Graphic Apocalypse: 
An Analysis of the Evolving Doomsday Narrative

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Foreword:

What could I possibly say about the end of the world that hasn’t already been said? That was the challenge I faced when I first sat down to write this paper. How could I translate my own enthusiasm and interest for all things apocalyptic into a successful thesis? To do this, I began to analyze my own history with the End.

To this day I have vivid memories of my childhood art classes. I recall all the kindergarten students lined up with their easels and smocks, painting their families smiling under watery rainbows. Their suns beamed, their clouds winked and the teachers lavished praised upon their vignettes of domestic bliss. Yet, once they got to my canvas, the instructors’ smiles quickly left their faces and the compliments turned to nervous murmurs. My painting was not like the others: there were no rainbows, and certainly no jovial celestial objects. No, my creativity took a rather darker tone; I had drawn what made me most happy. Upon my canvas were monsters; crude and evil beasts chasing after the stick people that had been so content to live in the relative Eden of my peers’ work. If the paintings hung up around the class were Disney, I was Bosch. My parents were called, and perhaps to the surprise of my teachers, my work was soon proudly displayed on the walls of my house along with the other monstrous creations.

From a young age I was always encouraged to express myself as I wanted, which was mostly through apocalyptic visions of bizarre creatures attacking cities, people and each other. Maybe it was the fact that I was an only child, perhaps it was a result of my biological and cultural breeding – my father is a psychoanalyst and my mother a portrait
artist. I suppose that combination of psychology and realism along with a healthy dose of free time yields a child of the Apocalypse. In any case, my doomsday infatuation continued as I progressed through school. I was of course at the first showing of *Jurassic Park* and three years later *Independence Day*. The end of the world was a thrilling concept; so much unimaginable added flavor to my boredom with the predictable school system. It is worth mentioning that I attended Quaker school for almost twelve years. It’s no wonder I turned to the apocalyptic; the Society of Friends failed to match the excitement of death on a global scale.

Then came *Saving Private Ryan* – I had never seen such destruction. I was thrilled and horrified in equal measure. It is this combination of emotions which the end of the world is all about. Increasingly, I was fascinated by depictions of real world apocalyptic events, however dramatized. I soon took up the study of World War Two and first heard about the Holocaust (when I was eleven or so).

The first way I was exposed to Hitler’s “final solution” was through Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*. Here I was introduced not only to Genocide but also the graphic novel. Never before had I seen anything like *Maus*. Though I had always read the Sunday cartoons (I was partial to *Calvin and Hobbes*) and watched a fair amount of animated television, I was wholly unprepared for Spiegelman’s work. I had no idea that comics could be used like this. To say I read *Maus* would belittle the experience; I consumed it. It was as if Spiegelman had written *Maus* in the language of my own mind. The characters were alive within my head, they were in the room as their story unfolded. I did
not even realize the characters were animals until my second or third reading, I was entranced. *Maus* flowed into me, perfectly in sync with my ADD and caffeine riddled mind. All of this took place in the years immediately preceding 2001.

I do not want to exaggerate the effect that September 11th had on me – I did not know anyone who was injured or killed – but it certainly brought the idea of a real Armageddon that much closer. The Apocalypse no longer seemed confined to the pages of a book or the screen of a theater, it had come home with me. I found solace in the world of comic books, especially those with superheroes, seemingly the only pure beacons of justice left. Of these fictional heroes Batman was by far my favorite. Superman was too incorruptible, too good to be believable. He was always moral, always bright, shiny and obnoxious. Superman was the man your parents wanted you to be: invincible and dimpled. To me, he was a glorified jock and reminded me too much of the guys who made fun of me in high school. But Bruce Wayne was different. He was human. Batman was dark, violent and intelligent. Here was a man who should by all accounts be a pompous and spoiled jerk living off his parents’ wealth – but he wasn’t. Instead, Wayne was a broken man, obsessed with revenge after the murder of his parents. He was mean and borderline psychotic (after all, the man dressed up as a bat to fight crime). Batman was one of us, complex and damaged. And because of his humanity I worshipped him. He was my alter ego, my outlet for aggression and “real” justice. Superman was too much of a goody two shoes, trying to turn others from a life of crime.
Batman was all about retributive justice, unapologetically beating criminals senseless. Here was a flawed hero, Devil and Angel all in one.

*Watchmen* was based a similar concept, real men and women as heroes. These were neurotic crusaders: no powers, just justice on their own terms and emotional baggage. Even more than Batman, they were ordinary citizens who accomplished extraordinary things, people who fought to save the society that shunned them. They were the ones to admire. Batman and *The Watchmen* were ideal for the apocalyptic post September 11 world. Real people battling against seemingly hopeless situations. They reminded me of the firefighters and police who ran into the towers knowing full well there was a good chance they would not come out. Ordinary people put in horrific situations with just reaction, no super powers, to save them. Wasn’t it reality that was scariest anyway?

It was about this time that I was first exposed to Zombie cinema. Paradoxically, it was the realism of George Romero’s films that was so disturbing. There are few things more frightening in this world than being eaten alive by the cannibalistic corpse of your neighbor. Perhaps that sounds a bit silly. What zombie films manage to accomplish with their living dead stalkers is a reflection of our own world. The undead are symbols of social ills and strife – of the baser instincts and violence that reside within us all. The combination of surrealism and realism is what gives this narrative its power. It is the Apocalypse of our communities, our homes and of us. The two sides of the epic battle are our contemporaries; there is no us vs. them - there is only the struggle against ourselves.
No matter the victor of this war, the only result is death. To this day I am still unnerved by late night walks, afraid that one day the man stumbling toward me in the darkness might not simply be intoxicated, but one of the undead. At the same time, I find the idea simultaneous amusement makes the fear tolerable.

Even with all this incoming end time stimulation, I still felt like something was missing – my own version of the Apocalypse. Because of this, I enrolled in an Honors Seminar detailing the study of the End. As part of this course I had to create my doomsday vision; I chose to write, direct and act in my own film. The short was entitled “Descent” and was the video diary of a man who had locked himself away in his basement as the final battle draws ever closer. As the titled suggests, the film is about this man’s descent into madness and his subterranean isolation. I do not want to give too much of the story away but I urge you to watch it if you are interested.¹ So, what did I learn? Well, besides gaining the knowledge that I can play a rather eerie and convincing shut in, I realized that years of Apocalyptic dedication translated into a rather disturbing account of the end. The film prompted me to ask why. Why is apocalyptic imagery so powerful and so prolific? Why does Western Culture seem so obsessed with such depictions? A response addressing these questions is what I hope to accomplish with this, an in-depth investigation of the Graphic Apocalypse: an Analysis of the Evolving Doomsday Narrative.

¹ Just search Jesse Astwood and Descent on YouTube
Introduction: The Evolving Doomsday Narrative

Western culture is rife with apocalyptic imagery as depicted in the Christian Bible, especially from the Book of Revelation. These symbols and descriptions (brimstone and the four horsemen of the Apocalypse just to name a few) have been ingrained into our collective cultural consciousness. Since the conception of Revelation, apocalyptic imagery has played a prominent role in fine art. Writers like Alan Moore or artists like Frank Miller are simply the modern equivalents of earlier apocalyptic thinkers like Dante and Bosch. The concept of Armageddon resonates deeply in our society, as succinctly said by Lee Quinby: “Americans have been taught to reside in apocalyptic terror and count on millennial perfection.” While not all Americans subscribe to fundamentalist interpretation, it is important to note that “for a large majority these fears and hopes are more nebulous, a loose blend of religious symbols and secular expression.”2 Through the continued circulation of apocalyptic ideas, increasingly thought all forms of media, earth’s end has become embedded in our minds.

This thesis is aimed at illuminating the presence of apocalyptic symbolism in Western Comic Books, Graphic Novels and current Cinema and to analyze why such images are so powerful thousands of years after the first Apocalypses were written. I aim to elucidate the legacy of Christian apocalyptic archetypes in contemporary popular media. More specifically, I will discuss how the Bible’s Book of Revelation offers such a powerful model (and sometimes a script) for the depiction of end times in contemporary popular culture. My primary sources, such as Cloverfield, The Watchmen, Maus and

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2 Lee Quinby. Millennial Seduction. 5.
Shaun of the Dead, are representative of the infusion of Armageddon into modern entertainment. These examples offer a window into the evolution of how the Apocalypse is represented and how it adapts in different media forms.

Millennial media is steeped in doomsday visions as well as the language characteristic of Revelation, comprising what I call an apocalyptic vernacular. Whether Batman gallops into Gotham atop his horse (vigilante army in tow) in Batman: The Dark Knight Returns or Simon Pegg beats zombies with a cricket paddle in Shaun of the Dead, the traditional views of the Apocalypse linger in the background. Further examples are present in music ranging from Johnny Cash and Green Day. Cash’s “When the Man Comes Around” is arguably one of the most apocalyptic musical pieces in recent memory. The song includes the telling lyrics: “And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts, and I looked and behold: a pale horse. And his name, that sat on him, was Death… It's Alpha's and Omega's Kingdom come.”

Green Day in turn sings: “like an Armageddon flame… the shame. The ones who died without a name…To a hymn called "Faith and Misery" And bleed, the company lost the war today.”

Drawn from Revelation, these images and linguistic turns constitute the apocalyptic vernacular. Revelation also acts as a base upon which Graphic Apocalypse is built. The scenes aren’t new, only the style and the players. Perhaps the best example of this lies in Watchmen.

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3 Johnny Cash. When the Man Comes Around.
4 Green Day. Holiday.
Here, superheroes battle it out for the fate of the world and of mankind. They are mirror images of their biblical counterparts.

But why is this connection important?

