PREFACE

This exhibition, *De/coding the Apocalypse*, arose from a one-year residency by the artist Michael Takeo Magruder in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at King's College London. It was funded by the Leverhulme Trust's artist-in-residence scheme, and its academic Principal Investigator was Ben Quash, Professor of Christianity and the Arts. We acknowledge with gratitude the support of the Leverhulme Trust, without whose support this project would not have been possible.

The Department of Theology and Religious Studies at King's College London is one of the largest in the UK, and during his time in the Department the artist was able to spend time in discussion with a range of scholars representing the variety of sub-disciplines that are typically part of the study of religion in university departments, including sociologists, anthropologists, historians, text scholars, ethicists, philosophers, and theologians. His decision to develop his work in response to several 'readings' of the *Book of Revelation* was in part a desire to hear how some of the different sub-disciplines he encountered would treat the text, and it is for this reason that the perspectives explored here include theology, biblical studies, art history, and cultural criticism.

ARTIST'S FOREWORD

I was a child of the Cold War era living in my nation's capital surrounded by the incessant rhetoric and proxy wars of two ideologically opposed superpowers - all made real by the constant threat of nuclear annihilation. Even at that young age I was already fascinated with both technology and religion. Upon reading the Book of Revelation for the first time I wondered to myself if John the Seer wrote of things like locust hordes and falling stars because he could not understand, much less describe, swarms of apache helicopters and the sight of missiles raining from an evening sky.

Now, three decades later, I watch my daughter grow up in a very different world defined by data, networks and code. And in this age of such technological possibility and terror, I can't help but wonder what end times she imagines in her own quiet moments of personal reflection. Her fears (or hopes) about the final days that she might witness are certainly not the same as those from my youth. My end never came, but hers might. So I look to her and try to understand what is her Apocalypse.

Michael Takeo Magruder

THE HORSE AS TECHNOLOGY

He delighteth not in the strength of the horse.
(Psalm 147:10)

Before there were ever cyborgs, there was the human being on horseback. Cyborgs, or cybernetic organisms, are the result of a performance-enhancing combination of technological parts with creaturely flesh. United in this way to technology, the creature – and most often in our imaginations the *human* creature – is able to overcome many of his or her physical limitations: to run faster, jump higher, and pack more of a punch. The natural flesh and the fabricated parts become a single entity, with superhuman powers.

Horses are 'natural', fleshly creatures like humans, of course. But intensively bred by humans as they have been, they are also 'made'. And with the help of bridle and bit, stirrup and spur, they become an extension of the human body and the human will. There is a beauty in the way that these two beings can move as one – in effortless unison. Maybe the ancient mythical image of the Centaur is a tribute to just how intensive this union can be in our imaginings. But there is also a terror to the combination, for by its power wars are prosecuted (in the *Book of Revelation* Conquest rides a white horse and War rides a red horse) and devastating punishments inflicted (Famine rides a black horse; Death rides a pale green horse).

Michael Takeo Magruder's works meditate on how in our own age we have manifold means at our disposal to render ourselves 'cyborg': to extend our powers through our activities of making. The early technologies of animal husbandry and the manufacture of refined metals and cured leather are now eclipsed by the apparently limitless possibilities offered to us by digital devices, high-speed wireless connections, drones, implants (the list is extendable). Our mobile phones are extensions of our hands, our eyes, and our ears. We sometimes seek to modify our own bodies with the same determined precision with which we once bred our livestock.

Technology, in other words, is the 'logic of the horse', unfolding itself. And so the artist makes the horse a central symbol in this key room in the exhibition, just as the horse is a central symbol of power (and potential destruction) in the final book of the Christian Bible. Here, we see high-tech machines served by high-spec technology demonstrating what our modern world is capable of. We see our machines testifying to their forerunner, the *horse-as-technology*. It is a horse's skull that they show us, for most of the uses we traditionally had for horses are now past, but (as these machines relentlessly witness) the cyborg spirit lives on. 'The horse is dead; long live the horse!'

