(Re-)Writing the End: Apocalyptic Narratives in the Postmodern Novel

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in English

at the University of Canterbury

by

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2011

<u>Abstract</u>

This thesis investigates the relationship between the apocalyptic narrative and the postmodern novel. It explores and builds on Patricia Waugh's hypothesis in *Practising Postmodernism: Reading Modernism* (1992) which suggests that that the postmodern is characterised by an apocalyptic sense of crisis, and argues that there is in fact a strong relationship between the apocalyptic and the postmodern. It does so through an exploration of apocalyptic narratives and themes in five postmodern novels. It also draws on additional supporting material which includes literary and cultural theory and criticism, as well as historical theory.

In using the novel as a medium through which to explore apocalyptic narratives, this thesis both assumes and affirms the novel's importance as a cultural artefact which reflects the concerns of the age in which it is written. I suggest that each of the novels discussed in this thesis demonstrates the close relationship between the apocalyptic and the postmodern through society's concern over the direction of history, the validity of meta-narratives, and other cultural phenomenon, such as war, the development of nuclear weaponry, and terrorism.

Although the scope of this thesis is largely confined to the historical-cultural epoch known as postmodernity, it also draws on literature and cultural criticism from earlier periods so as to provide a more comprehensive framework for investigating apocalyptic ideas and their importance inside the postmodern novel. A number of modernist writers are therefore referred to or quoted throughout this thesis, as are other important thinkers from preceding periods whose ideas are especially pertinent.

The present thesis was researched and written between March 2010 and August 2011 and is dedicated to all of those people who lost their lives in the apocalyptic events of the February 22nd Christchurch earthquake.

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<u>Acknowledgements</u>

I would like to express my sincerest thanks and gratitude to the two supervisors who have overseen the writing of this thesis. Firstly, I would like to thank Associate Professor Paul Millar who since my undergraduate studies has been a mentor and has always provided me with sound advice. Secondly, I would like to thank Dr Daniel Bedggood for his considerable assistance and advice, and for his generous offer of the use of various texts which have been enormously helpful for the purposes of researching my thesis.

I would also like thank my parents, Rosaleen Joyce, and my father, Tony Humphreys, for their unstinting support over the years to which I am forever grateful, as well as to the rest of my family, especially my uncle, David Morrison, whose assistance in the proof-reading of my thesis was greatly appreciated. I would also like to thank my friends, both in New Zealand and overseas, for their ongoing support and encouragement throughout the past eighteen months.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to those other people within the English department, staff and students, whose collective knowledge and individual passion for their subject has at all times been an inspiration. I would like to thank in particular Professor Patrick D Evans and Dr Philip Armstrong, as well as Andrew Dean, fellow student and unparalleled humorist.

Introduction

Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who
hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near.
-Rev. 1: 3

Our history is an aggregate of last moments. (176)
-Thomas Pynchon *Gravity's Rainbow*

The concern of this thesis is with the apocalyptic narrative and the postmodern novel. In the following chapters I will suggest that there is a strong relationship between the apocalyptic and the postmodern, and have chosen for this exercise five texts: *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), *Waterland* (1983), *Mao II* (1991), *Cosmopolis* (2003) and *Millennium People* (2003). The question I will endeavour to answer might be reduced to such a simple formula as "what treatment is given to the apocalyptic narrative inside the postmodern novel?"

In this thesis I have employed a very broad definition of the term apocalyptic so as to include both (quasi-)religious as well as secular narratives, themes, and ideas. The apocalyptic narrative in this sense includes ideas about the end of history, the spectre of nuclear annihilation, genocide, millennialism, and terrorism, as well as utopian visions of temporal renewal and spiritual transcendence. In this way, I have undertaken to investigate how the five selected texts engage with the apocalyptic narrative and represent its various dimensions.

In order to provide a framework for my investigation, I have taken as a starting point Patricia Waugh's formulation that there is a close relationship between the apocalyptic and the postmodern:

'Post' implies after but with no indication of whither next … Postmodernism is

Apocalyptic. Or, if not in the full Christian millenarian sense of a Last Judgement,

ushering in a new Jerusalem, then Apocalyptic in its sense of crisis. (Waugh 9)

It is this "sense of crisis" which I believe is a common theme in the five novels I have chosen to study. I suggest that this apocalyptic sense of crisis is an important aspect of the postmodern novel, indicative of the fears and concerns of an uncertain and transitional age. Steven Best gives some insight into how postmodernity specifically

engenders this sense of crisis and uncertainty, especially insofar as it relates to the study of history and the meta-narrative:

> … postmodern visions of history typically see no progress or directional tendencies in history, deny the authority of science and validity of facts and causal and objective analysis, reject foundationalism and universal values, decentre the subject to determining social or linguistic forces, link rationalism to domination, reject global, utopian or systematic forms of theorising and politics, and abandon normative language and epistemology. (Best 26)

Postmodernity taken in this way suggests the demise or fragmentation of the grand narratives of history, the apocalyptic narrative included. The historical narrative has therefore come to be doubted as something which carries any claim to truth, nor can it any longer be accepted as having a meaningful shape or direction. Furthermore, Best suggests that "The deconstruction of history follows the same movement as the dismantling of subject, author and text" (Best 23). The postmodern condition might therefore be seen as effecting both an epistemological and ontological destabilisation or decentring, a process linked to those ostensibly postmodern phenomena such as the "death of God", "the death of the author", "the death of the subject", and so on. It is perhaps not surprising then, given the deconstructionist nature of postmodernism, that it should be characterised by a sense of apocalyptic crisis or uncertainty.