In Revelation a messianic warrior leads the armies of justice against those of evil in a war for the souls of all. Replace Jesus with Superman and the story suddenly seems more familiar. It is not outlandish to see Jesus as the first superhero, and Satan the supervillains. The characters of Revelation are the archetypes for those we seem to see in major blockbusters and popular graphic novels. Both millennial media and the Bible are obsessed with absolutes; absolute good and absolute evil and the Apocalypse is where these two genres meet (often with violent consequences). Such a formula works well in a country like the United States. Often we depict ourselves as the savior of the world fighting against the unjust. In turn we occupy this role and carry it out with violent efficiency. This is partly why apocalyptic imagery is so popular in the West; initially it shaped our attitudes as a nation and now nationalism continues to reflect it. Judging from our media, it seems some part of us all wants to be the hero; wants to save the innocent from harm. More important, as Americans, we often see it as our job to do so. Yet, because most of us lack the ability to fly like Superman or have yet to fight a zombie, millennial media allows us identify with these archetypal characters we worship (in the case of Jesus, religiously). In this way we can live out the heroics we grew up with as children, from the safety our living rooms.
This heroism is closely linked to hope, a common yet seemingly contradictory response to of Armageddon. In his work, *Holy Superheroes*, Greg Garrett argues that Apocalypse represents rebirth and renewal, a chance to restore what is torn down. Destructive hope is reflected in *Watchmen*, when in an attempt to save the world from war, one of the superheroes destroys New York City. In the death of millions lays the salvations of billions. In the same way, God ends the world in the *Book of Revelation* to begin eternal life as a “shining city on the hill.” This is what Superheroes are all about, fighting desperately in hopes of creating some idealized crime-free (sin-free?) society. To take it even further, this is the hope of America: clearing the world of despotism to make room for democracy. Part of the popularity of the Graphic Apocalypse lies in the ideology that surrounds us, be it secularized or straight from biblical texts. The hope for rebirth is an immensely powerful biblical/end time concept within the apocalyptic vernacular, and it inevitably involves death. There has been much discussion over the “real” meaning behind the *Book of Revelation* and who the characters represent on a mortal level. John of Patmos asserts that entire text is a prophecy, an apparition of what is to come. If *Revelation* is understood as a vision then it is by nature representative. The images he sees serve as surrogates or warnings for the future. To take this one step further, some have “argued that when John sees visions of the armies of Satan at war with the armies of God, he is predicting the invasion of the Roman Empire by various ‘barbarian’ peoples” and that when he describes the Antichrist he is in actuality referring
to Emperor Nero. This kind of information is accepted by many believers as a coded system. The text works as a proxy for historical events and issues of time period in which it is read, a concept I will more fully discuss in Chapter I. The importance of Apocalypse by proxy remains true today as many continue to find new candidates for the Antichrist (most recently Barack Obama).

Graphic Apocalyptic narratives allow us to securely experience the threat of death and in some cases laugh at it. Batman risks his life every time he ventures out of his cave, be it from psychotic criminals or corrupt law officials. And yet every morning he returns, perhaps a bit a worse for the wear, but still alive. He regularly faces death, and in the process fends off evil. At the same time, Batman controls the ultimate fate of his nemesis. In doing this, Bruce Wayne manages to conquer his own mortality as well those he hunts. Batman, the warrior of justice, allows for introspection about our mortality in comfortable safety (well, not for Batman). In the same way, Shaun’s comedic zombie like demeanor, as he goes about his monotonous life, pokes fun at the concept of death and of our fear of what we cannot control. Death suddenly seems much less frightening when you face it being beaten (to death?) with vinyl records. The absurdity allows for acceptance of ideas and images that are usually too hard to stomach.

These are but a few themes prevalent in the doomsday narrative. I will also investigate the consumerism of modern society and the ills it breeds, the historical use of surrogates to depict and explain events, the graphic nature of the Apocalypse – both

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visual and in terms of gore, the self-visualization and surveillance associated with the
digital age, the uncanny and the nature of its potency, and the use of timelines. In short, I
aim to uncover the influence of biblical end time ideology through careful analysis of
graphic narratives and comparison to Revelation. There is a good deal of literature that
explores religion in such sources, but there is little that specifically evaluates the effect
that apocalyptic imagery has had or why it is there to begin with. Why should such a
secularized form of art be so biblically inclined? The answer lies in the state of the West.
As a civilization we are constantly bombarded with images of the end, so it makes sense
that the rising popularity in graphic narratives should also reflect a rising influence of
Revelation. So too, resistance to the ideology of Apocalypse often takes Parodic form, as
with Jon Stewart’s mimetic images.

To demonstrate the extent to which modern day doomsday, be it the undead
narrative or Batman’s struggle for the soul of Gotham, is firmly grounded in what came
before in Judeo-Christian texts. I have divided this thesis into three chapters, the order of
which is meant to show a gradual evolution of the doomsday narrative. Apocalypse by
Proxy investigates the use of Revelation-like imagery as a device to express reality. In
this Chapter, I introduce the origins of Biblical apocalyptic thinking and apply these
concepts to modern forms of popular culture. Specifically, I will analyze the religious
significance and underlying themes in the monster and zombie genres. This is in hopes of
understanding the changes and similarities of ancient doomsday narratives to modern
ones. Chapter II, Super Apocalypse, analyzes superheroes as religious archetypes. In
Here I investigate the duality of the millennial story – of ultimate good and evil. To show the continuing evolution of apocalyptic imagery. Thus, the doomsday narrative is ever altering to accommodate the period in which is used. The Third Chapter **Surviving Apocalypse**, is an examination of personal accounts of the end with a focus on the human experience of great tragedy and destruction, as opposed to the more mythical constructions of the previous sections. This takes the Apocalypse out of the realm of proxies and absolutistic ideals and into the muddier arena of the everyday. I aspire to examine what happens when the Apocalypse no longer resides in Biblical visions or media but invades our waking lives.
Chapter I

Apocalypse by Proxy

Part I
Why Revelation’s Beast, Godzilla and Clover are Not Merely Monsters

_Cloverfield_ isn’t only about a giant beast that ruthlessly attacks Manhattan. The creature, dubbed Clover, is a symbolic representation of our fear of destruction. In this light, the monster renders a kind of Apocalypse by proxy. This enables the film to discuss and explore important themes and issues by circumventing the audience’s hesitation to watch frightening, real world events, such as terrorism. _Cloverfield_ puts a dramatic screen between those watching it and the serious social issues it raises; and it seeks to entertain in the process.

The first, and arguably the most important, question is: why use a monster as device? The producer, J.J. Abrams explains that, “there’s this underlying fear that we all have, every day, that something else [referring to 9/11] might happen, at any moment” and that the “idea of a monster movie, it allows people to experience that kind of fear, safely.” Thus Clover represents, in part, Abram’s attempt to make a film about terrorism devoid of terrorists. This is echoed by the characters within the film, who at the first sign of destruction anxiously question one another: “Think it’s another terrorist attack?” A similar device plays through Godzilla films. Godzilla can be easily understood as an embodiment of Japanese fear and anxiety concerning their Apocalypse. Philip Brophy

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6 Matt Reeves, _Cloverfield_ (2008), Special features.
7 Reeves, Film.
explains that the Japanese were traumatized by their “graven misfortune at the hands of America’s atomic and pyrotechnic tactics during World War II” and that “every time Neo-Tokyo is razed to the ground, silent footage of Hiroshima seems to be subliminally superimposed.”

Godzilla is created by the same nuclear energy that destroyed Japanese cities and becomes a destroyer. With his own creation, Abrams does pretty much the same. The main difference is Godzilla’s eventual transformation into a benevolent beast that protects Japan from other giant beasts; Clover never makes this progression.

Like Godzilla, Abram’s beast accomplishes a similar end: Clover is the Godzilla of terrorism. While the creature does not stem directly from September 11th, his actions evoke familiar 9/11 imagery. He causes confusion, fear and dread, forever changing the world in the process. Clover brings down building after building, including the Woolworth tower which collapses, creating a wave of dust and debris that envelopes the camera. This is after the characters, like many on 9/11, duck into a store to avoid the foul air outside. It would be difficult for Abrams to find an action more emblematic of a terrorist attack in America than having the monster rip the head from the Statue of Liberty and hurl it into the crowd of attractive but frantic twenty somethings. Such a scene shifts toward the comical with its heavy handed symbolism, especially when these “typical” New Yorkers proceed to crowd around the head, snapping pictures of it with their cell phones. Yet the destruction is monumental.

At its core, the film is a classic apocalyptic piece, invoking the Book of Revelation in numerous ways. John of Patmos explains that “there were voices, and

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8 Phillip Brophy, *Monster Island: Godzilla and Japanese sci-fi/horror/fantasy*. 1
thunders, and lightings; and there was a great earthquake" and “he maketh fire come
down from heaven.”⁹ Now compare this to the introduction of Clover. The monster’s
first appearance is preceded by a tremendous explosion that shakes the ground and
throws great balls of flaming debris into the air. This scene is no less apocalyptic,
especially if you take into consideration the location of the creature’s emergence –
Manhattan. In this case, New York serves as proxy for Babylon; one of the great cities of
the world destroyed by some supernatural force. Equally telling of Revelation’s influence
is the nature of Clover itself. The animal is inferred to have come from the ocean, akin to
“a beast rise[n] up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns.”¹⁰ While Clover has
neither multiple heads nor horns, it is certainly a horrendous creature in a similar vein.
Another intriguing similarity is the Cloverfield monster’s invincibility; no matter what
weapons are used, it seems impervious to damage. Revelation contains a similar
description of its own foul creature: “and I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to
death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast.”¹¹
This concept of regeneration is popular within monster and horror Genre and
encapsulates the ubiquitous influence of Christian apocalyptic imagery on modern
popular country.

If understood as a series of interpretive acts, Revelation is itself an Apocalypse
by Proxy, having biblical characters stand in for those historically threatening Rome,
much in the same way Abram’s creation represents terrorism. To take it one step further,

⁹ Revelation, 16:18, 13:13
¹⁰ ibid, 13:1
¹¹ ibid, 13:3
to John these “barbarians” are terrorists. While is may not seem possible for a monster destroying Manhattan to be any more Apocalyptic, this kind of direct relationship to Revelation surely makes a case for it.

At the same time, it would not be fair to simply dismiss Cloverfield as a mere modernized depiction of the prophecies outlined by John in the Book of Revelation. The film represents an evolution in end time representation. A key issue in Revelation is a clash of wills. God wants to protect his throne, Satan yearns to usurp it; otherwise there would be little point in the epic battles that would take place during the Christian Apocalypse. Cloverfield is devoid of such resolve. Neville Page, the creature designer explains that Clover “is an infant. It’s newly hatched, newly born” and “when it’s screaming, when it’s roaring, it’s not a threat display kind of thing… It’s crying out for its mother, perhaps. It’s lost.”\(^{12}\) The monster has no interest in anything but survival, the pain and suffering it causes is never purposeful. This brings a whole new dimension to Abrams’ urban Apocalypse, not to mention thoughts of how horrifying Clover’s mother must be. In creating this confused, lost being, Cloverfield has in essence amplified the fear associated with end times. The film’s director, Matt Reeves elucidates, “I think there’s almost nothing scarier than an animal that is much bigger than you, that’s terrified. Because that animal’s going to do anything.”\(^{13}\) No longer is the threat of Apocalypse clearly defined or scripted as it is in Revelation, Clover strikes blindly and is impossible to predict and therefore to defeat. Such random and wanton destruction

\(^{12}\) Reeves, Special features
\(^{13}\) ibid
corresponds well to the monster’s role as a stand-in for terrorism. No one, at least not the ordinary citizen, expected the suicide bombings of September 11th. It is the impulsivity of terrorism that is its most powerful weapon. The utterly unpredictable when and where of the attacks, not always the extent, is what makes them so terrifying. It is worth noting that Revelation has no set start date either. But once the end begins, it is strictly choreographed; the same cannot be said of a terrorist based Armageddon and certainly not of Cloverfield.