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse appear relatively briefly in the *Book of Revelation*, yet they have become one of its best-known and most enduring symbols, returned to again and again by artists up to the present day. This may be because the dark motifs with which they are associated are still ones that loom large in our experience of the world – including our extension of that world into cyberspace. The Horsemen stalk the ether. Immense resources are pumped into *conquest* of the internet and the markets it opens up. From online bullying to cyberterrorism, there is large-scale *warfare* to be reckoned with on our most sophisticated technological platforms. Huge parts of the world are disadvantaged by being technology-poor (or information-poor): a kind of *famine*. And (as the scientist Martin Rees has argued[1]) our technology is one of the things most likely to assist our own *extinction* in the coming decades.

Revelation as a whole has a great deal to say about the ambitions and limits of human power – well beyond the cameo appearance of the Horsemen. You could say that it is an extended, dramatic meditation on human hubris (which is a near cousin to idolatry: the worship of unworthy objects, objects that *we make*, as though they were the true God, the God who *transcends* the devices and desires of our own hearts).

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[1] Martin Rees, *Our Final Century: a scientist's warning; how terror, error, and environmental disaster threaten humankind's future in this century* (London: Heinemann, 2003).

Today, we live in a technologically-advanced set of global systems, which increase their grip from day to day, exerting their strength (as Nicholas Boyle has pointed out) through the proliferating tendrils of cables, television channels and interconnected computers.[2] They are mainly based around the flow of money and the maximization of profit for certain powerful players of the global game. Since 1945, the development of the global market has become the most overriding of economic facts. It fosters a newly-uniform way of valuing – or attributing worth to – everything that we do and are: a new sort of *worship*. But this is not the worship of what most people would call God. We might call it worship of *ourselves-on-horseback*: our preternaturally-empowered selves.

And the human desire to increase in power and to manufacture an unfettered earthly *dominium* is not, of course, manifest only in the grip of the market. It has obvious military dimensions. In this respect too, the possibility of concentrated power in our day – at a planetary level – has increased beyond all imagining. The Roman Empire was a pale anticipation of what today can be achieved by the modern stockpiling of arms.

As the author of *Revelation* knew, because he knew the traditions of the Old Testament prophets so intimately, when a people turns to worship the works of its own hands, God will wage war on such idolatry. And so it is that in chapter 19 of the *Book of Revelation*, we meet a fifth horse. It, too, is white, and its rider is the Logos, the Word of God. Traditionally this figure is interpreted in the churches as Christ, and his power is what finally overthrows the tyranny of the Beast who for a time has held sway over the corrupt earth.

This shows that the horse *as such* need not have negative connotations in the biblical world. The Four Horsemen may reflect the dangers of our cyborg ambitions back to us from their mounts, but it is also on horseback that God in Christ is seen waging war on all that is opposed to God. On horseback he defeats

[2] Nicholas Boyle, 'Hegel and "The End of History"' in *New Blackfriars* 76:891 (1995), 112.

idolatry in the name of truth; on horseback he puts darkness to flight in the name of light. In this figure, we see that the horse's power can be used for good as well as for ill.

But perhaps there seems little to reassure us in this image. God waging war on a horse may look all too like Death and all of his friends. Or *God-on-a-horse* may just look like a bigger and more powerful version of *us-on-a-horse*. This image may confirm our sense that the *Book of Revelation* is unremittingly a book of violence (which is what so repelled D.H. Lawrence about it). God simply saddles up and joins in. The book's binaries of good and evil, black and white, are not overcome but reinforced by this conflictual logic. The whites and blacks of Takeo's installations, along with the binary codes that underlie his light boxes, also raise this disturbing possibility.

This would be to miss the strange and ultimately reconciliatory logic of *Revelation*'s own self-subversions, however. Yes, this deeply visual book seems to take its binary oppositions to extremes, but it also pulls the rug out from under them. The heavenly city with which the book concludes has its gates open, and no enemies ride against it (nor does it ride against them): 'and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it (Revelation 21:24). It is an inclusive realm, in which human dominion is not crushed but harmonized.

In the same vein, the figure of one animal is superseded and transformed by that of another – a far more important organizing image in the context of the book as a whole, and a more fundamental manifestation of Christ. The *horse* is eclipsed by the *lamb*. The power of military victory is eclipsed by a power won through self-giving; generosity; love made perfect in vulnerability.

> [A]nd I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!' (Revelation 5:11-12)

In the *Book of Revelation*, sacrificial love is that to which the human lust for power is called to surrender itself; it is the end our technology will redeem itself by serving. The presence of a wounded lamb on the throne is the reason why, ultimately, the Church reads the Apocalypse not as a prophecy of doom but as a prophecy of hope. This exhibition challenges us to ask whether we are capable of sharing a vision like that, or whether it is too much to hope for.