However, the five texts I have chosen to study also reflect a variety of approaches to the apocalyptic narrative, from those which are deeply pessimistic to those which hold out the possibility of historical continuity, spiritual renewal or temporal rearrangement. The treatment given to the apocalyptic narrative is therefore multifarious; indeed, each novel represents a unique way of responding to apocalyptic ideas and the apocalyptic sense of crisis which postmodernity engenders. This varied response to and representation of apocalyptic narratives might in itself be regarded as quintessentially "postmodern", indicative perhaps of the inherently fractured nature of (post)modernity and that particular sort of ambivalence or "incredulity towards meta-narratives" which Jean-Francois Lyotard suggests is a defining feature of the postmodern condition (Lyotard, *Postmodern* 123). This is also indicative of a sort of schizophrenia intrinsic to the postmodern, whereby an extreme "incredulity" is tempered with extreme credulity or a desire to somehow (re)affirm the importance of

such meta-narratives, the apocalyptic narrative included. This is despite Lyotard's assertion that "The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (Lyotard, *Postmodern* 138). I would therefore suggest that inside the five selected novels I have chosen there is both a conscious awareness of the anthropocentric and constructed nature of the apocalyptic narrative, as well as an acknowledgement of its immanence and its recurring importance as a cultural or historical theme which transcends time and history.

The five novels' respective attention to ideas about time and history, in so far as they relate to the apocalyptic narrative, emphasises the recurring nature of Waugh's theorised sense of crisis both within postmodern literature as well as in preceding literary epochs. In this manner, the five texts I have selected for this thesis are a part of a long cultural tradition which draws upon apocalyptic themes, symbols, and ideas, in what Northrop Frye terms our "grammar of apocalyptic imagery" (Frye, *Anatomy* 141). The common thread among these novels is that they have referenced or acknowledged this apocalyptic tradition, albeit in different ways, and so the apocalyptic narrative, while often dealt with in an innovative or ironic fashion, is at the same time grounded in that familiar "grammar of apocalyptic imagery" which is central to the Western tradition of literature.

It would be fair to say then that the postmodern apocalyptic narrative shares similarities and a sense of continuity with those apocalyptic narratives in that period which directly precedes it, namely modernism, and in the course of this thesis I make relevant comparisons between modernists and postmodernists. I also draw parallels between the five texts I have studied, as well as any other associated and relevant texts. I have drawn upon historical theory as well as literary and cultural criticism so as to support the points made in my thesis. In the following paragraphs I provide a brief overview of each chapter.

The first chapter of this thesis deals with Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). Pynchon's landmark novel is metaphorically "launched" from amidst the debris of the Second World War and undertakes to comprehend the forces which go into shaping history. Pynchon's novel largely describes the coming of the postmodern epoch as well as the advent of the sort of politics, warfare and weaponry which signal the (apparent) closure of one previous historical epoch and the entry into

a new one. At the centre of the novel is the Rocket which symbolises both the destructive and the transcendent possibilities of the apocalyptic narrative, and which also embodies that sense of trauma, uncertainty, and crisis which is a defining feature of (post)modernity. In this chapter I suggest that the Rocket is symbolic of humanity's need to (re)create structures of meaning and order out of chaos; the Rocket therefore becomes for many of the characters of *Gravity's Rainbow* an apocalyptic text or symbol which is used to explain the course of history, past, present, and future, in both a retrospective and a visionary-prophetic sense.

Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983) provides the subject matter for the second chapter, and follows on from *Gravity's Rainbow* in speculating as to how history may or may not end, as well as the individual's relationship to historical narratives, namely those of an apocalyptic-eschatological nature. The message of Swift's novel is a distinctly postmodern one in that any meta-narrative, the apocalyptic narrative included, has no claim to absolute or objective truth. In this manner, the narrator of the novel, Tom Crick, interrogates the grand narratives of history, especially those apocalyptic narratives which imagine both destructive as well as utopian historical "endings". Despite the collective sense of apocalyptic dread experienced by his students and his ancestors, I suggest that Crick remains committed to a more cyclical theory of history as opposed to a linear or teleological one, and in doing so affirms a sceptical position with regards to narratives of an eschatological nature.

The third chapter deals with Don DeLillo's *Mao II* (1991). Indeed, two of DeLillo's novels have been included for study in this thesis, a testament to his importance as a postmodern writer and an interpreter of postmodernism. DeLillo's unparalleled ability to translate and imitate the postmodern *zeitgeist* accords with the opinion of another contemporary writer who has called DeLillo "an exemplary post-modernist" (Amis 313). While DeLillo's writing pays much attention to the more familiar aspects of postmodernity and postmodern culture, consumerism, the media, paranoia, spectacle, and violence, his attention to history, religion, mysticism, and spirituality means that apocalypticism is an increasingly important theme within his novels. *Mao II*, written in the shadow of the Salman Rushdie affair, stages an apocalyptic confrontation between the writer and the terrorist, a "zero-sum game" in which the future is contested by conflicting ideologies. The prescience of *Mao II* in terms of its wider commentary on the role of the writer and the terrorist, and the individual and the crowd, makes it a key text in the exploration of apocalyptic themes

within postmodernity. I suggest that *Mao II* gives expression to a range of spiritual and millennial longings which have (re)emerged in the postmodern epoch, and I also highlight the importance of the messianic figure who, either in the shape of the religious leader, the terrorist, or, indeed, the writer, seeks to renew the spent energies of an exhausted age.

In the fourth chapter I use another of DeLillo's novels, *Cosmopolis* (2003), alongside J G Ballard's *Millennium People* (2003) as a comparative and complimentary study of two novels whose sense of crisis hints at the entropic destruction of time and history. Indeed, both novels imagine a post-historical epoch in which the global market reigns triumphant at the expense of other cultural and historical narratives. This drift towards an a-temporal, post-historical, and entropic world is met with the apocalyptic desire of individual actors to see history and value reanimated, though just how this is to be carried out, and whether violent acts of terror should be instrumental in this process, remains problematic. Both novels build upon the issues raised in *Mao II* and are a useful means of exploring and understanding those latent millennial impulses which are a recurring theme throughout history. I suggest that both *Cosmopolis* and *Millennium People* portray the increasing potential for chaos and apocalyptic violence at the beginning of the third millennium.

I return once again to Patricia Waugh's formulation that the postmodern is apocalyptic in its sense of crisis. In the following chapters I will suggest that the postmodern novels I have chosen to study certainly accord with such a hypothesis, and as such, give expression to those various doubts, fears and uncertainties which the postmodern age engenders. Those factors which go into shaping this apocalyptic sense of crisis provide the content, shape, and direction of this thesis.