Terrorism, especially in America’s urban centers, is an immensely difficult subject matter to translate to film successfully. Cloverfield achieves a blend of entertainment while still managing to expose our fears surrounding terrorism—a difficult mix but one that is aided by the graphic Apocalypse. Cloverfield represents an alternative to the documentary, a way of experiencing real world events through the fantastical. Revelation works in a similar way, using biblical characters as proxies for the real dangers facing its author and readership. To this day the Christian Apocalypse is used by many in a similar manner, as they assign the role of Antichrist to various historical figures. In this way, the gravity of real world violence is transformed into a more palpable and relatable form. Cloverfield offers an updated example of this, incorporating aspects of the classical Armageddon with the unpredictability of and chaos wrought by modern terrorism.
Part II

Zombies: The War Against Ourselves

Zombies are used in much the same way as Revelation’s Beast, Godzilla and Clover: a proxy that continues the evolving doomsday narrative. Yet there is a crucial distinction between the surrogate duty of the undead and Abram’s creature. In a zombie Apocalypse, the monsters are us. Suddenly the demons we face are ourselves and the task of separating us from them becomes increasingly complex and personally destructive. While this may at first glance seem to undermine the idea of zombies as an Apocalypse by proxy, it is from their humanity that they draw so much of their potency. This internal strife is a cosmic struggle which the proxy of a zombie Apocalypse allows to be physically realized. It is the same strength that enables those surviving end times to withstand the horrendous onslaught of the undead that powers the reanimated. Ultimately, those left alive must fight against their counterparts and, via a surrogate, themselves. More crucial is the undead parallel to an inverse of Christian hope. In essence the walking dead can be seen as the true survivors of the Apocalypse. Zombies are already deceased and will survive indefinitely so long as they are not cut down by the still living humans, an ironic twist on with fundamentalist literalism in which the dead will walk the earth again come god’s final judgment. This ironic use of Revelation’s message is another facet of the zombie Apocalypse and another reason it is such a powerful tool.
A common reaction to zombie film is one of disgust. Many a movie critique has condemned the genre as a vulgar blood fest, a kind of pornography of hyper violence. This is the grounds upon which many horror moves are dismissed as little more than vulgar, debased entertainment. Anyone who has watched the great works of George Romero (especially *The Land of the Dead* and Zach Snyder’s 2004 remake of *Dawn of the Dead*), can attest to the brutal nature of the genre. As Robert Kirkman, the creator of the zombie graphic novel series *The Walking Dead* explains: “good zombie movies show us how messed up we are, they make us question our station in society… and our society’s station in the world. They show us gore and violence and all that cool stuff too… but there’s always an undercurrent of social commentary and thoughtfulness.”

Thus it is important to avoid dismissing such narratives at face value. And it is worth noting that there has been a long history of debate over incorporating John of Patmos’s work into the Bible due to its violent imagery. Perhaps “the successive waves of violence that unfold in *Revelation,*” what Charles Strozier terms “biblical Genocide” echoes the brutality of zombie cinema. The excessive bloodshed of the undead narrative is precisely what links zombie representation to the book of *Revelation.*

This depiction of death is also what draws us to both works and activates reflection by way of the proxy. Simon Pegg, lead actor and co-writer of the Zombie satire *Shaun of the Dead,* asserts that the walking corpse “embodies a number of our greatest

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14 Zach Snyder, *Dawn of the Dead* (2004), Film; George Romero, *Land of the Dead* (2005), Film
15 Robert Kirkman, *The Walking Dead - Volume 1,* no pagination
16 Charles B. Strozier, *Apocalypse,* On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America, 70
fears,” most notably death.\textsuperscript{17} Fatality is a prominent theme in \textit{Revelation} as well as a source of general human fascination. It is one of the only constants that we all share and the one we are most powerless against, “because we all die, everyone reflects at some point about individual and collective endings.”\textsuperscript{18} As such, it is not surprising how mortality plays such an important role in both religion and entertainment; both allow for us to experience death from relative safety.

The undead narrative allows us, perhaps more than any other Genre, to gain a familiarity with the prospect of our own demise. In this millennial media form, death is ubiquitous to the point that a corpse roaming the earth becomes common place. Think how bizarre it is for those surviving the zombie Apocalypse to accept their semi-extinct neighbors as a fact of life (pun intended). Zach Snyder’s remake of \textit{The Dawn of the Dead} echoes this point in a scene that is as humorous as it is revoltingly disturbing. The characters in the film have locked themselves into a shopping mall, barricading the entrances against the hordes of living dead that now stumble by the hundreds of thousands outside the doors. Boredom soon replaces terror and the survivors must find unique ways of entertaining themselves. This is accomplished via a game affectionately dubbed “Hollywood Squares.”\textsuperscript{19} The sport is simple. First, a member of group calls out the name of a celebrity to a rifleman. In turn, the smiling gunner proceeds to blow the head off the closest undead, in this case, Jay Leno. In the film, this is then followed by a

\textsuperscript{17} Robert Kirkman, \textit{The Walking Dead - Volume 2}, no pagination  
\textsuperscript{18} Strozier, 1  
\textsuperscript{19} Snyder, film
spired cry “to get Rosie O’Donnell.” In essence the figure heads of our popular culture and of the pre-zombie world are quite literally killed off via their zombie proxies. Yet the question remains about how this relates back to Revelation.

Revelation revolves around a period of tribulation before the final judgment and this is certainly a theme that is robustly represented in the Zombie genre. It should come as no surprise then that Dawn of the Dead should be so heavily steeped in the doomsday narrative. The link is made explicit early on in the film when in the film one of the survivors drifts off to sleep as he watches a fundamentalist Christian television program. The camera focuses on a clock to show that the time is past midnight. The Apocalypse has begun. The reverend reproaches: “hell is overflowing…And Satan is sending his dead to us. Why? Because you have sex out of wedlock. You kill unborn children. You have man-on-man relations. Same-sex marriage. How do you think your God will judge you? Well, friends, now we know. When there is no more room in hell, the dead will walk the earth.” Besides the obvious gestures toward Revelation, of Satan’s army and God’s judgments, the reverend speaks in the apocalyptic vernacular. These references to Revelation pull the zombie out of the realm of science fiction and frame it in a fundamentalist Christian environment of the End Times, in Tribulation.

The entire premise of a zombie Apocalypse seems to be reflected by Revelation; the premise of all undead narratives involves the survival of the chosen few against
hordes of the undead (a veritable army of Satan). Furthermore, like the followers of Satan, all zombies bear the mark of the beast – the bite that turned them into the undead. As with *Revelation*, those with the mark are doomed. The zombie bite serves as the way of telling who will become the walking dead and who will remain human. This device is well used throughout the horror genre and the same basic rules apply to werewolf and vampire bites. A good deal of suspense and drama stem from this device as the humans frantically struggle to figure out who the enemy is and how to combat them. But the question remains: where exactly do the living dead come from? A number of characters within these dramas suggest the outbreak of the living dead is part of God’s final judgment, again a central part of *Revelation*. Although this judgment is usually not directly carried out by God, there is always some event, a proxy, through which the supernatural force works. A common cause of the zombie Apocalypse is viral or bacterial; nature or man has released some deadly agent that transforms the living into putrefying cannibals. Like the creature from *Cloverfield* this kind of undead narrative “may be a symptom of a post-9/11 world nervous at the possibilities of bioterrorism, as a previous Generation lived constant in the shadow of nuclear war,” as is consistent with the creation of Godzilla. As I noted earlier with *Cloverfield*, this end time destruction is consistent with *Revelation*’s Armageddon. While this places Judeo-Christian apocalyptic imagery in the undead narrative, I argue that this goes both ways: that the undead are also within the Bible.

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22 Kim Paffenroth, *Gospel of the Living Dead*, 3
What I am saying is that the concept of zombie, the living dead, is integral Christian ideology. The Bible, especially The Book of Revelation, is full of depictions of supernatural creatures and the dead and those who return to life. Many creatures within the bible are by their nature “a combination of two creatures… between two physical states,” the clearest example of this being Revelation’s Beast of the Sea who “was like unto a leopard” had the “feet of a bear” and “the mouth of a lion.”23 So too, zombies represent a fusion of human and demon/ghoul.24 To take it one step further, Jesus is also a similar combination of supernatural and mortal man, “what humans consider holy and sacred” as well as being a mortal man.25 This in turn could be applied to a human corpse “because it is both still human, and yet no longer human: it cannot be treated just like a piece of trash, but also it should not be kept around”26 Herein lays the dilemma of the extermination of zombies who are human and monstrous at the sometime. This also what is so utterly terrifying about the undead. To invoke Freud’s concept of the uncanny, that which frightens us most is what we are most familiar with, the normal made alien.27

While it may be offensive to some to assert that Jesus was a zombie, the important comparison lies in the time Christ spent undead as he visited his apostles. During this time, Jesus is often depicted as maintaining the injuries he sustained before his death, much in the same way as the living dead do. In the zombie genre, this is often humorous.

23 Paffenroth, 7; Revelation, 13:2.
24 Ghoul as defined by Britannica Online: demonic being believed to inhabit burial grounds and other deserted places.
25 Paffenroth, , 8
26 ibid
27 Lee Quinby, Anti- Apocalypse , Exercises in Genealogical Criticism, 143
The undead are maimed, brainless and thus clumsy. They stumble about, their wounds so outlandish, as be a mockery of injury and death itself. Their monstrous nature is tempered by their child-like shambling and almost slap stick like accidents – it’s not uncommon for zombies to trip and fall on their faces, each other or off precipices. As strange as it may seem, such scenes of walking corpses become more comedy than horror and the viewer seems almost encouraged to laugh. Violence and aggression can be funny and arguably the root of all humor.

Interestingly, the concept of a “zombie Jesus” is a popular internet meme, with many creating humorous depictions of Christ stumbling about like the undead. In a more serious vein, Christians recall that Jesus, for example, overcame death only after being subjected to the gruesome and humiliating spectacle of public execution.”28 Christ’s horrific and shameful execution at the hands of the Romans bares a striking similarity to the way the living treat the walking dead. Zombies are dispatched with chilling gore, often as humans laugh and generally enjoy the slaughter. More than this, their deaths often takes place in public. This in turn leads to the humiliation inherent with reanimation – the corpse on display, laid bare before the world. Zombies are depicted as wearing whatever they happened to be dressed in when they were first turned and are doomed to do so until they are dispatched: “most [zombies] were either in hospital gowns, or pajamas and nightshirts. Some were in sweats or their undies… or just naked, a lot of

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28 Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God, the Global Rise of Religious Terrorism*, 168
them completely buck bare.”