Ben Quash

REVELATION AS MIRROR

The *Book of Revelation* has inspired more visual responses than any other biblical text. This can be attributed in part to the very visual nature of the text, which includes over sixty references to 'seeing'.

Artists have mined this text in many media since the 6th century CE. Often they have used Revelation to reflect issues and controversies from their own time. Readings of this sort are called 'presentist'.

I will here offer seven examples from the 13th to the 20th centuries to show how artists have used this most complex of biblical texts to mirror their own times. The first image comes from the thirteenth century *Lambeth Apocalypse* (c.1260), one of a number of English illuminated manuscript Apocalypses. *Lambeth* consists of 78 images, with accompanying text and commentary, in this case the popular 'Berengaudus' commentary. Berengaudus' anti-Jewish slant was doubtless in tune with the growing anti-Semitism in the England of the time (which culminated in the expulsion of the Jews in 1290).

Anti-Jewish prejudice creeps into *Lambeth's* images. On folio 5 the third Horseman of the Apocalypse, who rides the black horse, wears a hood, symbolising the inability of the Jews to understand Scripture. On folio 12, (Fig. 1), we see John of Patmos, to whom *Revelation* is delivered in a vision, encountering the 'Mighty Angel', initiating him into a further stage of his prophetic mission. Underneath are contrasting images from the so-called *Life of Antichrist*, a medieval legend about the Antichrist figure whom many believed would appear during the 'end-times'.[3] Often identified with the Beasts of Revelation 13, Antichrist was Jewish in the legend. Accordingly he and some of his followers wear the pointed Jewish caps that were the symbol of Jewish identity. Superficially straightforward illustrations of Revelation are thus used

[3] See R. Muir Wright, *Art and Antichrist in Medieval Europe* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995) on artistic interpretations of the Antichrist figure in medieval Europe.

here to contrast Christianity and Judaism, and linking Jewish people with Antichrist.

The Angers Apocalypse Tapestry was produced around one hundred years later (c.1373-80). Following iconography similar to *Lambeth*,[4] it transposes the latter's miniatures into a huge tapestry of 84 panels, measuring around 130m long and 4.5m high. The scale alone suggests that *Revelation* is being used for the aggrandisement of the tapestry's patron, Louis I of Anjou (second son of Jean II of France), even though Revelation was originally a cry of polemical anger against the might of Roman Empire in 90 CE. In the image depicting the demonic cavalry of Revelation 9.16 (who appear when the sixth trumpet is blown), the riders wear the costumes and armour of the English armies of the fourteenth century (Fig. 2), complete with pheasant feathers in their helmets.[5] The English of the Hundred Years War are thus identified with the satanic characters of Revelation while, the French are on the side of virtue (the Lamb of God of Revelation 5, for example).

The final medieval image comes from the *Master Bertram Altarpiece* (now on display in the Victoria and Albert Museum).[6] Like *Angers* this German altarpiece (c.1400) broadly follows the Anglo-Norman iconography established by manuscripts such as *Lambeth,* but adds its own interpretations and contemporary details, and, in an echo of a German commentary popular at the time, it ends at Revelation 16, leaving the ending open to interpretation by the viewer. In a radically presentist interpretation of Revelation, many of the figures featured in the text are visualised with two heads. One head represents the character from the text and the other a contemporary with whom they are being identified. Thus the Earth Beast or False Prophet (of Revelation 13), who is

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[4] On *The Angers Apocalypse Tapestry* see N. O'Hear, *Contrasting Images of the Book of Revelation in Late Medieval and Early Modern Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 43-68.

[5] See M.G. Houston, *Medieval Costume in England and France* (New York: Dover, 1996), 122-8; Muel 1986, 148.

[6] On the *Master Bertram Altarpiece*, see C.M. Kauffmann, *An Altarpiece of the Book of Revelation from Master Bertram's Workshop in Hamburg* (London: HMSO, Victoria and Albert Museum, Museum Monograph no 25, 1968).

portrayed as a double-headed bear, is identified via the surrounding commentary with Mahomet (Mohammed), (Fig. 3). His two horns represent his claim to wisdom and holiness, respectively, and the fire descending from heaven is the Holy Scripture, from which elements of the Qur'an were derived. Those killing the people who are refusing to worship the Sea Beast (also a bear-like creature) are clearly represented as Saracens (Muslim forces). In this version of *Revelation* from 1400, Islam is taking the role assigned to the Roman Empire in 90 CE.