<u>Chapter One</u>

"I came to sense a peculiar *structure*…": History, Revelation, and the Rocket in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*

> The 'kingdom of God' is not something one waits for; it has no yesterday or tomorrow, it does not come 'in a thousand years'-- it is an experience in the human heart; it is everywhere, it is nowhere … (159)
> -Nietzsche *Twilight of the Idols*

> These fragments I have shored against my ruins. (431, 51)
> -T S Eliot *The Wasteland*

    Gravity's Rainbow is essentially an historical novel which shows how the apocalyptic narrative is (re)constructed and revised throughout history. Although ostensibly set amidst the ruins of the Second World War, Pynchon's novel spans a much wider period of history, encompassing a period between the age of European expansion in the 16th century through to the emergence of the Cold War. As such, the novel explores the role of apocalyptic narratives in an attempt to understand the crises of (post)modernity, not the least of which is the looming spectre of imminent nuclear annihilation. In contrast to the narrator of T S Eliot's *The Wasteland* who can "connect/nothing with nothing" (301-2, 47), the putative narrator and the multifarious characters of *Gravity's Rainbow* seek to connect everything with everything in a "progressive *knotting into*" (3) which describes the processes of history and its (imagined) movement towards an apocalyptic conclusion. *Gravity's Rainbow* thus employs a wide range of perspectives in order to speculate upon the apocalyptic end of history, and the different characters attach to the Rocket a range of apocalyptic readings, from the destructive to the transcendent. In this chapter I suggest therefore that the Rocket, the novel's central conceit, functions as an apocalyptic symbol or text, a visionary conception of past, present, and future.

    A number of critics have at least partially focused on the apocalyptic aspects of *Gravity's Rainbow*, a text which works both within and against traditional Judeo-Christian apocalyptic narratives such as Revelation. Kathryn Hume identifies in the

novel "crucial symbolic actions equivalent to paradise, the fall, crucifixion … and apocalypse" (Hume 12) and Sean Molloy suggests that the novel's cosmology is "neither Christian nor classical, but incorporates elements of both" (Molloy), while Andrew Yerkes stresses its postmodern and poststructuralist qualities:

> Although heavy with symbols of apocalypse, the novel's narrative structure challenges the idea that history might fall into any large, subsuming pattern such as apocalypse … although the rocket unambiguously evokes the form of apocalypse, the context of this historiographic form, in the context of the novel's postmodern sense of history and ontology, is crucially undeterminable. (Yerkes 1-2)

Indeed, *Gravity's Rainbow*, through its multiple narrative strands, unconventional structure, and layered irony, resists any one definitive reading. Instead, it presents to us a number of ways in which the apocalyptic narrative is employed in an exegetical or interpretive manner. Northrop Frye calls the Biblical narrative a "myth of concern" (Frye, *Critical* 37) which is laid out in scripture as an interpretation of primary revelation in what comes to be known as a "critical reconstruction" (Frye, *Critical* 120). *Gravity's Rainbow*, in a rather different fashion, imitates, replicates, reconstructs, parodies, and deconstructs the apocalyptic narrative familiar to the Western tradition of literature.

Of all the Biblical texts, none has undergone more "critical reconstruction" than that of Revelation, the final text of the New Testament. In its claim to give Christians a comprehensive vision of past, present, and future, it has become one of the most powerful and influential meta-narratives of Western history. Apocalypse means "to reveal", and so Revelation illuminates the historical process as a teleological one which describes both the end of this world and its replacement with another: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more" (Rev. 21: 1). Christopher Rowland suggests that "The apocalypse offers a basis for hope in a world where God's way seemed difficult to discern" (Rowland 46-7). *Gravity's Rainbow* assumes the role of an apocalyptic text in the way that it describes the real or imagined processes that have gone into constructing history, not least of which are those apocalyptic narratives which imagine the end of one historical epoch and the beginning of a new

one. The Rocket then functions as a multi-faceted apocalyptic symbol, a means by which various actors comprehend the historical process and their place within it:

> But the Rocket has to be many things, it must answer to a number of different shapes in the dreams of those who touch it – in combat, in tunnel, on paper – it must survive heresies shining, unconfoundable … and heretics there will be: Gnostics who have been taken in a rush of wine and fire to chambers of the Rocket-throne…Kabbalists who study the Rocket as Torah, letter by letter – rivets, burner cup and brass rose, its text is theirs to permute and combine into new revelations, always unfolding … Manicheans who see the two Rockets, good and evil, who speak together in the sacred idolalia of the Primal Twins (some say their names are Enzian and Blicero) of a good Rocket who will take us to the stars, an evil Rocket for the world's suicide, the two perpetually in struggle. (862)

The above passage I take to be key to unlocking the apocalyptic themes within *Gravity's Rainbow*. In its suggestion of "heresies", it emphasises the dominance of one monolithic apocalyptic narrative which other narratives work against or resist. Andrew Yerkes therefore correctly points out that "The postmodern apocalypse in *Gravity's Rainbow* retains the apocalyptic form, but transfers it from a temporal to a spatial grid … relocating it at various nodes, creating small apocalypses in different moments of the text …" (Yerkes 8). This I take as a starting point from which to examine the numerous competing apocalyptic narratives of the novel and their utopian/dystopian and destructive/transcendent possibilities.

The first of these apocalyptic narratives occurs at the beginning of *Gravity's Rainbow* in the historical setting of war-time London. The apocalypse imagined by Pynchon here is essentially associated with an existential apocalypse and the death of the self. Central to this is the death of western grand narratives such as religion and progress, and the loss of foundational ontological supporting structures such as time and space. In the same way that Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed the "advent of nihilism" and Michel Foucault suggested that the human being of modernity was "dehistoricised" (Foucault, *Order* 368-9), and from this starting point theorised the "absolute dispersion of man" (Foucault, *Order* 385), Pynchon's novel, situated in the

shadow of the bomb, describes the advent of the postmodern and (post-)apocalyptic subject.

