead on a number of mystical images, such as “Master of the still stars and of the flaming door.” No mention is made of any particular army, only “unknown perishing armies.” No one can know where this valley is or will be. The reader is told only that the author has experienced a vision of a battle. One point made explicitly, however, is that the resultant change is welcomed by many who are “weary of the world’s empires.”

Throughout *The Wind Among the Reeds* there are descriptions of a tired world, decayed and imperfect. A vital element of Yeats’s early apocalyptic poetry is that it is at times intensely personal, its meaning existing only in relation to the private world of the speaker, as we find in ‘The Lover Tells of the Rose in His Heart’, which begins

All things uncomely and broken, all things worn out and old,  
The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a lumbering cart,  
The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the wintry mould [. . .]

These lines describe the raw materials of a perfected world; it is made clear later in the poem that the speaker “hungers to build them anew and sit on a green knoll apart, / With the earth and the sky and the water, re-made, like a casket of gold.”<sup>45</sup> Rachel Billigheimer suggests in *Wheels of Eternity* that in Yeats’s earlier poems “apocalypse is the moment of internal vision.”<sup>46</sup> That these earlier apocalyptic poems are internal is evident in their centering on personal issues, as in ‘He Mourns for the Change that Has Come upon Him and His Beloved, and Longs for the End of the World’, which is, as in previous examples, grounded in mystical imagery:

I would that the Boar without bristles had come from the West  
And had rooted the sun and moon and stars out of the sky  
And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning to his rest.<sup>47</sup>

Again, a look at Yeats’s notes to the poems points to many sources outside of the Christian tradition: *The Wanderings of Oisín*, Frazer’s *Golden Bough*, Rhys’s *Celtic Heathendom*, and imperfectly recalled snatches of Irish folklore. The patterns described in the poems are nonetheless comparable to those of strictly Christian apocalypses. In some cases the origins of the imagery are less vague, possibly drawn from *Revelation*. The most notable instance of this occurs in the poem ‘He Bids His Beloved Be at Peace’, which Harold Bloom considers “the most successful” of the “apocalyptic poems of the volume.”<sup>48</sup> The apocalypse may occur on cosmic levels, but the poem resolves on a private note. The reader encounters the brutal instant when “the horses of Disaster plunge in the heavy clay” as the “South is pouring down roses of crimson fire.” But this is followed by a gradual softening that brings the reader to

Beloved, let your eyes half close, and your heart beat  
Over my heart, and your hair fall over my breast,  
Drowning love’s lonely hour in deep twilight of rest,  
And hiding their tossing manes and their tumultuous feet.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Yeats, ‘The Lover Tells of the Rose in His Heart’, ll. 1-4, 6-7

<sup>46</sup> Billigheimer, *Wheels of Eternity*, 104

<sup>47</sup> Yeats, ‘He Mourns for the Change that has Come Upon Him and His Beloved, and Longs for the End of the World’ ll. 10-12

<sup>48</sup> Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (New York: OUP, 1970) 127

<sup>49</sup> W.B. Yeats, ‘He Bids His Beloved be at Peace’ ll. 6-12

There is a settlement into consonance, the fury of apocalypse concealed by human tenderness and withdrawal, a sentiment missing from the collectivist visions of biblical apocalyptists who envisioned the tears of the saved being dried en masse.

Yeats was not the only *fin-de-siècle* poet to write in this vein. Lionel Johnson also wrote with an apocalyptic temperament suited to the era. A 1904 edition of Johnson's poems, selected by Yeats, included several apocalyptic poems. The most clearly apocalyptic is 'The Red Wind'. Johnson feels confident sounding the trump:

Red Wind from over sea,  
Scourging our lonely land!  
What Angel loosened thee  
Out of his iron hand?<sup>50</sup>

There are more subtle apocalyptic elements as well. In 'The Age of Dream', the reader finds apocalyptic nostalgia for a bygone age, similar to the more successful apocalyptic poems in *The Wind Among the Reeds*:

Gone Now, the carven work! Ruined, the golden shrine!  
No more the glorious organs pour their voiced divine;  
No more rich frankincense drifts through the Holy Place:  
Now from the broken tower, what solemn bell still tolls,  
Mourning what piteous death? Answer, O saddened souls!<sup>51</sup>

Johnson found himself left unhappily in a more tempestuous and less-certain world, a modern world in which changes were taking place at a frightening pace, in which all he understood seemed to be slipping away.