We turn now to two woodcut images from the Renaissance and Reformation era. The first is from Dürer's famous *Apocalypse* series of 1498, a printed book version of *Revelation* in which the text was reproduced alongside just fifteen images.[7] In striking Renaissance fashion, in some of the images Dürer depicts himself as the visionary, John of Patmos. He inserts his monogram 'AD' at the foot of each image, and in the 1511 version, he omits the text altogether, implying that his re-visualisation of *Revelation* actually supplants the original text. These woodcut images hold a mirror to Dürer's own time, reflecting the development of the printing press and its scope, as well as the changing role of the artist. Dürer was probably an orthodox Catholic, but there is no doubt that his images also reflect growing hostility to the Church hierarchy. In Fig. 4 the Two Beasts of Revelation 13 rampage over the earth, clothed in a Bishop's cloak and mitre, under the watchful gaze of God, who holds the sickle of judgement. Dürer is reminding us of God's status as head of the true Church, and of what will befall those who 'worship the Beast', even an episcopal Beast.

Cranach's twenty-two *Apocalypse* woodcuts, heavily influenced by Dürer, but also produced under the direction of Luther himself, leave us in no doubt as to their polemical meaning. Thus the Whore of Babylon (of Revelation 17) is easily identified with the Pope himself as she wears the papal triple tiara (Fig. 5).[8] Revelation 17 is indeed a thinly veiled critique of the excesses and 'idolatry' of

[7] See O'Hear 2011, 134-175 on Dürer and his *Apocalypse* series.
[8] See O'Hear 2011, 175-197 on Lucas Cranach the Elder, his relationship with Martin Luther and his Apocalypse images of 1522.

the Roman Empire, but this use of *Revelation* as an anti-Catholic 'mirror' became increasingly widespread as Protestantism became dominant in parts of Europe and the USA, and also increasingly problematic.[9] (We have only to think of Ian Paisley's notorious denunciation of Pope John Paul II as the Antichrist.)

We end this survey with two later images inspired by *Revelation*, which exemplify the way in which in more recent times decontextualised readings and visualisations of the Book abound. The first image is a cartoon from 1795 by James Gilray depicting William Pitt, the Prime Minister of the day, as the fourth Horseman of Revelation 6 (Fig. 6). While he is skeletal with straggly, flowing hair, he rides a powerful white horse, white being the colour of the House of Hanover, as 'pale' is *Revelation*'s description of the fourth Horseman's horse. The monkey seated behind Pitt is the Prince of Wales, whom Pitt had supported during George III's mental illness. Pitt's followers trail behind him, represented as little devils. Pitt himself holds a dragon by the neck, possibly an allusion to the Dragon of Revelation 12. In the right hand corner, meanwhile, Pitt's opponents, including Charles James Fox, have been thrown into hell (Hades). The pigs Pitt's horse is trampling are the common people, whom Pitt had referred to as the 'Swinish Multitude' and who, in France, had risen up and overthrown the monarchy. As in many apocalyptic images common man bears the brunt of the apocalyptic woes! And also, as is common in modern interpretations of *Revelation*, only the negative side appears: Gilray gives no hint of a New Jerusalem, or promise of salvation to the elect.

Cartoons featuring the Four Horsemen have continued to be popular. Our final image is a cartoon from the *Sunday Express*, published in August 1943 (Fig. 7). Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer and head of the SS is entering the 'Reich Home Office' tailed by the Four Horsemen of Revelation 6.2-8. The Horsemen are recognisable from their appearance, although they are not arranged in order. The first figure on the left is covered in sores and so represents 'Pestilence' (an

[9] See Ian Boxall, 'The Many Faces of Babylon the Great' in Steve Moyise (ed.), *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh, New York: T & T Clark Ltd, 2001), 63-8.

alternative name in tradition for the first Horseman). The second figure, attired as a Roman gladiator, must be 'War' (the second Horseman). The third, simply a skeleton, represents Famine (the third Horseman) and the fourth carries the scythe of the grim reaper - Death, the fourth Horseman. The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, symbols of eschatological and universal destruction, are thus presented here as agents of the Nazi regime.