In turn, Jesus is stripped before his crucifixion and is left near nude upon the cross, compounding his shame. Perhaps it is more than coincidence that many of the trials of Jesus seem to be invoked by this undead lore.

Aside from the assertion that the dead will ultimately rise again to be judged, Revelation also explains what is in store for the chosen people: “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” While Revelation is referring to those who will be saved, the passage above could also be used to describe the walking dead, albeit with irony. No longer do they have any functioning internal plumbing, their eyes are dry. The zombies rise from the dead and while they can be destroyed it would be difficult to claim you can kill anything that has already expired. The undead feel neither pain nor emotion. Their brains no longer function with any urge other than the one to feed and their human way of life has “passed away.” Perhaps in this way zombies represent not just a surrogate for humanity but also a proxy of the millennial dream, in inverse form. Maybe the corpses represent a way for us to experience the finale of end times. A large part of the apocalyptic image is the stipulation that the chosen will live forever in harmony. Zombies, if left unmolested, can walk on indefinitely. As for harmony and peace, zombies attack only others; the undead never fight one another and are always content to coexist, even in great numbers. Still, the

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29 Max Brooks, World War Z, An Oral History of the Zombie War, 97
30 Revelation, 21:4
walking dead are creatures of incomprehensible and mindless violence. That is, until recently.

_Land of the Dead_, more than any other zombie source, demonstrates the evolution of the undead automaton from senseless beast to a thinking being. In _Land of the Dead_ Romero introduces us to a world ruled by reanimated corpses. The remaining humans have barricaded themselves in Earth’s final city, centered around the last remaining luxury condo – Fiddler’s Green. The humans rely on Dead Reckoning, a heavily armed truck, to raid neighboring towns for food. This society is ruled over by the malevolent Kaufman who is part “capitalist robber baron, mad Roman emperor, and organized crime kingpin.”

Kaufman extorts and murders at will, as he drinks champagne and peers down at the undead from his penthouse view. One such deceased being is of particular interest. Big Daddy is a former gas station attendant who, like some other of his undead neighbors, is beginning to remember. He is compelled to pump gas for cars that are long gone as he slowly regains pieces of his former life. This reclamation of his former self culminates in his attempts to save his fellow corpses after they are violently eviscerated by an unprovoked attacked by a gang of human survivors. The film then follows Big Daddy as he leads a group of zombies to the remaining human establishment in hopes of ending human persecution. Humanity has become exceedingly violent; perhaps for a similar reason those who believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible (and

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31 Paffenroth, 125
32 This includes a scene of a zombie marching band who try in vain to play their instruments in a park gazebo. This vignette is as humorous as it is depressing.
often show such disdain for those who do not agree with them. “The nonbeliever symbolizes [their] pre-Christian, earlier self” much in the same way an undead neighbor could serve as a reminder of your past, your own pre-zombie world. Thus the anger may be based on an internal struggle, against those who are a proxy for yourself. The goal is to come to grips with the new world and the shame at having been unable to prevent it or save those we loved.

Big Daddy, as one of those left out of the new order seeks to rebuild his world. In short, Romero has created a zombie messiah. Even more paradoxically, the undead have become a beacon of self-determination and hope. This reversal of roles makes the issues inherent to a world of the undead all the more multifaceted. Have zombies come full circle and become more human than us? Are we now the proxy by which the zombie Apocalypse will be described? What exactly has happened here?

At first glance, *Land of the Dead* seems to completely disregard former zombie imagery. Actually, it overturns it. In *Revelation*, humans are the chosen people. In *Land of the Dead* this role has shifted to the undead. Firstly, both Big Daddy and Jesus as the warrior messiah have spent time as a corpse before rising (literally) to lead their respective people. In addition, the Apocalypse has always had a strong undercurrent of hope, at least for those who are chosen by God. What’s changing here is the result of the final battle and the way this optimism is used. Traditionally in the zombie genre, humans as a whole have represented the forces of good against the satanic

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33 Strozier, 91
legions of walking dead. In *Land of the Dead* there are new classifications and groups. Zombies are no longer necessarily fated to be mindless murderers, though in the film many remain as such. The undead like Big Daddy are a new breed, seeking asylum from the violence of humanity, perhaps surviving as a stand-in for early persecuted Christians like the man who most likely wrote *Revelation*. These new zombies offer a similar example of how the victimized can overcome, albeit in this case through the unsavory means of cannibalism, a point to which I will return. On the other side, the human survivors do not function as a cohesive unit; greed and power have made the men who control Earth’s last city violent and selfish. New comers and the less well off (often foreigners) are forced into ghettos closest to the barrier against the undead hordes. This kind of social commentary is common to many examples of the zombie genre, but it is rare to see it so notably in a film.

*Land of the Dead* explores the social constructions and faults of a world overtaken by zombies, but what of the undead themselves? As Simon Pegg points out, “The zombie represents a number of our own deeper insecurities. The fear that deep down, we may be little more than animals, concerned only with appetite. Zombies can represent the threat of collectivism against individuality.”

In this way, the undead serve as surrogates for our own internal doubts. This is comparable to *Revelation* in its attempt to place early Christianity’s enemies within a broader, cosmic story.

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34 Kirkman, vol 2., no pagination
The difference with the zombie Apocalypse and Revelation is that the enemies are now within us, which makes them exceedingly hard to battle. So perhaps the outlandish nature of the genre, as well as the violence and gore, is a means to remove us from our own demons, to take us far enough away to come to terms with or at least explore self-doubt and personal internal struggle. Or maybe it isn’t even really about the zombies: “as in some of the best zombie stories, the ghouls themselves are merely bit part players, a context in which to play out the human story. Our real concerns are for the people that remain, for their future and by proxy, our own.”35 It is this human story which is at the core of hope for a new world; how we can survive in the face of even the most horrendous disasters. “The undead may be tenacious, single minded and relentless” but “you don’t have to be Van Helsing… to throw down with a zombie. Anyone with a pulse can step up. As long as you keep your head, defeating a zombie is not an insurmountable task.”36 In other words, the zombie Apocalypse occurs for the common people, a cosmic battle in their own backyard. It is the mundane nature of the zombie Apocalypse that makes it so terrifying, affecting everyone everywhere. As with Revelation, the armies of Satan will not be restricted to supernatural beings; the zombies will be “reflections of your friends, your neighbors, your families” and maybe even “yourselves.”37 In The Walking Dead, Dawn of the Dead and Land of the Dead, the combat occurs in our backyards, our malls and our cities. The zombie Apocalypse is one fought against

35 ibid.
36 ibid.
37 Van Helsing - Mythical killer and expert of all things evil, most notably vampires; Kirkman, vol 1, no pagination
ourselves in places we live - our homes. This adds to the terror of the Genre and adds a
certain degree of realism. All the gruesome events of the undead narrative (as well as
Cloverfield) are happening in the places we live now, not in some far off place.

The zombie genre can also be seen in terms of the doomsday timeline, the order in
which the end of world occurs. The rise of the undead seems to be the most solid starting
point for the apocalyptic end within the zombie Apocalypse, which roughly corresponds
to the events of Zach Snyder’s Dawn of the Dead. The characters experience the
transformation of their world from the one we all know to a place where the dead refuse
to remain so. The Land of the Dead picks up some time later, perhaps five or ten years in
the future. The zombies have completely taken over the earth and the human Arch villain
Kaufman has exploited his way to power. He maintains this power through use of the
death machine Dead Reckoning (a beast in its own right), which invokes the Christian
concept of the final judgment and places Land of the Dead within the apocalyptic vernacular. Kaufman has decided it is “better to reign in hell, than serve in Heav’n”
making him a candidate for a surrogate antichrist.38 This comparison is strengthened by
the fact that he resembles the suspected original Antichrist proxy, Roman Emperor Nero.
One of the popular stories about Nero was his indifference to the suffering of his own
people, Nero is said to have to have “fiddl[ed] while Rome burn[ed].”39 Nero also was
rumored to have enjoyed torturing (and torching) early Christians. This conclusion is of
course strengthened by the name of Kaufman’s headquarters - Fiddler’s Green. Thus in

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38 Paffenroth, 126
39 ibid
Land of the Dead, Romero seeks to establish his film as the time of the Antichrist. This period in Revelation’s doomsday narrative is followed by the great biblical battle of Armageddon and the return of Jesus before his 1,000 years of peaceful rule. I again assert Big Daddy’s role as the warrior zombie messiah and his clash with the last breathing city left. This final battle between the undead and their living counterparts culminates with the promise of peace. It is also worthy of note that Kaufman, like Satan, is cast into the fire (he is burned to death) and is forever unseated as part of the last great zombie/human conflict.

So what does this all mean for the doomsday narrative? The zombie genre has transformed the Apocalypse into one of irony and inversion, swapping the absolutist roles of good and evil. The evolution has shown the failings of man and their transition into the demonic, we have lost our former world through our own wickedness and risk loosing humanity as whole. The undead Apocalypse is a scathing critique of so-called civilization with its great greed and corruption, a force that has poisoned the world. Revelation has this critique too, but the resolution is cosmically fulfilled by God, not zombies who in this case occupy the role formerly held by humans. Zombies also represent a cleansing force, consuming the evil men who have gained control. The undead, somewhat paradoxically, have become the moralizing agents, freeing the world from corruption of humanity.
Chapter II
Super Apocalypse: When Darkness Descends

Ideally, superheroes represent an ultimate form of benevolence. They are the angels of old revamped – now clad in spandex and capes for the modern day. Supervillains are the exact opposite; they are the current representation of demons. Both of these roles are Biblical constructs of absolute good versus evil, as are the cosmic battles by which these two forces are intertwined. This dualism is common to Revelation and carries into world of the comic book. Yet, it is not as simple as this. The modern superhero is not one of pure benevolence nor is the supervillain one of absolute malevolence. With figures like Batman, the line separating good and evil has been blurred. So too has the nature of the “super,” since the Dark Knight is neither an angel nor demon but, rather, a man with attributes of both. This represents a step away from pure dualism and thus a step in the evolution of the Doomsday Narrative that began in Revelation.