One of the central characters in this context is Tyrone Slothrop, a hapless American soldier whose picaresque journeys take him between England and Europe on various special missions. Slothrop's time is spent puzzling over the construction and flight path of the newly developed V-2 Rockets, the precursor to the ICBM missile, his "function" being to "learn the rocket, inch by inch" (257). Importantly, we are told that he has "become obsessed with the idea of a rocket with his name written on it" (29), indicative of his paranoia and the sense of death being both imminent and immanent, as well as pre-ordained, inside The Zone:

> It's nothing he can see or lay hands on – sudden gasses, a violence upon the air and no trace afterward … a Word, spoken with no warning in your ear, and then silence forever. (29)

To Slothrop and his fellow soldiers the swift deadliness of the V-2 rocket has a mystical quality, the sort of fearful power associated with the sublime, much like the white whale which Captain Ahab obsessively pursues in *Moby-Dick*. In an important reversal to Melville's text, however, Pynchon's characters are not the hunters so much as they are the hunted and it is the V-2 rocket which seeks them out, "promising death with German and precise confidence" (29). A second contrast lies in the fact that the Rocket, unlike the whale, is less a symbol of transcendence than it is of pure deathliness, a "judgement from which there is no appeal" (4). Unlike Ahab's transcendent quest and his Romantic death, the characters of *Gravity's Rainbow* are fated to be destroyed ingloriously and without warning, in a war whose logic or purpose is unknowable. For Slothrop and his friends, The Rocket is less a revelatory text pointing the way forwards to a new epoch than it is an abiding symbol of annihilation in a fearful new age of destructiveness.

Slothrop, whose name and behaviour suggests a "solipsistic" mindset as well as a "slothful" or "sinful" nature, becomes convinced that he is in fact being singled out for destruction, an existential dread shared by many of those around him. Frank Kermode suggests that "our sense of endings has its origins in existential anxiety" (Kermode, *Waiting* 254) and in this way does Slothrop imagine his own personal "apocalypse"; he and a number of other characters come to share in a sense that they

are fated to be destroyed by a shadowy system governed by "Them", those "crippled keepers" who "were sent out to multiply, to have dominion" (854). In his growing sense of there being powers arranged specifically to destroy people, Slothrop falls into the category of a "heretic" in that his particular Revelation suggests not a benevolent creator presiding over a teleological or Providential history, but instead a humanity condemned to earthly destruction by unknown forces, with no apparent possibility of spiritual redemption. This anti-transcendental apocalypse is echoed by another character who says, "Our history is an aggregate of last moments" (176), and Lois Parkinson Zamora rightly suggests that "The paranoid fear of Pynchon's characters is, one senses, a kind of inversion of the spiritual longings of the biblical apocalyptist, for whom it is the power of good that is unfathomable, not the power of evil" (Zamora 58). The fear and loathing of these characters reflects not only the trauma of war but also, more importantly perhaps, the destruction of religious meta-narratives where in place of God there is either an empty and meaningless space or, alternatively, God's position has been usurped by a shadowy system governed by a destructive and anti-transcendental will-to-power.

Such a view is expressed by Slothrop's friend, Tantivy, who says that during his time at Harvard he came to sense "a peculiar *structure* that no one admitted to …" (230) and the Welshman Gwenhidy, in plotting the distribution of rocket detonations across London points to the apparent fact that people in the East End are being targeted: "The people out here were meant to go down first. We're expendable: those in the West End, and the north of the river are not" (205). This point is further developed by the itinerant "narrator" of the novel who further articulates this sense of paranoid double-predestination:

> The real war is always there. The dying tapers off now and then, but the War is still killing lots and lots of people. Often in ways that are too complicated, even for us, at this level, to trace. But the right people are dying, just as they do when armies fight. The ones who stand up, in Basic, in the middle of the machine gun pattern. The ones who do not have faith in their sergeants. The ones who slip and show a moment's weakness to the enemy. The right ones survive. (764)

Just who the "right ones" are exactly is never clear in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and the interjections on the part of the narrator are never so much an explanation as they are a

further obfuscation of the real processes occurring inside The Zone, where people like Slothrop would appear to have their fate mapped out for them by powers unknown. Once again, the numerous and fractured narrative strands inside the novel reflect the difficulty of comprehending the processes of history and the individual's place within it. In this manner the reader, like Slothrop and his cohort, lacks those epistemological foundations which give meaning or understanding to any narrative, whether it be an historical or a novelistic narrative. Slothrop is therefore the quintessentially uncomprehending postmodern subject, whose apocalyptic crisis is largely occasioned by the short-circuiting of his epistemological and ontological coordinates.

Roger Mexico, like Slothrop, is another character who sees in the Rocket not so much apocalyptic transcendence as a chain of events pointing the way towards his own eventual extinction in a meaningless universe:

> A doodle will give them time to get to safety, a rocket will hit before they can hear it coming. Biblical, maybe, spooky as an old northern fairy tale, but not The War, not the great struggle of good and evil the wireless reports everyday. And no reason not just to, well, to keep on … (63)

Roger Mexico's Beckettian resignation signals a lack of faith in teleological ideas of history, and with it an absence of meaning, value and truth. For Roger, the war can no longer be described as a battle between "good and evil" as such terms have long ceased to have any meaning. Life in the shadow of the Rocket is bereft of epiphany and transcendence and history *regresses* or entropies into stalled, meaningless time: "Will Post-war be nothing but 'events,' newly created one moment to the next? No links? Is it the end of history?" (65). The surreal nature of life and death inside The Zone is occasioned by a fracturing of reality and chronological time:

> Imagine a missile one hears only *after* it explodes. The reversal! A piece of time neatly snipped out … a few feet of film run backwards … the blast of the rocket, fallen faster than sound – then growing out of it the roar of its own fall, catching up to what's already death and burning…a ghost in the sky. (56)

The V-2 symbolises humanity's continuing fall into ever-escalating and meaningless acts of violence. Furthermore, in the development of the atomic bomb, which brings a

new kind of immanent death into the world even more deadly than the V-2, the advent of postmodernity becomes synonymous with the death of utopia, the end of history, and, importantly, the destruction of meaning.