As well as serving as visualisations of *Revelation*, our images act as a guide to some of the major hopes, fears and cultural preoccupations of the ages in which they were created. Thus, *Revelation* has served as a prism through which anti-Jewish, anti-English, anti-Muslim and anti-Catholic concerns could be reflected and legitimated, as well as a basis for political critiques, and as a platform for self-aggrandisement, whether of a royal family or of an individual artist.

We may be critical of some of these interpretations as parochial and limited, but our own time is no different. Examples abound, in contemporary art, journalism, gaming, cinema, and much else besides, of *Revelation* being held up as a mirror to our own, equally challenging times. For every age, *Revelation* has served as a mirror, but one that can be hard to look into with honesty, and without descending into polemics and self-obsession.

Natasha O'Hear

APOCALYPSE FOREVER

Instead of forever hovering above I'd like to feel a weight grow in me to end the infinity and to tie me to earth […] to be able to say 'now…now…and now' and no longer 'forever' and 'for eternity'.
Wim Wenders, Wings of Desire *(1987)*

In 1970 Hal Lindsey hit the headlines with his best-selling book *The Late, Great Planet Earth*.[10] It promised at last to have decoded the secrets of the *Apocalypse of John* (or *Book of Revelation*), describing how in 1982 the planets would align and the end of the world would finally begin. Due to growing nuclear arsenals, genetic modification, and skin cancer, what had previously been hidden in the words of the last book of the Bible, was now able to be revealed: hail and fire mixed with blood (Revelation 8) denotes bombs; a woman with wings (Revelation 12) represents US Air force jets; and Armageddon (Revelation 19) is a cypher for WWIII. It promised Apocalypse Now, finally unveiled. *Late, Great Planet Earth* flew off the shelf by the millions, and started a trend for popular contemporary prophetic literature, which is still strong today.[11]

Yet Hal Lindsey, despite his tapping into the public's consciousness, was not the first person to believe that he had at last decoded the *Apocalypse of John*, and that its events were coming true in the here and now.

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[10] Hal Lindsey and Carole C. Carlson, *The Late, Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970). According to the publisher, the *New York Times* said it was 'no. 1 non-fiction bestseller of the decade': http://www.zondervan.com/the-late-great-planet-earth (accessed on 29 August 2014).

[11] To date it is claimed that Lindsey has sold over 15 million copies of *Late*, *Great* alone, and has published several more best-sellers since. *Late*, *Great* also became a film narrated by Orson Welles. Lindsey still has his own broadcasts today ('The Hal Lindsey Report': http://www.hallindsey.com/). However, there are numerous other Lindsey-esque readers, each with their own publications offering their own interpretations, particularly famous are Tim LaHaye's and Jerry B. Jenkins's *Left Behind* series of novels, now a Hollywood production staring Nicolas Cage: http://timlahaye.com/ and http://www.leftbehind.com/. The rise of the internet has taken the idea of contemporary prophecy to extreme levels.

During 1914, with the outbreak of WWI, it appeared to many of his followers that Charles Taze Russell's end time predictions were being fulfilled. Despite several previous failed predictions, surely this marked the beginning of the end.[12]

1666 brought a year when the infamous number of Revelation 13's beast, 666, and the thousand years spoken of in Revelation 20, were combined. Publications predicting the end of the world were rife, with plague and fire sweeping through the great city of London, the end was (once again) surely nigh.[13]

In the eleventh century Joachim of Fiore saw the *Apocalypse*'s beast as the current Pope, and believed that soon after 1200 the world would enter into its penultimate stage, leading to the end of history.[14] Those who inherited his predictions believed that the end of the age would be in 1260.[15]

During the second century CE, early inheritors of the *Apocalypse of John*, the Montanists, believed the New Jerusalem was to descend on the city of Phrygia. They encouraged people to move there in anticipation of its imminent arrival.[16]

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[12] On the history of Charles Taze Russell's predictions see M. James Penton, *Apocalypse Delayed: The Story of Jehovah's Witnesses*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 13–46, particularly 43–45.

[13] See for example Richard H. Popkin, 'Seventeenth-Century Millenarianism', in *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World*, ed. Malcolm Bull (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 112–34.