Perhaps the best-known poem from the collection is 'The Dark Angel'. Although not openly apocalyptic, it deals with the revelation of the "dark" side of the self, the satanic. Ian Fletcher writes that "Johnson's life, at this time, had begun to break up, and the poem sets out rather desperately in a search for answers."<sup>52</sup> On a superficial level the poem is very apocalyptic; images that recall biblical apocalypses abound: "The ardour of red flame is thine, / And thine the steely soul of ice." As in Yeats's apocalyptic poems of this period, there is a tension between consonance and dissonance, calm and convulsion. When the speaker of the poem hears music, the dark angel changes "its silvery to a sultry fire," and all things of beauty "burn / With flames of evil ecstasy." The images that constitute and represent this opposition are very close to Yeats's: slumber, lands of dreams, sunlight, flowers, on the one hand, representing stasis and comfort; and fire, tears, tombs, aching lust, on the other. The contrast is best expressed in the seventh verse:

Within the breath of autumn woods,  
Within the winter silences:  
Thy venomous spirit stirs and broods,

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<sup>50</sup> Lionel Johnson, *Selected Poems* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1895)

<sup>51</sup> Lionel Johnson, *Twenty One Poems Written by Lionel Johnson: Selected by William Butler Yeats* (Dundrum: The Dun Emer Press, 1904)

<sup>52</sup> Ian Fletcher, *W.B. Yeats and His Contemporaries* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1987) 315

O Master of impieties!

Yeats used this opposition to bring to his poems a sense of resolution and closure in which, for instance, his “beloved” can drown “love’s lonely hour in deep twilight of rest,” and hide the manes and feet of the terrible apocalyptic horsemen. Johnson does something different. The tension in ‘The Dark Angel’ arises from an internal opposition. Yeats’s speakers are besieged by external forces, cosmic forces beyond their control. Johnson’s speaker is similarly besieged by an internal force that is beyond his control.

The closest parallel to Yeats’s ‘The Valley of the Black Pig’ to be found in Johnson is ‘The Coming of War’. Like Yeats’s, it concerns a coming rout of the enemies of Ireland. This in itself is odd. Johnson, born in Kent and educated at Oxford, nevertheless declared himself Irish around 1893 and contributed to the Irish literary revival of that period. Jean Halladay writes that “he apparently convinced himself that he was Irish, and wrote many poems on Irish subjects and Irish Nationalism.”<sup>53</sup> The theme of Armageddon is very important to the poem. It is an absolute, abstracted conflict: there is no geographic point named, no specific enemy cited:

Gather the people, for the battle breaks:  
From the camping grounds above the valley,  
Gather the men-at-arms, and bid them rally:  
Because the morn, the battle, wakes.

Johnson, who died in 1902, wouldn’t live to see the bold ranks of men march away to face the trenches of the First World War. Part of a former, more elegant age, it is somehow appropriate that his untimely passing spared him the horror of witnessing a confident young generation wasted on the fields of the Somme and Ypres.

## II.vi

The second half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth can be considered apocalyptic ages. The empires of the European powers seemed to be holding, despite numerous difficulties such as those in South Africa, German South-West Africa, Somaliland, and the Balkans. Beyond nationalist frenzies, apocalyptic fuel was also to be found in a distrust of scientific advance by those who clung to a crumbling past. Historical events of national concern were filtered through apocalyptic writings to a public eager for sensationalism and crisis. The number of these works published anonymously or under pseudonyms attests to their dubious or marginal nature. In some cases, such as Chesney’s ‘The Battle of Dorking’, a work of fiction instigated widespread political concern; others, like Le Queux’s *The War of 1910* sold exceptionally well. In other cases, however, the warnings of novelists failed to garner political attention or, even worse, failed to leave the bookstore shelf. At the same time, a handful of poets dealt with similar subjects in an entirely more private manner. Religious apocalyptists insisted that the world “reck their rod” while in all probability their cries went unnoticed by the general public, as did so many tracts of a technical military nature. Literary works tended to hold more power and appeal more directly to the public, and they were eventually appropriated by political and military authorities. In 1903, as strikes and protests spread across Tsarist Russia, providing a forecast of the 1917 Revolution, George Barlow published his unexceptional ‘Armageddon

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<sup>53</sup> Jean Halladay, *Eight Late Victorian Poets Shaping the Artistic Sensibility of an Age*. (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993) 106

Sonnet', prophesying "The end of love, of life,—of everything" as "Europe reddens into fire."<sup>54</sup> Perhaps he recognized a new restlessness and violence emerging in the young century, a recognition that could only be expressed by turning back to the ancient language of Armageddon. At the outbreak of the First World War, apocalyptic works from the previous seventy years may have seemed strikingly poignant, but they would soon prove to have been dangerously naïve.

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<sup>54</sup> George Barlow, *Poetical Works in Ten Volumes* (London: Henry J. Glaiser, 1902-1914)