The dystopian and nightmarish quality of *Gravity's Rainbow* is also largely explained by the apocalyptic longings of earlier generations, those who read history as a series of events progressing inexorably towards a final struggle between good and evil. In the context of Pynchon's novel, this is a specifically Judeo-Christian-Protestant *weltanshaung*, which, as well as being grounded in millennial expectation, divided the world into "elect" and "preterite", the saved and the damned. In *Gravity's Rainbow* this apocalyptic narrative is imagined to be a guiding force in history, its (il)logical outcome being the advent of the Cold War which has the potential to see Armageddon acted out with nuclear weapons. This unflinching confidence in historical teleology is for Pynchon embodied in ideas such as providence, manifest destiny, and American exceptionalism, whose origins he traces back to the Reformation in Europe, and the subsequent expansion of Christianity throughout the New World. The importance of the Reformation as an historical event which harnessed apocalyptic ideas and transformed them into an eschatological meta-narrative is explained by Diarmaid MacCulloch:

> The Reformation would not have happened if ordinary people had not convinced themselves that they were actors in a cosmic drama plotted by God: that in the Bible he had left them with a record of his plans and directions as to how to carry them out. (MacCulloch 550)

This particular "critical reconstruction", to use Northrop Frye's term, acted as a blueprint or script for history and gave Protestants a God-given mandate to attack anything which they deemed to be ungodly, including not only the Papal anti-Christ and his ministry, but also those other "pagans" or "preterite" whom God had supposedly "passed over". *Gravity's Rainbow* therefore describes a number of scenarios whereby the apocalyptic narrative becomes a means to justify extermination policies against those who are deemed to be passed over. The Dutchman Van Der Groov, who takes part in a campaign to exterminate dodos in Mauritius, is for

Pynchon representative of the eschatological-apocalyptic theology which certain Protestants of a militant cast embraced:

> … They saw the stumbling birds ill-made to the point of Satanic intervention, so ugly as to embody argument against a Godly creation. Was Mauritius some first poison trickle through the sheltering dykes of the Earth? Christians must stem it here, or perish in a second Flood, loosed this time not by God but by the Enemy. The act of ramming home the charges into their musketry became for these men a devotional act, one whose symbolism they understood. (130)

Van Der Groov's war of extermination is one of many battles fought in God's name, part of a larger apocalyptic war of which Armageddon would (supposedly) be the final realisation of the historical process.

The Rocket is therefore a millennial symbol or text which allegorically describes the history of Protestant expansion and extermination. In this way, the presence of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1898) is felt throughout *Gravity's Rainbow* as rockets are fired into continents, indigenous people are exterminated, and hollow men assume control of the world's resources. Behind all of this is what the narrator of *Heart of Darkness* suggests is "an idea … something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to …" (35). Such "ideas" seem to be at least partially drawn from biblical texts such as Revelation: "To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7). These "critical reconstructions" of God's word were applied to numerous and varied historical situations, often with the aim of furthering Protestant expansion into the New World, and justified the domination of so-called "inferior peoples". Pynchon reads these historical episodes as a progressive falling away from the possibility of utopia, and so the apocalyptic narrative becomes decidedly *dystopian*, pointing the way towards an increasingly ruined world:

> America *was* the edge of the world. A message for Europe, continent-sized, inescapable. Europe had found the site for its Kingdom of Death, that special Death the West had invented. Savages had their waste regions, Kalaharis, lakes so misty they could not see the other side. But Europe had gone deeper – into obsession, addiction, away from all the savage innocenses. America was a gift from the invisible powers, a

>   way of returning. But Europe refused it … Now we are in the last phase. American
>
>   death has come to occupy Europe. (857)

Pynchon traces an apocalyptic *geist* or spirit which runs through history and demonstrates the continued transference of apocalyptic narratives between the Old World and the New, the most recent of these being the Rocket and nuclear technologies which will become the apocalyptic text *par excellence*. In this, "the last phase", the imagined final stage of history, mankind's complete destruction becomes a distinct possibility. The above passage also makes explicit how flawed the idea of utopia is; instead of historical progression, we are faced with a sort of Spenglerian decline into an atrophic winter, or to use the language of Hesiod, an "Age of Iron". Like Graham Swift's *Waterland*, Pynchon's novel therefore depicts the historical process as an unfolding series of disasters inflicted on various peoples in the name of religion or progress. The dream of utopia, in this sense, always transforms itself into the nightmare of history. Pynchon, like Swift, lays much of the blame for these increasingly destructive episodes on societies' abiding faith in grand narratives, both religious and secular, but it is the decidedly Manichean nature of the Judeo-Christian-Protestant narrative of Revelation which makes it such a potentially destructive one. It is for this reason that D H Lawrence viewed the meta-narrative of Revelation as "repellent … because it resounds with the dangerous snarl of the *frustrated*, *suppressed* collective self, the frustrated power-spirit in man, vengeful" (Lawrence, *Apocalypse* 73).

Central to this Protestant apocalyptic narrative is the Manichean struggle between the forces of good (the elect) and evil (the preterite). Pynchon not surprisingly subverts the idea of elect and preterite throughout the novel in that the former are not so much pure and Godly as they are associated with a ruthless will-to-power, corruption and sterility, while the preterite are largely characterised by their helplessness, innocence and fertility. The preterite, embodied in the likes of Tyrone Slothrop, adopt pigs as their totemic symbol, which in the Gospel of Mathew were infected with demons and driven over the edge of a cliff. In a similar way, Pynchon depicts the preterite as scapegoats and canon fodder, expendable human waste inside the greater unfolding drama of Providence. Importantly, Slothrop's ancestor, William Slothrop, is linked to a heretical tradition which subverts the Christian narrative: "Nobody wanted to hear about the Preterite, the many God passes over when he

chooses a few for salvation …William felt that Jesus was for the elect, Judas Iscariot for the Preterite …" (658). His descendent Tyrone Slothrop likewise speculates as to the path of history and the role of apocalyptic theology in its consigning of people to salvation and damnation:

> Could he [William] have been the fork in the road America never took, the singular point she jumped the wrong way from? Suppose the Slothrop heresy had had time to consolidate and prosper? Might there have been fewer crimes in the name of Jesus, and more mercy in the name of Judas Iscariot? It seems to Tyrone Slothrop that there might be a route back…the whole space of the Zone cleared, depolarised, and somewhere inside the waste of it a single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite, without even nationality to fuck it up … (658-9)

To Slothrop's mind, the Protestant apocalyptic narrative has therefore had a rather ignominious role to play throughout history, past, present and future. It has cast people in predetermined roles of elect and preterite and consigned a significant portion of humanity to an earthly destruction with no apparent hope of transcendence. Such a pernicious theology has resulted in numerous genocides, the most recent of which are those events occurring across The Zone: war, planned extermination, slave labour, and the development of nuclear weapons designed for use on both military targets as well as civilian populations.