[14] Judith L. Kovacs, Christopher Rowland, and Rebekah Callow, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 17-19.

[15] Marjorie Reeves, 'Pattern and Purpose in History in the Later Medieval and Renaissance Periods', in *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World*, ed. Malcolm Bull (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 90-111.

[16] John M. Court, *Approaching the Apocalypse: A Short History of Christian Millenarianism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 51–60; Elaine H. Pagels, *Revelations : Visions, Prophecy, and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 103–132.

Lindsey may have spawned a lucrative publishing craze, and believed he was the first to truly understand what he saw, but in reality he stands in a long line of those who have believed that *they* are the generation the *Apocalypse of John* was written about, the events in *their* world the ones spoken of in the text, as they faced natural disasters, war, unshakeable systems and inevitable death. Two thousand years have unfolded in which people have believed that the *Apocalypse of John* was encoded and incomprehensible until their time. Lindsey was, in reality, an inheritor of this feeling, not the instigator.

And it turns out that this idea of inheritance from the *past* is more akin to the textual fabric of the *Apocalypse* than Lindsey et al. – as they focus on the *future* - would have us believe.

The *Apocalypse of John*'s original audience certainly faced complicated times. They were Christian congregations living in Asia Minor during the late first century CE when Rome was the occupying force. These believers faced daily difficulties regarding how they dealt with their earthly rulers, when they believed that they were answerable to a heavenly one.[17] The urge to see the world around them destroyed, and a new one established was perhaps an appealing one. What then did the *Apocalypse*'s author, John, offer to these struggling congregations? An uncrackable code stored up for people 2000 years later? No. It offered them a connection to the past.

For in the text of the *Apocalypse*, John did not present its recipients with unfathomable images and language only imaginable in an unknown future, as Lindsey and so many others believe. Rather, he used the known language and images of the familiar past, for the *Apocalypse* is a Christian book intimately entwined with the Jewish scriptures of the Old Testament. D. H. Lawrence for example, claimed that the *Apocalypse*'s 'best poetry is all the time lifted from

[17] For the complex nature of Emperor worship and Imperial cults in Asia Minor see Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, or Isaiah, it is not original'.[18] He is not exaggerating: the *Apocalypse* uses more language, motifs and narratives from the Old Testament than any other New Testament document.[19] This is a text which constantly dialogues with the audience's inherited scriptures. For example, the *Apocalypse*'s Four Horsemen (Revelation 6) gallop out of history, having appeared before in the opening chapter of the book of Zechariah.[20] The infamous Whore of Babylon (Revelation 17), drunk and dressed in scarlet and purple, resembles other women representing cities in the prophetic books of Ezekiel, Isaiah and Jeremiah.[21] Chapter 13's beast from the sea described as 'like a leopard, its feet […] like a bear's, and its mouth […] like a lion's mouth' (Revelation 13:2), looks very similar to the destructive leopard, lion and bear-like beasts from the sea described in Daniel 7. Even the narrator of the book, John, behaves remarkably like Old Testament visionaries, eating a scroll which tastes like honey and measuring the temple like Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3/Revelation 10), indicating he is an inheritor of a tradition, rather than an instigator.

By contrast with the repetitions of different generations (with their cries that the *Apocalypse* is happening 'now, now'), the text itself seems more like a case of history repeating than the unveiling of a new future. Yet the *Apocalypse*'s text is not just an exact copy of past texts. Whilst the Four Horsemen resemble those in Zechariah, a difference is signalled: in Zechariah the riders go out and find peace. The *Apocalypse*'s riders go out to remove it.[22] The Whore of Babylon is described

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[18] D. H Lawrence, *Apocalypse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 117.

[19] The *Apocalypse of John* never simply quotes the Old Testament. Rather it constantly alludes to it, and so the exact number of references is still uncategorised.

[20] 'During the night I had a vision, and there before me was a man mounted on a red horse […] Behind him were red, brown and white horses.' Sent out they 'found the whole world at rest and in peace'. (Zechariah 1:8;12)

[21] On the composite nature of the Whore of Babylon see Michelle Fletcher, 'Flesh for Frankenwhore', in *Body as Cultural Entity in Biblical, Early Christian and Jewish Texts.*, ed. Joan E. Taylor (London: T & T Clark, 2014), 144–64.