During the battle at Armageddon, there are only the forces of good and the forces of evil, each side having its own officers. The army of light is led by Jesus and the army of darkness by the Antichrist. Superheroes and villains occupy similar roles, are champions of their given camps. In Revelation, Jesus’ “eyes were as a flame of fire” and “out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite nations” as he rides upon his white horse and on “his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF
KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”⁴⁰ Such a description depicts Christ as a kind of Biblical superhero, a Christian Superman. Jesus too has his own costume, complete with Crown and a name/insignia upon his vesture. Dressed all in white, he exemplifies heavenly purity and righteousness as he battles the forces of Hell. The description of Christ’s eyes also invoke what amounts to be a super power (perhaps akin to Superman’s heat vision), as could the sword that comes from his mouth. This is of course without mentioning Christ’s many other unworldly powers, such as reanimation and curing of the sick. This is strengthened by Christ’s other worldliness, Jesus is not of this world and neither is Superman. The Bible is full of beings who that can perform marvels and possess unnatural abilities, Samson’s superhuman strength and Moses’ miracles are representative of this as well. Perhaps then, it is not unreasonable to look upon the Judeo-Christian holy texts as the precursor to the modern comic book; a literary form that depicts ultimate battles of good and evil fought by the super powered.

In essence comic books and their “heroes have become a part of our American mythology.”⁴¹ Perhaps the greatest proof of this is that I need neither explain Superman nor his origins, since most Western readers will already be intimately familiar with these details. Much in the same way as Jesus defends the chosen at the end of the world, “when evil rears its ugly head, Superman… bravely battles the villainous forces, ending the threat, restoring the state of peaceful equilibrium.”⁴² In this way, Superman and other such “supersaviors in pop culture function as replacements for the Christ figure… their

⁴⁰ Revelation, 19:11-19:16
⁴¹ Greg Garrett, Holy Superheroes, 5
⁴² ibid.
superhuman abilities reflect a hope for divine, redemptive powers."43 The caped crusaders are the Biblical heroes of old, adapted to modern life. Yet, during the course of this evolution, some of these heroes seem to have lost their ultimate morality.

Superman can be grouped in easily with his Biblical forbearers; he is uncompromisingly righteous, and he never strays from his ideals of purity and of good. This is why Superman represents an almost exact analogue of figures like Christ. Batman is entirely different story. Unlike Clark Kent, Bruce Wayne is neither mild mannered nor does he have either extraterrestrial or humble small town beginnings. Wayne is a multimillionaire from the city of Gotham, orphaned as a child after his parents are gunned down during an armed robbery. Because of this, Wayne devotes his life to revenge against crime. Batman dresses like a bat, a creature that represents shadow, evil and fear. He uses this malicious guise to carry out justice and is beholden to none. In contrast to Superman’s “goody two shoes,” Boy Scout personality, Batman is a fusion of good and evil; one from the dark who fights for the light. Wayne embraces malevolence in order to carry forth his retribution. He has no side but his own and is as often caught battling the inept police force of Gotham as he is its seedy underbelly. This amalgamation separates Batman from the classic Doomsday Narrative as something different, something new, but still grounded in the Apocalyptic.

Like Christ, the Beasts of Revelation and the Zombies detailed in the previous chapter, and unlike superman, Batman is a hybrid. As stated earlier, he is a union of light

43 Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, Myth of the American Superhero, 6-7
and dark, in addition to this, Batman is a blend of man and animal. He is stronger than any normal human and fights with the ferocity of a rabid beast. Batman is called demon by his opponents who believe him to be superhuman, a force beyond their strength. Wayne himself echoes this sentiment as he describes his origins. As a child, Wayne fell into a cave where he was attacked by giant bat “gliding with ancient grace… eyes gleaming, untouched by love or joy or sorrow… breath hot with the taste of fallen foes, the stench of dead things, damned things.”44 This creature is referred to as “the fiercest survivor – the purest warrior, glaring, hating” and it claims Bruce Wayne “as his own.”45 Thus Batman is born from this awful and terrible vision of death, decay and malice - a warrior Messiah, dark instead of light. And just as “the dead, small and great, stand before God” and “were judged”, Wayne is the final judge of Gotham’s less savory citizens.46 And those who Batman deems most dangerous are “cast into the lake of fire,” that is, the Psychiatric Hospital of Gotham, Arkham Asylum. Thus, Batman is both the arbiter and the one who carries out justice in Gotham. Gotham too links to Revelation as a contemporary depiction of Babylon.

John of Patmos claims that “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird” which seems to correspond with the general history of Gotham city. In Christopher Nolan’s *Batman Begins*, Gotham is depicted as a great city slowly falling

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44 Frank Miller, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, 19
45 ibid.
46 Revelation, 20:12
into decay, culminating in the murder of Bruce Wayne’s parents. By the time Wayne creates Batman, the metropolis has become a dangerous and dirty place, full of crime and cruelty. This disintegration is a contributing factor to Wayne’s decision to act as he does. Batman sees his role as reestablishing Gotham as it was, just as God “wipe[s] away all tears... for all the former things are passed away” creating “the holy city, New Jerusalem.”47

In Frank Miller’s acclaimed graphic novel, Batman: The Dark Night Returns, Gotham find itself without its Batman. Wayne has retired his cape and mask following the murder of Robin. Now Gotham must go it alone against a new threat, a violent group known as the Mutants. Wayne walks along the perilous streets and is approached by two shadowy figures wearing red visors and holding large knives. He explains that these new villains aren’t like the man who killed Wayne’s parents; that man “was sick and guilty over what he did.”48 Instead, “these are his children... a purer breed... and this world is theirs.”49 This statement is followed by a news report detailing the Mutants’ most recent crimes, including the savage “butchery” of an entire family. All of this occurs as Gotham experiences a debilitating heat wave. It is as if the city has become Hell on earth; this new pure evil has claimed the metropolis for its own. What better time for Gotham’s Dark Knight to make his return?

Wayne’s final decision to return as Batman follows a dramatic vignette as he relives his parent’s death as he showers, an allusion to Christ’s baptism, as evidenced by

47 Revelation, 21:2 – 21:4
48 Miller, 14
49 ibid
the biblical invocation of the words of Batman echoing in Wayne’s head – ‘the time has come… I am your soul… You cannot stop me – not with wine or vows or the weight of age.’ This inner monologue employs the apocalyptic vernacular. The bat like beast that had earlier inspired and terrified Wayne now returns and crashes through the window as the panes cast the shadow of a cross on his face. Batman is reborn as he glides through the air, a thief in the night - his cape spread like some dark angel’s wings behind him, a sinister messianic warrior for Gotham. Batman has been pulled from retirement to lay “siege [to] Gotham’s underworld.” This in an important distinction. Batman does not fight crime, he battles it. This further links him to the cosmic dualist struggle found in Revelation but also represents Batman’s moral ambiguity – he wages war on evil but is not some ultimate good. Wayne is something new and “a rebirth of the American fighting spirit, a resurgence of the common man’s will to resist.”

The Mutants represent one of Batman’s greatest tests; they too draw strength from the darkness and are bestial hybrids in their own right. Wayne acknowledges this, as he refers to the Mutant leader “the one creature who isn’t wounded or hiding” after the Dark Knight has laid waste to the rest of the gang using his specially modified tank. Up until now, he has “only fought humans” but this new threat is different, with “his claws” and “teeth like razors.” Batman is unsure whether or not he can defeat this beast. The Mutant leader is akin to Clover and Revelation’s beast of the Sea. He is an uncanny

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50 ibid, 25
51 ibid, 32
52 ibid, 41
53 ibid, 76
54 ibid, 76-78
hybrid who’s “deadly wound[s] heal” and who “blasphem[es] against God,” as he shouts profanities and attacks Batman. But unlike Revelation, good does not triumph and Batman is overwhelmed, his life saved only through cunning and luck.

Wayne retreats to his cave which looks as if it is the mouth of Hell or of some great Biblical beast. At the same time, more consistent with Revelation’s script the great evil, the Mutant leader is captured and jailed much as the angels “laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him” in a “bottomless pit.” The Mutants are leaderless for the time being, but not beaten and are in fact emboldened by their sovereign’s claims that he had single handedly defeated Gotham’s Dark Knight. Batman decides that the mutants cannot simply be arrested, there are too many of them. Instead, Wayne believes “they have to be defeat. Humiliated.” Thus, he arranges for the Mutant leader to be released just as “Satan shall be loosed out of his prison [bottomless pit].” The main difference here seems to be that Revelation makes no reference as whether or not frees Satan himself or who else would be responsible. Perhaps it is the same angel who imprisoned him, which would mean The Dark Knight follows Revelation’s script quite closely. This begins the second battle between Batman and the Mutant leader, a sort of “second coming.” Wayne finally vanquishes the leader in front of

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55 Revelation, 13:3, 13:6
56 ibid, 20:1-2
57 Miller, 97
58 Revelation, 20:7
his minions after luring him into a mud pit, akin to the way “the devil… was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone,” for eternity.\(^59\)

“The mutants are dead. The mutants are history. This is the mark of the future. Gotham City belongs to the Batman.”\(^60\) Instead of disbanding however, the mutants have switched sides to join the Dark Knight; they have begun to call themselves “the Sons of Batman.” Their message is clear, “Let Gotham’s Criminals beware. They are about to enter Hell.”\(^61\) This deviates from Revelation in which the defeated minions of Satan are “devoured” and presumably destroyed by a “fire c[o]me down from God out of heaven.”\(^62\) So instead of death, the Sons of Batman organize themselves into an army of the righteous. Interestingly, this depiction of Batman, seems to resemble a fusion of Revelation’s rendering of the Antichrist and Christ. The Antichrist is described as a beast having “two horns like a lamb” and the voice of a “dragon.”\(^63\) This compliments Batman’s dual role as both demon and angel. Revelation’s account could be adapted to represent Batman who, with his horned mask and belligerent tone seems like a good candidate for the Antichrist.\(^64\) This point is strengthened by the Bat symbol that the Dark Knight wears upon his chest and adorns the faces of the Sons of Batman. This could very well correspond to Revelation’s “Mark of the Beast” which is emblazoned upon

\(^{59}\) ibid, 20:10  
\(^{60}\) Miller, 102  
\(^{61}\) ibid  
\(^{62}\) Revelation, 20:9  
\(^{63}\) ibid, 13:11  
\(^{64}\) This perhaps sheds some light of Christian Bale’s version of Batman in both Batman Begins (2005) and The Dark Knight (2008), who’s gravel and angry voice certainly sounds demonic, maybe even dragon-like.
followers of the Antichrist, on “their right hand, or in their foreheads.” This could also very well refer to any superhero (or supervillains) who all seem to have a emblem to differentiate themselves – be it Superman’s S, the Green Lantern’s ring or the X-Men’s X. Batman’s symbol is quite literally, a mark of a beast (a bat), and is present on all things batman, from his costume, to the Bat signal and even his weaponry (notably Batarangs which are shaped like bats). Everything about Batman is based on the animal to which he owes his name; the caped crusader is often described by witnesses as a “wild animal,” a “werewolf,” a “monster… fangs and wings” or at most “a man – about twelve feet tall.” Clearly, Batman is seen as something inhuman, bestial and otherworldly. But if Batman represents the evolution of the Antichrist, who would be his benevolent counterpart?