Pynchon therefore identifies in history the importance of a Protestant will-to-power which harnesses humanity to instrumentalist ends. The Protestant millennial utopia has increasingly been transformed into a dystopia in which humanity is reduced to what Marx termed "exchange value", the outcome of which is "naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation" (Marx and Engels, 222). *Gravity's Rainbow* describes the coalescence or "knotting into" of various meta-narratives, apocalyptic, rational, or utopian, into that "peculiar structure" which Tantivy suspects but only partially comprehends. Robert D Newman therefore suggests that "The Calvinist providential plan becomes equated with the arc of the rocket" (Newman 98) and Paul A Bove says:

> In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the symbol of elect ambition is the V-2 rocket developed by
>   Hitler in his war on England. But it is more than a symbol; it is the mechanic system in

the service of which the elect reorganise society against the human, against nature, and against the entanglements of history. (Bove 660)

In this way, the Rocket becomes an expression of that monolithic narrative in which humanity is judged according to its usefulness in the service of "the system". The development of the Rocket in the period of the Second World War therefore sounds the death knell of humanism. Pynchon, like J G Ballard, imagines a post-human(ist) epoch in which human life has become inextricably tied to that of science and technology, one example being the substance Impolex-G which Slothrop is partially composed of. Like Ballard's *Crash* (1973), *Gravity's Rainbow* witnesses the marriage of man and machine, and both texts echo William Blake, whose "dark satanic mills" symbolised humanity's increasing bondage to industry, technology and capital.

This is most potently depicted in the deranged and sadistic Captain Blicero's launching of the Rocket in which his lover Gottfried is encased, a parody of both the Christian "rapture" (the ascent of the faithful during Christ's return) as well as the sort of positivism or Wellsian utopianism which was characterised by an unshakeable faith in science and technology. Far from viewing science as a meta-narrative of emancipation, it points the way towards humanity's enslavement to rational systems and technologies. Blicero further confuses the boundaries between the organic and the inorganic, between sentient beings and machines, by regarding the rockets as his "pet animals, barely domesticated, often troublesome, even apt to revert" (121). Katje, one of his human "pets" and his some-time sex slave, comes to understand the Rocket as symbolising the embodiment of this destructive Protestant *geist* in which the boundary between humanity and technology has been blurred:

Katje has understood the great airless arc as a clear allusion to certain secret lusts that drive the planet and herself, and Those who use her – over its peak and down, plunging, burning, towards a terminal orgasm … (265-66)

The sexual imagery here is important in explaining those masochistic-mechanistic urges which go into annihilating "the other", whether that should be a lover, a foreign race of people, or those of a different religion or ideology. For Pynchon, as for J G Ballard, the will-to-power is clearly connected with a sort of apocalyptic death drive ("thanatos") and finds its fullest expression in a perverse union of the erotic with the

mechanical. The narrator of Ballard's *Crash* says, "The languages of invisible eroticisms, of undiscovered sexual acts, lay waiting among this complex equipment" (29) and likewise do Blicero's sadistic games involve the subjection of the human to the mechanical, symbolic of humanity's increasing alienation from itself and its perfection of deadly technologies. Lois Parkinson Zamora says of the various characters' sexual relationship to the Rocket, "Messenger of death and destruction, it is a symbol of sex not as procreative but as destructive, as a kind of death wish, a total loss of self" (Zamora 68). The Rocket is that "terminal orgasm" which symbolises the endgame of humanity, and the destruction/disintegration of the meta-narratives of history. It is therefore fitting that in *Gravity's Rainbow* the mushroom cloud should be likened to a "sudden white genital onset in the sky" (823), a final perversion of sexual desire and an inversion of human fertility that points the way towards humanity's self-inflicted apocalypse. Like the narrator of *Crash* who suggests that "The enormous energy of the twentieth century, enough to drive the planet into a new orbit around a happier star, was being expended to maintain this immense motionless pause" (124), Pynchon's novel describes an equally deracinated and entropic world in which the "The System" must sooner or later "crash to its death" (490) and in this way does the Rocket effect a postmodern temporal suspension in which human fertility, spirituality and optimism have been exhausted or destroyed.

 Gravity's Rainbow, like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1926) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1948), therefore links humanity's increasing loss of agency and affect to political systems and technologies which corrupt human relationships and mechanise sexuality, and in doing so reduce the possibilities of transcendence, meaning and value. The substance Impolex-G, which Slothrop has been composed of and conditioned by, is one satirical example of this, but a more serious critique is afforded by the example of Pointsman. In his Pavlovian experiments and his interest in Slothrop's "precognition" of approaching rockets, Pointsman embodies that scientific urge to "connect everything with everything", thereby creating a greater "structure" which is used to manipulate and control human populations. In the same manner in which Galileo conceived of the universe in terms of a great mathematical text, likewise is the fate of the human race in *Gravity's Rainbow* reduced to a sterile determinism and empirical equations of cause and effect. Pointsman thus speculates as to Slothrop's response to the approach of a rocket:

But if it's in the air, right here, right now, then the rockets follow from it, 100% of the
time. No exceptions. When we find it, we'll have shown again the stone determinacy of
everything, of every soul. There will be precious little room for any hope at all. (101)

This is the anti-transcendental apocalyptic narrative of a science pursuing its own
sinister logic. For the likes of Pointsman, the Rocket is neither a symbol of utopia nor
of transcendence but simply a mathematical formula which enables "Them" to extend
their control over the rest of humanity. In the "cartelised state" (195) where "a million
bureaucrats are diligently plotting death" (20), the Pointsmans and Bliceros therefore
play a central role in destroying society, meaning, and value.