[22] For the complex nature of the passage, and use of other Old Testament texts see Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Continuum, 2006), 103–111.

in a similar way to females representing cities in the Old Testament, but she is seated on a Beast, which none of her past incarnations are. The Beasts of Daniel are four separate entities, whereas in Revelation 13 they are combined into one. The seer John shares much with prophets from the past, but whilst Daniel is told to seal up the words of his book (Daniel 8:26), John is told 'do not seal them up' (Revelation 22:10).

The *Apocalypse* is therefore history repeating, but with a twist; the familiar of the past taken and reformed, expanded and forever altered.[23] An inherited past, re-presented for the audience's 'now'.

In the end, the *Book of Revelation* presents images of human constants: conquest, war, signs in the sky, decadent empires which rule the earth and fall spectacularly, earthquakes, plagues and death. These were present before its composition, since humanity's birth: in every generation's 'now'. Yet each generation has its own permutation of these events, and the *Apocalypse* makes this clear by presenting familiar images in new guises. The Beasts of John's day (Rome, Emperors) are different to those of Daniel's (Babylon, Assyria), the ruling cities in different locations, the great wars fought between new rivals, the difficulties faced unlike difficulties in the past. It presents images 'like' what has been seen before, but not exactly the same as. This textual signalling is perhaps the text's most powerful code, pointing out that every generation has had its own beasts, Babylons, locusts and horsemen which threaten to destroy all they know; yet their Babylons are not our Babylons any more than their wars are our wars, their Beasts our Beasts.

So when Hal Lindsey believed no one before him had understood what he could now see, in a sense he was right: his version of 'now' *was* unlike anything seen before. But he failed to see what the *Apocalypse of John* really does reveal to its

[23] As Ian Boxall says of Revelation 18, a part of *Revelation* particularly similar to the Old Testament: 'This is no montage of biblical quotations (that is not John's way), but a wealth of allusions and evocations rewoven into something new and creative' (Boxall 2006, 254).

audience: that he was the inheritor of these feelings and experiences; that he was part of each and every generation's struggle to understand its own terrifying times, and to face things unknown before. For the *Apocalypse* can call its readers to wrestle with their present fears by finding their place in the complex fabric of history, and to realise that they join together with their ancestors who too have cried out 'now, now' for the end to come. And maybe there is comfort in that, turning to the known past when struggling with the present, as opposed to looking to the unknown future. Today we inherit not only the text of the *Apocalypse*, but a long line of decodings, and what these provide is a strong sense that we are not the first to be perplexed by our world, and to face insurmountable challenges. These decodings, as we have seen above, speak powerfully of a shared inheritance, of shared longings and shared fears. In essence it provides the realisation that Apocalypse Now always dialogues with infinite permeations of Apocalypse Then.

Michelle Fletcher

A NEW JERUSALEM

PLAYING THE APOCALYPSE

Each time a mass shooting occurs in America—an event to which we are becoming disturbingly accustomed—conservative pundits swarm to their nearest television studios to offer solutions. As a moral society, they shout from their soapboxes that we must make every effort to stop the quick and easy sale of dangerous ... ahem ... video games. Forget semi-automatic weapons—those poor maligned implements of patriotism—the real devils are those dastardly Xbox and PlayStation consoles!

The idiocy of this political smokescreen—which shamelessly protects and perpetuates 'Big Ammo'—is obvious. But there is also something a bit more interesting surrounding video games, which usually goes unnoticed in the midst of such debates. Those commentators who inveigh against the moral degradation of American youth, and its departure from 'traditional' (read: Christian) values, clearly haven't looked very closely at, let alone *played*, any of these supposedly soul-destroying productions. If they had, they might notice a curious fact. Many of the most popular, and indeed the most violent, video games are awash in explicitly religious themes and symbols.

The plots—yes, video games can have plots!—of bestselling game franchises such as *Halo*, *Assassin's Creed*, *Heavenly Sword*, *Gears of War*, and *Darksiders* all draw extensively upon biblical material. While *Genesis*, especially the stories of Creation and the Flood, provides many of the allusions and archetypes in these games, unsurprisingly it is the *Book of Revelation* which rules the day. With its gory amalgam of rampaging beasts, devastating military campaigns, and natural disasters, the book reads like a game designer's dream. In contemporary gaming parlance, John of Patmos serves up a perfect synthesis of hack and slash survival horror. God may not play dice, but if John is a reliable guide, the Lord does seem to enjoy a good third-person shooter. (The point is not merely facetious: video game theory, including concepts such as ludonarrative dissonance and emergent gameplay, might actually provide useful tools for analyzing scripture).