In *Dark Knight*, Superman has become a pawn of the United States Government, currently headed by Ronald Reagan. Reagan often appears dressed in a white shirt, red tie and blue jacket complete with stars. Such outrageous, fanatical patriotism is mirrored in Superman’s own costume. Thus, the two most powerful men on the planet are dressed in American flags. This is obvious contrast to the grays, black and blues wore by Batman – Bruce Wayne is his own man, loyal only to himself and to Gotham. In this universe, the only remaining heroes are Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne. Superman has become a puppet of borderline fascist Cold War American government; he gave them his “obedience” and

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65 *Revelation*, 13:16
66 Miller, 34
“invisibility” in turn for “a license [to] live.”67 The prodigal son from Krypton has become a satire of the blind obedience and fundamentalist Nationalism; he has lost his moral compass to the militant federal government. Batman on the other hand resists this and as a result has become a fugitive.

As Superman fights along side the US military he ponders how this all came to pass. He asserts “you were the one they used against us, Bruce” in reference to the forced retirement of their fellow caped crusaders. Batman’s response to the “parent’s groups and the subcommittee” was simple “sure, we’re criminals, we’ve always been criminals” and “we have to be criminals.”68 Batman willingly became an outlaw in order to engage in what Superman dubs Wayne’s holy war. With Batman’s return, this war begins anew and Superman claims that “now the storm is growing again and [the US government] will hunt us down.”69 The stage is set for the eventual confrontation between these new Messianic figures, much akin to Christ’s final battle. This furthers the Dark Knight’s moral ambiguity, and while it exemplifies the continuing adaptation of Revelation’s script, it also shows its deviation. Miller seems to have chosen the aspects of Revelation that serve his new Batman best, while incorporating new ideas to modernize the story.

At the same time, American troops launch an offensive against Soviet forces and “Strategic Air Command” is put “on Red Alert” as Reagan assures the public that the US “won’t make the first move… but [is] ready to make the last.”70 The President is

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67 ibid, 139
68 ibid
69 ibid
70 ibid, 131
referring to a complete Nuclear Armageddon, a Cold War Apocalypse come to life. The absolutism here is clear, even if every American is killed; Reagan intends to destroy the U.S.S.R. The final climatic battle is well along the lines as the one detailed in Revelation. On cue, the Russians fire an atomic missile. Superman is able to deflect its course, but is severely injured in the process. The bomb has instead knocked out every electrical device in the Americas, leaving Gotham literally powerless. All hell breaks loose and the city is plunged into darkness and chaos. A downed plane crashes, igniting an inferno that threatens to engulf the city. The Sons of Batman take the initiative to violently “raze” and “purge Gotham” while law enforcement is otherwise occupied. Masked and clothes in emulation of Batman, they take to the streets. The Dark Knight himself cuts them off atop a large black horse, a sinister imitation of Jesus upon his white mount “and in righteousness he doth judge and make war”\textsuperscript{71}. The new female Robin mirrors Superman’s earlier comments and stipulates that she “feels like there’s a storm coming” but “it’s just his voice… just him.”\textsuperscript{72} This corresponds to Revelation “and I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude… and as the voice of mighty thundering… for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”\textsuperscript{73} The Sons of Batman and the Dark Knight take control of Gotham, the latter vowing that “tonight [they] are the law… tonight, [he] is the law.”

\textsuperscript{71} Revelation, 19:11
\textsuperscript{72} Miller, 173-174
\textsuperscript{73} Revelation, 19:6
Superman, in contrast, lies near death. His source of power (our sun) has been obscured by “blackened sand” and “endless flame” – a scene that fits well within the apocalyptic vernacular.  

Kent calls out to out to Mother earth, whom he has “always loved” and “always served” for the power he needs to be “hope for the screaming millions.” This is but one of the many suggestions to Superman’s candidacy for a modern but now exploited Christ and as such is followed by Superman’s coming battle with the hybrid Christ/Antichrist figure of Batman. This battle seems to represent the very struggle of the evolution of the doomsday narrative, the battle between old and new. Wayne and his soldiers are meanwhile quite literally rounding up the rioters of Gotham with lassoes. Batman and his followers, notably the four on horseback, are a clear allusion to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. In addition, as they represent a larger militia they can also been seen in terms of Revelation’s section on the Army of Horsemen. The horses are described as having “the heads of lions” and tails “like unto serpents” bringing back the association of Batman, the reformed Mutants and the bestial. They represent not only a Holy Army, but also an inhuman one. Finally with the addition of the lasso, stirrups and saddles, the Dark Knight parallels the classical American Western. This scene represents a blending of Biblical and American culture. The infusion of popular western media allows for the modern adaptation of Revelation’s script and the continuing evolution of the Doomsday narrative.

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74 Miller, 177
75 ibid, 177-178
76 Revelation, 9:17, 9:19
Batman has secured Gotham for the time being, but his actions have not gone unnoticed. Now Reagan commands Wayne to be brought in, and as a pawn of the state, Superman cannot refuse (even in his weakened state). And so the epic battle between the two Messianic heroes begins, as the snow falls on a Gotham gripped by Nuclear winter. It is hard to imagine a more apocalyptic scene. Superman descends god-like from the sky to meet the Dark Knight, clad in his black armor and drawing power from the shadowy city that surrounds them. Batman insists that it is “way past time [Superman] learned what it means – to be a man” and with that, strikes him to the ground. It is not until he is struck with a Kryptonite explosive and Wayne’s heart skips a beat that Kent realizes Batman’s intentions. Batman explains that “this is the end. For both of [them],” that they could have done great things, but instead he’s “become a political liability” and Superman “a joke.” Superman lies trampled and bleeding, with Wayne’s gloved hand around his neck. The god has been brought back down to earth by a man, by the Batman. And with that, “the clock strikes twelve” and Wayne’s heart stops beating. The final battle is completed and Superman cradles the Dark Knight, invoking Michelangelo’s *Pieta*. Batman is buried and his secret identity is exposed, but all is not as it seems.

For perhaps the third or forth time in the graphic novel, Batman is reborn as the drugs he took to stop his heart (in hopes of fooling Superman) wear off. The Dark Knight and his method of justice is dead; Wayne knows this and will no longer don his mask and cape. Instead, Wayne and the Sons of Batman organize underground, in the complex of

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77 Miller, 191
78 Ibid 193
caverns adjacent to the Bat cave. “It begins here” explains Wayne, “an army – to bring
sense to a world plagued by worse than thieves and murderers… This will be a good
life… Good enough.” 79 Batman and his followers have in essence created or intend to
create a new Gotham and a new World. Just as the Bat cave has no natural light except
those brought or made by the Batman, New Jerusalem “had no need of the sun, neither of
the moon, to shine it: for the glory of God did lightened it.”80 Seen within this frame,

Batman: The Dark Knight Returns and Revelation finish in a similar fashion: “all the
former things are passed away” and “behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he
will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them,
and be their God.”81 In the case of the novel, Batman’s vision can be considered the
tabernacle by which the new order will be formed. To take this one step further, why not
continue the association between the messiah, the Antichrist and the Batman.

Wayne has transcended humanity, not only with his bestial appearance but in his
hopes for the future – he has truly become both God and Devil. Besides, defeating
Superman seems as good an indicator for deification as any other test in American
popular media. Though Superman is not killed and is seemingly reborn, Christ like,
following the final battle. The Dark Knight has followed a modern trial akin to those
faced by Jesus in the Bible but tailored to fit the era in which the novel is written.

Revelation has been reborn for the world of Superheroes and the Cold War.

79 ibid,
80 Revelation, 21:23
81 ibid, 21:2, 21:4
Chapter III

Surviving the Apocalypse: The Hope Within

It is no hyperbole to say that the Holocaust was apocalyptic. Few things are as representative of doomsday as the attempted Genocide of an entire “race” of people. There are few events in recorded history that measure up to the death and destruction caused and sought out by the Nazis. In their effort to violently usurp Europe and systematically enslave or murder its inhabitants, the Nazi government committed inconceivable evil. The scale of the brutality and death represented by the Second World War and Hitler’s “final solution” seems almost Biblical, akin to the wholesale destruction of the Old and New Testaments, most notably the Book of Revelation. So does his call for a thousand year Third Reich. Hitler’s Germany was one, well grounded in the end times, “many individuals who would convert to Nazism interpreted this period as not simply hard times, but in apocalyptic fashion, as a total ‘collapse’ of German civilization.”82 Such Germans felt themselves part of the coming apocalypse,”that Germany, and indeed, Aryan humanity in general, had reached a historic point. The old older had collapse, requiring the appearance of a new order (a new construction of reality).”83 This is an important point to consider, because Maus did not come from a vacuum, Spiegelman’s narrative is one shaped by the Nazi Apocalypse. “The Aryan-Jewish conflict was, quite literally, interpreted as an eschatological war” and as a result

82 David Redles, The Millennial Reich and the Induce Apocalypse, 119
83 ibid.
Maus reflects this emphasis on end time imagery and allusion.\textsuperscript{84} Further more, while Spiegelman is not Christian, he is Jewish and American and thus was raised in the apocalyptic culture of the west, infusing millennial concepts into his work.

The first characteristic that separates Maus from traditional depictions of the Holocaust is its medium; Maus is a graphic novel, a comic book. During a recent lecture in the Fall of 2008 Spiegelman asserts that “great comics are great because they make use of the thing that isn’t words or pictures” and that property is exactly what makes Maus such a powerful tool.\textsuperscript{85} Maus and graphic novels as a whole have a capacity to reach us on a level unavailable to other media forms because they speak to us within our own inner voice, “comics allow [us] to be the projector of a film.”\textsuperscript{86} This is much akin to a vision, perhaps even like John of Patmos’ vision detailed in Revelation. In turn, Maus is a collection of visions of what Vladek Spiegelman’s (Spiegelman’s father) experienced during the Nazi occupation of Poland. In addition, “Revelation has been described as “future history” - John is shown things that have yet to come but will.\textsuperscript{87} Spiegelman in turn depicts what has already been through the eyes of those who want to hear his father’s story. Both authors describe an Apocalypse and a final climatic war against an enemy that is the personification of evil. The two texts end in a world reborn and forever

\textsuperscript{84} ibid, 126
\textsuperscript{86} Spiegelman, Art. "Breakdowns Comix 101."
\textsuperscript{87} Kirsch, 4
changed; time will be measured from the events of both narratives. And at the core of each is the concept of surviving the Apocalypse.