A more unwitting dupe of the system is the engineer Pokler who has worked
on rocket technologies at Nordhausen. Pokler's faith in science as a narrative serving
the interests of humanity is an apocalyptic-utopian vision grounded in the old
narrative of progress and pre-war positivist philosophy. Pokler assumes that he is
working on a technology that will eventually aid mankind, and so invests a
considerable amount of intellectual and emotional interest in the Rocket's
construction. However, Leni points to the destructive potential of Pokler's work,
suggesting that "They're using you to kill people" (475), thus highlighting Pokler's
complicity in the workings of the Nazi military-industrial complex. Pokler rather
naively argues for the Rocket's utopian-transcendent capacities, suggesting that
"We'll all use it some day, to leave the earth. To transcend … Someday … they won't
have to kill. Borders won't mean anything." (475). Through Pokler, Pynchon shows
how a progressive-utopian scientific narrative has been subsumed or appropriated by
a monolithic narrative based upon global markets, arms manufacturing, and the
enslavement of the individual. Pokler's own transcendent-utopian apocalyptic
narrative is therefore assimilated into the larger destructive-dystopian apocalyptic
narrative symbolised by the Rocket.

Once again, it is this "progressive knotting into" of various narratives, fields of
knowledge, and political institutions which constructs the Rocket, that deadly
eschatological text. This particular form of Revelation is synonymous with the vision
attributed to the foreign minister Walter Rathenau, a model of the cartelised state
which extends the world over:

He saw the war in progress as a world revolution, out of which would rise neither red communism nor an unhindered Right, but a rational structure in which business would be the true, the rightful authority – a structure based, not surprisingly, on the one he'd engineered in Germany for fighting the World War. (195)

Nazi Germany therefore becomes the prototype of the military-industrial complex but as the narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow* suggests, such a system extends beyond the borders of the Third Reich and is replicated throughout the world: "Are there arrangements Stalin won't admit … doesn't even *know about*? Oh, a state begins to take form, in the Stateless German night, a state that spans oceans and surface politics, sovereign as the International or the Church of Rome, and the Rocket is its soul" (670). According to Pynchon's narrator, the "soul" of the Rocket would appear to be an interconnected system of capital, empire, colonialism, science, and Protestant theology, the final stage of a long historical process dating back to at least the eighteenth century, and possibly to the first period of European expansion. It is a supranational ideology which transcends national borders and governments, a dystopian world governed by "Them", and the final stage of the historical process.

  Gravity's Rainbow therefore follows the tradition of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in imagining a super-state which reinvents itself through a dynamic process of permanent revolution, a continual re-arrangement of politics, capital and technologies. It is that greater "structure" imagined by Tantivy, invisible but highly organised and robust, while the war "so vast and aloof" (155), is thought to be "theatre … to keep the people distracted" (617). The dystopian and anti-transcendent vision which is offered in *Gravity's Rainbow* is much like that which Winston Smith reads about in Emmanuel Goldstein's '*The Theory and Practise of Oligarchical Collectivism*':

The war, therefore, if we judge it by the standards of previous wars, is merely an imposture … In the past, ruling groups of all countries, although they might recognise a common interest and therefore limit the destructiveness of the war, did fight against one another, and the victor always plundered the vanquished. In our own day they are not fighting against one another at all. The war is waged by each ruling group against its own subjects, and the object of the war is not to make or prevent conquests of territory, but to keep the structure of society intact. The very word 'war', therefore, has become

misleading. It would probably be accurate to say that by becoming continuous war has
ceased to exist. (207)

In such a dystopian realm as this, war is a means by which to maintain a status-quo,
and history has come to a stand-still. The various narratives which have gone into
making history have disappeared and life is reduced to a meaningless process in the
service of "The System". In this way, Raymond M Olderman rightly suggests that "In
Pynchon's history of Western consciousness, the old view – with its rationalism and
institutional religions, its Newtonian science and great chain of being – has entropied"
(Olderman 199). If the narratives of the past have indeed led to such a dead end, or,
indeed, have "entropied", all that can now be hoped for is that somehow the system
itself might collapse, or implode from within.

Pynchon therefore sees in the advent of the Cold War two distinct possibilities
for the direction of history thereafter. The first is that stalled sense of time and history
which the globalised "rocket cartel" embodies, effecting a temporal stasis whereby
various states have acquired nuclear arsenals and have the capacity, if not the will, to
destroy each other. This was described by the theory of M.A.D. (Mutually Assured
Destruction) which, along with détente, saw the Cold War settle into an equilibrium
based on nuclear parity. This situation was largely maintained through various treaties
during the Cold War (SALT I, SALT II) and, more precariously, since the dissolution
of the Soviet Union (through various non-proliferation agreements overseen by the
UAEA). The global world order as described by *Gravity's Rainbow* is therefore one
that values stability and stasis, and history as a directional process therefore becomes
non-existent. The second possibility, a full-scale nuclear conflict, also theorises an
end to history, albeit a different and more unimaginable one. The spectre of such a
disaster is contemplated throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*, but as Jacques Derrida
emphasises in an essay from 1984, this can never properly be represented. According
to Derrida, a nuclear holocaust would "destroy the entire archive and all symbolic
capacity" and as such:

It would be a war without a name, a nameless war, for it would no longer share even the
name of war with the events of the same type, of the same family. Beyond all

genealogy, a nameless war in the name of the name. That would be the End and the Revelation of the name itself, the Apocalypse of the Name" (Derrida 31).