In *Gears of War*, designed by Epic Games for Xbox 360 in 2006, the populace of an earth-like realm named Sera is threatened by the Locust Horde, a grotesque subterranean race who tunnel to the surface on Emergence Day (E-Day) and begin sucking humans into their underground lairs. The game's setting—a once beautiful, but now ashen world full of ruins and humanity's last survivors—seems to channel the words of Revelation 9.2-3: "the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given authority like the authority of scorpions of the earth." Even the horde's snarling countenances seem to owe something to *Revelation*, in which the locusts' "faces were like human faces...and their teeth like lions' teeth; they had scales like iron breastplates" (9.7-9).

Darksiders, developed by Vigil Games in 2010 for Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3, engages with John's prophecies in even more detail. The protagonist of the game is War, one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. War arrives before his appointed time, prior to the breaking of the appropriate seal (cf. Revelation 6). Unbeknownst to the horseman, the Apocalypse has been hastened prematurely by the militant angels Abaddon and Azrael, the former figure plucked from Revelation (9.11) and the latter adapted from Jewish and Islamic legend. Rather than victory for the forces of good, the forces of Hell gain the upper hand amidst the chaos. It is up to the Horseman, controlled by the game's player, to restore balance to the cosmos.

So just what lesson are such games teaching to those 'impressionable minds' we hear so much about from commentators? Even infamous games like *Grand Theft Auto*, so often maligned by pundits and politicians for encouraging acts of hooliganism and mayhem, satirize America's obsession with guns and violence just as much as they glorify it. And as we have seen, some of the industry's most successful creations employ a recognizably Christian soteriology, in which the gamer must play his or her part in order to 'win' salvation for humankind.

Sure there is still a lot of hacking and slashing that happens on route to this *telos*, but the 'message' of these role-playing games is far more complicated than a

simple endorsement of random acts of violence. The fight for goodness, justice, and at the very least survival, is integral to the vast majority of such narratives. And along the way, players become immersed in worlds studded with as many biblical names, stories, and concepts as a Sunday school chalkboard.

The irony of evangelical attacks on video games is particularly juicy in the case of eschatological thrillers like *Gears of War* and *Darksiders*. The grim, visceral imagery of these productions is not the recent invention of malevolent secularists as much as it is a continuation of a profound tradition of the Christian apocalyptic. The creators of these darkly captivating digital worlds are following in the hallowed footsteps of Memling, Brueghel, and Bosch, all of whom relished the creative opportunities furnished by theme of the Last Judgment.

Perhaps most of all, *Gears* and *Darksiders* evoke the fiery tumult which was the stock in trade of the Victorian painter John Martin, whose epic canvases were a major influence on early filmmakers. Despite being sniffed at by contemporary critics, John Ruskin among them, Martin was immensely popular in his time, and audiences queued up in droves for the opportunity to be swept up in the tempest of destruction in *Belshazzar's Feast* (1820), or to experience the vertiginous pull of *The Great Day of His Wrath* (1851-53). The latter, completed a year before Martin's death, all but inhales viewers, leaving us teetering on the edge of the frame as we peer into the central chasm. Naked sinners grapple against each other and the sliding rubble. One false step and we are in danger of slipping with them into Hell.

The titillation we feel in a gallery, swallowed up in a scene of biblical mayhem, may have a more respectable provenance, but it is not so different from the thrill of murdering a locust horde on a shimmering flat-screen TV. Indeed, Martin—an engineer by trade—would probably have been jealous. In the end, playing at the apocalypse is nothing new, and the greater danger may be in dismissing it than encouraging it. If John's vision does come to pass, a teenager with a little virtual experience expulsing the Devil's minions might come in handy. Perhaps more imminently, a healthy dose of the apocalyptic reminds us that religion is not just

a tidy device for encouraging good table manners; it can also get messy. Video games are not a reliable predictor of our actions in the real world, but they do paint a convincing picture of the worlds we imagine, for better or worse.

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