For his doomsday narrative, Spiegelman depicts the characters as animals; mice for Jews, cats for Germans, etc. There is the obvious symbolic meaning here, the reference to how the Nazis preyed upon the Jews just as a cat does a mouse. The deeper significance is one this paper has analyzed previously, the conception of the uncanny. The animals of *Maus* are not simply cartoon creatures; they are a surreal combination of both human and beast. In the same way as the Beasts of *Revelation*, Clover, Zombies and Batman fuse the bestial and humanity, so do Spiegelman’s characters. These hybrids begin to take on the characteristics not only of the historical people they are based on, but also the animals they emulate. In fusing them together, Spiegelman has created something new. This is evident throughout *Maus* as the Jewish mice seek refuge in holes and the German felines sniff them out.

This transformation also has other uses. The depiction of men and women as animals resembles the coded language of *Revelation*, such as when “John, like other apocalyptic writers, seizes upon the lamb as the symbol the messiah.”\(^{88}\) In the New Testament this “helpless creature that serves as a sacrificial offering... is transformed in the book of *Revelation* into a warrior-king.”\(^{89}\) The Jews in *Maus* undergo a similar rebirth but in reverse, they are captured by the Germans and forced to live as mice. Spiegelman goes so far as to show a real mouse hiding in the same manner as the Jews,

\(^{88}\) Kirsch, 90
\(^{89}\) ibid
although the presence of real mice somewhat confuses his Jewish characterization.\textsuperscript{90} Spiegelman shows the change from man to beast pictorially, while \textit{Revelation} does the opposite, moving from envisioned image to text. Vladek is especially representative of this, as he slowly adapts to the harsh realities of life under Nazi rule. He (understandably) becomes obsessed with survival in order to escape from the “mouse trap” that the Germans had created. Vladek echoes the hybridization his son has imposed upon him when he asserts that the “the Germans... could [cat-like] smell if a Polish Jew” was in their presence.\textsuperscript{91} This vignette shows that not only has the younger Spiegelman adopted the fusion but also the Jews that experience the events he writes about.

The discussion of hybridization also relates to \textit{Revelation} in regard to the figure of the Antichrist, “the Beast.” In \textit{Revelation}, the Antichrist marks all of his subjects with “the name of the beast” or “the number of his name... six hundred three score and six [666].”\textsuperscript{92} Conversely, if the Germans in \textit{Maus} can be considered the beasts then their mark has two possibilities, or a hybrid of both. The closest symbolic equivalent to the icon explained in \textit{Revelation} is Nazi swastika, a pictogram (and rune) that was emblazoned upon everything associated with the Third Reich. Wherever Hitler conquered or wished to assert his will, this symbol of his loyalists and regime followed. And like the mark of the beast, the swastika became an indication of fealty to the Nazis. This helps to ground the National Socialists in the apocalyptic aided by Kirsch’s assertion

\textsuperscript{90}Spiegelman, Art, \textit{Maus} a survivor's tale. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986, 147
\textsuperscript{91}Spiegelman, 140
\textsuperscript{92}Revelation, 13:16, 13:18
that “Hitler plainly understood the terrible power of the millennial ideal: “there can be little doubt that the thousand-year reign of the saints lies behind the vision of a thousand-year Reich.”

Conversely, the mark may be one of victimization, as seen in the registration tattoos forced upon the Jews. Vladek explains: “they took from us our names, and here they put me my number.” In this case it is the Antichrist Hitler (a popular candidate for this biblical role during the 20th century) who issues the mark, not upon his followers, but those he aims to eradicate. This represents Spiegelman’s adherence to Revelation’s script and its themes. Spiegelman also depicts a scene in which a Christian prisoner analyzes Vladek’s tattoo, stating “your number starts with 17... Seventeen is a very good omen...It ends with 13... Added together it totals 18... the Hebrew number of life...” He then asserts that Vladek will “come through all this alive,” to which Vladek explains that these remarks acted like a rebirth: “he put another life in me.” This mirrors the many numbers and codes believed to be hidden within Revelation- that “strange and powerful magic of Revelation: each new Generation of readers is convinced that God planted a secret meaning into the text that was meant only and especially for them.”

Maus is a retelling of the Holocaust, framed as a cartoon and well versed in the symbolism of western apocalypticism. In sections of the novel, Spiegelman finds the visions of his father slowly invading his life, as bodies begin to appear under animated

93 Kirsch, 209
94 Maus A Survivor’s Tale and Here My Troubles Began (Volume 2). New York: Scholastic, 1993, 26
95 Kirsch, 12
96 Spiegelman, 28
97 ibid
98 Kirsch, 12
desk and guard towers out of his window. The Apocalypse of his father’s generation slowly invades his reality. An example of this would also be Vladek’s discussion of the way Jewish corpses were burnt after the gas chambers. Like Revelation’s “lake of fire” Spiegelman’s father describes the holes used to burn the dead Jews as “big, so like the swimming pool[s]” and how “the fat from the burning bodies” was “scooped and poured again so everyone could burn better.”99 This frames these horrendous constructs as literal lakes of corpses, fat and fire. The similarity to Revelation is only compounded by the description John of Patmos gives to the lake of fire. John exclaims that “this is the second death,” much in the way this cremation is the second death experienced by the prisoners of the concentration camp - following the gas chamber.100

Both Spiegelmans have infused their stories with the apocalyptic vernacular, in both image and word. This depiction of a modern Armageddon, that has no final cosmic battle, thus allows for an evolution of the doomsday narrative on real life events that follow apocalyptic devastation rather than just referring to them enigmatically. This leaves the survivors with the difficult task of living on past the apocalypse, of picking up the pieces of their life. There is no ultimate savior for them, they must save themselves and create their own future. They are not cosmically chosen and their lives are in their own hands. Along with this new mortal responsibility also came the power to destroy and devastate divorced from the supernatural, as is the case of nuclear apocalypse.

99 *Maus*, 72
100 Revelation, 20:14
The atomic bomb represented, for the first time, humanity’s ability to completely and utterly destroy itself. Never before had humanity seen the capability to kill at such a huge scale. The nuclear bombings of Hiroshima are recorded in Kejji Nakazawa’s *Barefoot Gen*. While not a western text; it has greatly influenced American apocalyptic work - notably Spiegelman who wrote the foreword to the American version of Nakazawa’s novel. Spiegelman read *Gen* “in the late 1970’s, shortly after [he]’d begun working on *Maus,*” his reaction was simple and profound: “*Gen* haunts me.”\(^\text{101}\) He continues with what seems to pay homage to John’s visions, “*Gen* burned its way into my heated brain with all the intensity of a fever-dream.”\(^\text{102}\) This allusion is seemingly adopted by Nakazawa himself who’s first autobiographical account of Hiroshima was entitled *I Saw It*. Again, I remind the reader that this is a Japanese text, but it exciting to find such apocalyptic vernacular in non-western media. These are not likely accidental or superficial references. *Revelation* is a widely read text, worldwide and has made its way into *Gen*, which later depicts a flaming horse that seems to herald in the death that is to take place after the bomb detonates over Hiroshima. This is perhaps a reference to *Revelation*’s four horsemen of the Apocalypse that bring misery and slaughter in their wake. But, like *Maus* and *Revelation* “*Gen* is a very optimistic work... cautionary... [*Gen*] is humanistic and humane, demonstrating and stressing the necessity for empathy among humans if we’re to survive another century.”\(^\text{103}\)

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\(^\text{102}\) ibid

\(^\text{103}\) ibid
The message of Revelation, Maus and Gen is ultimately one of hope. Hope that life will continue on after apocalyptic destruction. The Holocaust and John’s vision both end in the creation of a New Jerusalem, one secular and one biblical (respectively). This is representative of the apocalyptism of World War Two as a whole, an era that finally saw the potential for doomsday, “the power to destroy the world” finally became reality and the world was forever changed.104 This change also came with the conception of survivor’s guilt both in those and certainly is haunted by the demons of his father. This shows the hardship of surviving is not always limited to the survivor. But hope still remains, in what can be learned from the apocalypse by those it has left behind. Thus apocalypse can be a teacher, as is the case in *Children of Men*.

*Children of Men* takes place in a post apocalyptic period, if the holocaust is apocalyptic so is the end of fertility. Britain is the only nation left standing whole as the world slips into destruction and chaos after mankind learns it can no longer reproduce (no child has been born in twenty years). This represents a contrast to Christ’s harmonious thousand year reign after the great war, and “that old serpent, which is the Devil… [is] bound.”105 It is important to note that in Revelation this is a time of heaven on earth and prosperity, but there is still an inevitable conflict in sight and the true “end” has still yet to come. Already *Children of Men* is grounded in apocalyptic imagery. Hope is seemingly lost as the state begins to hand out medication for assisted suicide (“quietus”) for those unable to cope. The other option lies in violence.

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104 Kirsch, 210
105 Revelation20:2
The youth of the world have grown despondent and violent as human life slowly comes to an end. “20-year-old[s], some with painted faces – these are ZEDS. The youngest generation on earth, nothing to lose, it all ends with them.”\textsuperscript{106} The English term Zed, origin Greek Zeta and referring to the English letter Z (or end), belongs to the same apocalyptic vocabulary of Revelation’s “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.”\textsuperscript{107} Whether or not this is intentional, it certainly helps to further ground \textit{Children of Men} in the rhetoric of Revelation.

Christianity has seen many paramilitary groups using justifications of apocalyptic beliefs to carry out their often horrendously violent plans. This is exemplified in the words of Michael Bray when he described how “the only abortion chamber in Dover was gutted by fire.” His justification for this act was because of the clinic’s “business of butchering babies.”\textsuperscript{108} While this does not relate to Revelation directly, it is certainly consistent with apocalyptic thought concerning the rapture and who gains entrance to heaven (Bray argues the “murdered” babies cannot). In fact, that is much like the role that Revelation plays in \textit{Children of Men}, not necessarily determining the course of the actions, but setting the stage and allowing for other events to occur.

“A God-less Apocalypse” is one “in which human beings have no one to blame except themselves… no one to whom they may turn for rescue.”\textsuperscript{109} So who then will save us (if we can be saved, \textit{Children of Men} implies we can). The task of

\textsuperscript{106} Cuaron, \textit{Children of Men} (script) 2006, 4
\textsuperscript{107} Revelation, 22:13
\textsuperscript{108} Juergensmeyer, 20
\textsuperscript{109} Kirsch, 213
Christ in the atheist’s Apocalypse seems to fall upon the scientist. While it is mankind that provides the first impetus for its own savior (the first baby to be born in two decades will occur without modern science), science is key for humanity’s future. Perhaps it will be science that “cure[s] infertility,” perhaps “the Human Project” will be responsible for taking the miracle of this newly born child and translating it into redemption on a macro level.\textsuperscript{110} And seeing as it could have very well been science that began this tragedy, it seems poetic that it could have the possibility to fix it. This would help the God-less Apocalypse to mirror Revelation. While Christ is indeed the general of Heaven’s forces, he is in command of an army the saved. Christ leads the battle, but is not the only individual fighting against the forces of the dammed. Whether it is due to science or Jesus’ influence, mankind is still fighting for its own salvation, even if we caused the end to begin with.

The film is full of secular depictions of the end. Instead of a great red dragon and beasts with many heads, the God-less Apocalypse is one of science. \textit{Children of Men} is replete with montages of global war and nuclear devastation. Here science plays the opposite role mentioned previously: “the biologist blames genetic experiments that altered DNA. The environmentalist says that pollution and bio-experiments poisoned the water.”\textsuperscript{111} This is echoed in the writing of Richard Dawkins, a noted militant Atheist. Dawkins, in \textit{The God Delusion}, states that “rapture Christians” will “go further and actually yearn for nuclear war because they

\textsuperscript{110} Cuaron, 51
\textsuperscript{111} ibid, 7
interpret it as the ‘Armageddon’ which, according to their bizarre but disturbingly popular interpretation of the Revelation will hasten the Second Coming.”¹¹² Sam Harris is of a similar opinion and in his work, Letter to a Christian Nation, he claims that “it is, therefore, not an exaggeration to say that if the city of New York were suddenly replaced by a ball of fire, some significant percentage of the American population would see a silver-lining in the subsequent mushroom cloud, as it would suggest to them that the best thing that is ever going to happen was about to happen: the return of Christ…”¹¹³ Coincidentally, it is New York (among other cities) which is destroyed by atomic weaponry in Children of Men; shown in a propaganda piece on British television. It is not a stretch to say that while there may not be a religious component to it, the government of Britain in Children of Men could easily claim the extreme actions they take are defending London and other English cities from such destruction.

After a montage of the world at war, there is a cut to Big Ben with “Only Britain Soldiers On” emblazed in front with large white lettering, fading into the Jolly Roger. This could be a reference of Britain as the New Jerusalem; as the last paradise on Earth (at least in comparison). This is certainly what the State Department of the United Kingdom wants its people to believe in the film. Ironically, the terrorist group that plagues the government is known as “the fishes.” They see themselves as Christ-like (as per the relationship between Christ and fish), fighting for the salvation of those the British have wronged in their attempts to keep

¹¹² Richard Dawkins, The God Delusion, 302
¹¹³ Sam Harris, Letter to A Christian Nation, 29
their nation afloat. And thus in *Children of Men* the Christ figures seemingly fight against the establishment of New Jerusalem in hopes of reestablishing the old order. This is surely a departure from biblical cannon and representative of the evolution of the doomsday narrative.

In true apocalyptic fashion, *Children of Men* wastes no time in establishing the British as a group separate from the other nations of the world, terrorists and refugee immigrants in search of safe haven. In a ironic critique of such apocalyptic thinking and divisionism, the British are informed they are the chosen people of the new earth. Just as Revelation polarizes the enemies of the church and depicts them as enemies of Christ, any non-British citizen is demonized (by the government). Televisions and signs in the film prominently display ads calling for the expulsion of any all illegal immigrants (often violently). European and African refugees are rounded up into large metal cages and shipped to camps, away from England’s intact urban centers. This also seems to be homage to the Holocaust Apocalypse, detailing how these visions of the end build on one another much in the same way they follow a Revelation type script.

It is one of the refugees who ultimately holds the key to human salvation, suggesting the New Jerusalem the British are trying to create is at best imagined. The unwanted are carefully controlled, expelled, and often executed in order to preserve the sanctity of the new British nation which has become increasingly despotic and conservative.
Yet, the violence of Apocalypse is not always directed against the perceived “others,” it is also an internal struggle. Just as the cosmic battle rages at Armageddon, each man must battle his own inner demons, sometimes this manifests itself physically. Many Apocalypse based groups that attempt to stem the wrath of God during what they perceive to be end times do so through their own punishment. Examples include the medieval Christian flagellants who savagely beat their own flesh in imitation of Christ, in hopes of saving themselves from the Plague. The equivalent offered by *Children of Men* is similar, as revealed by a rather humorous exchange between Theo and Jasper. Jasper inquires about a woman Theo had been dating, to which Theo responds they are no longer together because “she decided to renounce.” Jasper responds by asking “renouncism, are those the ones that kneel down for a month for salvation?” and Theo informs him that “no, those are the repenters. The renouncers flagellate themselves for the forgiveness for humanity.” These fanatics are still affirming the importance of the individual, that through their own personal suffering they can accomplish an alleviation of the terrible things happening to others and to the world.

If *Children of Men* truly details the strength of humankind and its ability to save, then Kee, Earth’s last pregnant woman is the savior of the human race. She represents two of the archetypes of female sexuality: that of the mother and the whore. The mother role is easy enough to explain as she is pregnant throughout the

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114 *Children of Men* (film), *Children of Men*, 6:33-6:43
film and in fact she stands for “all the women who have ever given birth.” Converseley she is assuredly no virgin and she lets it be known when she discusses who the father of her child might be: “fuck knows. Omar. Sammy. Phil. Most of them wankers don’t know their names. Did some for quid, some for drugs. Some… Fuck knows, I was horny.” Ironically, the redeemer of humanity has engaged in prostitution; hardly the women draped in the sun depicted in Revelation. Still, she is the perfect maternal model for a world that has all but consumed itself in hate and destruction. It is arguable that such a character is more appropriate for a God-less Apocalypse in which no overwhelming moral superiority is trumpeted; survival is the greatest goal. Kee is thus akin to Batman as a combination of the holy and unholy, Christ and antichrist and a further adaptation of Revelation to the modern narrative of Apocalypse.

The idea that one mortal can have such a profound effect on the outcome of the Apocalypse seems to be something unique to this version of the secular Apocalypse. It would be hard to argue that Theo, very much a normal man, does not do an extraordinary amount of work (and sacrifice) so that the human race may continue on. This is most clearly seen in the final scene as “Theo rows” while bleeding from a bullet wound to the gut only “slowing slightly” as his “strength wan[es]” and he bleeds to death. So quite literally, Theo gives himself to the new child and thus to the future of humanity. There is an interesting comparison to made

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115 Cuaron, 69  
116 ibid  
117 Cuaron, 111
between Theo and the Revelation archetype of the mother and woman clad in the sun. Theo is of course a man and dies in blood, almost an exact opposite of Revelation’s birth of the Messiah. Theo could very well be a new step in the doomsday narrative, a hybridization of the Mother and Christ. This evolution could represent a new vision of the Apocalypse, sculpted from Revelation type imagery.

While there is mention of humans being important to the Apocalypse such as “the two witness… [who] shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth” and the 144,000 male virgins mentioned early; there doesn’t seem to be as much emphasis on individual roles. Instead, the saved seem to form up behind Christ and wage war against the minions of the Red Dragon. Many apocalyptic belief systems tend to revolve around “men who were now one with [the deity] in spirit and consciousness as well as in blood” an “intimate male circle: the elite of the Order.”118 While it is true one man can make a difference, this result is framed in the context of a bigger and larger movement. Children of Men tells us that even when all hope seems lost and the world is destined to slowly rot, there is still a means of salvation within even the most destitute of us. By using this internal strength (amplified with science) we are to overcome even the most desperate and bleak future. Revelation depicts the same concept, showing the power of human faith, aided by the intervention of celestial powers. So long as we remain loyal and holy, Revelation tells us that we will be accounted for. That is not to say there will not be a difficult and urgent struggle, but the end result will be positive and bring us

118 Juergensmeyer, 205
all together. “The heavy machinery of war silenced by the cries of a baby.”119 Here the baby can be seen as representing religion and its potential for bringing people together behind a positive message (one that is often missed).

The connection between the Apocalypse of the Book of Revelation and that depicted in the secular film Children of Men is complex. For the most part, no mention of belief is made, but the film is infused with religious symbolism and archetypes. Instead of God bringing the world to an end, it is man, woman and science that are responsible for the destruction as well as rebirth. The structure of the new concepts of the secular Apocalypse is built upon that of the biblical. The main separation lies in the importance put on individuals in the atheistic Armageddon. Mortal characters like Theo have profound effects on the worlds they inhabit, comparable to that of the central immortal figures of Revelation. It is the everyday human, who have the power to save us all. Finally, whether faithful or worldly the Apocalypse seems to offer a chance for hope and renewal. It can be a positive influence in the world, even if it stems from horrendous actions.

119 Cuaron, 128
Epigraph:

Having finished this paper, I just wanted to take a moment to analyze my feelings and ask myself one question: am I apocalyptic? This is a deceptively difficult question and it is important to first recognize what it means to be apocalyptic. To be apocalyptic is believe that we are heading, ever nearing some point in the future, an ultimate cataclysm. It need not be an end identical to the one found in Revelation or any of the other sources it has influenced but an end nonetheless. I am assuredly fascinated with the study of the doomsday narrative, how it is constructed and how it is used. That said, I am not apocalyptic; I do not believe in an unavoidable end of things. The reason I am drawn to such media forms is not out of faith but out of curiosity, to better understand the prevalence of the Apocalypse in popular culture. I have but scratched the surface of Apocalypse found within comic books, graphic novels and Western cinema and already I had found an overwhelming wealth of information. What this seems to suggest is the extent and power of this concept of an Armageddon.

Everything in Western culture seems to lead to an assessment of the end. As I write this, the Swine Flu threat seems to be dwindling, but for weeks and weeks the media depicted the virus as potentially destruction as the black plague. It seems that Western Civilization is forever looking for the next possible candidate for the end the world, much in the same way readers of Revelation seem to continue to search for an Apocalyptic date. In my mind, these two examples are not separate, but representative of a large apocalyptic world view that I have been brought up in.
And yet, despite of the end time influence, I find myself unable to buy into an our inevitable destruction. I find the hope associated with Apocalypse and Revelation to be quite seductive but the violence on this path to hope, disturbing. Must there really be so much pain and suffering for hope to finally triumph? I say no, but am eager to continue my research on why so many others disagree.
Works Cited:


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