This man-made apocalypse, a wholesale destruction of "the archive" and with it, humankind's representational capacities, is the closest we might come to theorising or understanding such an end to history, the apocalyptic sublime of the nuclear age. Pynchon's theory of postmodernity therefore becomes a decidedly apocalyptic one, an "aggregate of last moments" whereby history is either approaching or has already reached its "Signal Zero", its imagined point of completion. In the shadow of "the bomb", the Cold War puts a freeze on historical momentum and human development in a shattering of confidence and faith in grand narratives. Just as Theodor Adorno doubted that poetry could be written in the same way after the horrors of Auschwitz, *Gravity's Rainbow* questions the possibility of human progress and of writing in the post-war era. In this particular epoch, where apocalyptic death has been supremely perfected and takes on a quality of immanence, ours is a theatre of cruelty in which to speak or write becomes an absurd exercise. The veil is rent to reveal an empty space, a precipice which humanity now stands in front of, and as Derrida suggests

> Literature belongs to this nuclear epoch, that of the crisis and of nuclear criticism, at least if we mean by this the historical and ahistorical horizon of an absolute self-destructibility without apocalypse, without revelation and its own truth, without absolute knowledge. (Derrida 27)

For Nietzsche, words were something partially dead and so there was always a "sort of contempt in the act of speaking"; likewise do Derrida and Pynchon depict the inadequacies of language in explaining the horrors of what has occurred, and what may still occur, in the postmodern epoch, given the capacity of humankind to destroy itself. Indeed, in a final irony, it is language itself which has constructed the apocalyptic narrative of Revelation as well as the potentially apocalyptic coding which would enable a nuclear war, the event which would signal the apocalyptic closure of language itself.

In the knowledge that the advent of the Rocket might signal the final chapter of history and the destruction of all other historical narratives, *Gravity's Rainbow* also

hints at the immense void of meaning which the meta-narrative desperately attempts to fill. So it is that various characters, like Pokler, desperately hold to those seemingly defunct narratives such as progress, positivism, and utopia. The bleak alternative is the acceptance of an existence in which death or entropy are the only "realities" inside the Zone and so history would have to be viewed as something inherently meaningless and destructive. The awe-inspiring terror which the Rocket comes to symbolise is like Melville's whale, whose annihilating whiteness bespeaks a sort of apocalyptic wonder, both sublime attraction and sublime revulsion:

> But not yet have we solved the incantation of this whiteness, and learned why it appeals with such power to the soul; and more strange and far more portentous – why, as we have seen, it is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's Deity; and yet it should be as it is, the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind. (212)

Ishmael's lyrical hypothesising over the matter of the whale's whiteness, with its suggestion of the "heartless voids and immensities of the universe" and "the thought of annihilation" (212), is similar to that of a number of characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* who see both the Rocket and the sterile white north as the deathly conclusion of history.

      The "signal zero" which the Rocket is apparently moving towards is then imagined to be a sort of pre-destined history or script as imagined by Revelation: "I am the alpha and omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 21:6). Yet the Rocket, like Revelation, is open to numerous interpretations or "critical reconstructions"; like Melville's whale it is not simply one thing, it is many, and as the critic James Wood suggests

> Moby-Dick is the great dream of mastery over language. But it also represents a terrible struggle with language. For if the terror of the whale, the terror of God, is his inscrutability, then it is language that has made him so…Language breaks up God, releases us from the one meaning of the predestinating God, but merely makes that God differently inscrutable by flooding it with thousands of different meanings. (Wood 45)

Ishmael likens the scars on the body of a sperm whale to occult hieroglyphics, just as the Rocket's structure becomes a sort of apocalyptic text which is interpreted differently by different characters; the religious narrative, like history, is a literary construct. Derrida suggests that nuclear weaponry, "based upon structures of language", is "fabulously textual" (Derrida 23), and so it is that in Pynchon's novel the Rocket is a highly constructed symbol which has meaning superimposed upon it. It is constantly referred to in textual terms throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*, at all times highlighting the fact that meaning is created and bestowed upon historical narratives in an attempt to fill up those empty ontological spaces or "heartless voids" which Ishmael refers to. Language, with its yearning for "presence", always grasps at what cannot be properly explained or represented. In *Gravity's Rainbow* the Rocket, which for so many characters of the novel is "the Word" (29) a "Torah" (616) and a "holy Text" (616), is therefore the beginning as well as the end of metaphysical ideas of presence and transcendence. In a similar way does language and the meta-narrative, which, by its very nature, exists inside language, collapse in on itself inside postmodernity.

So far, this chapter has primarily emphasised the destructive capacities of the Rocket as an apocalyptic symbol or text. However, the Rocket also reflects the desire of certain actors to reactivate or redirect the path of history away from such an entropic or eschatological conclusion. A number of characters, whose destiny is believed to be tied or fated to the Rocket, signal their intention to construct new apocalyptic narratives out of one that has become obsolete. Once again, the nature of the apocalyptic narrative is revealed to be deeply subjective:

> He [Thanatz] is the angel they've hoped for, and it's logical he should come now, on the day when they have their rocket all assembled at last, their single A4 scavenged all summer piece by piece clear across the Zone from Poland to the Low Countries. Whether you believed it or not, Empty or Green, cunt-crazy or politically celibate, power-playing or neutral, you had a feeling, some hidden tithe out of your soul, *something* - for the Rocket. It is that 'something' that the Angel Thanatz now illuminates, each in a different way, for everybody listening. (797)

Inside The Zone various apocalyptic narratives are therefore reconstituted or rebuilt in the hope of finding a way out of that monolithic "structure" described by Tantivy, and so a number of characters, in different ways, re-imagine the end of history, and, perhaps, anticipate the possibility of a new beginning.

One such character is Oberst Enzian of the Zone-Herero who suggests to Slothrop that those faced with apocalyptic annihilation or genocide attempt to reconstruct or redirect the trajectory of history away from that which has caused the death and suffering of so many to date. Instead of viewing the Rocket as an apocalyptic text as described by teleological or eschatological narratives such as Revelation, the Herero reading of it serves as an allegorical explanation of their own history:

> One reason we grew so close to the Rocket, I think, was the sharp awareness of how contingent, like ourselves, the Aggregat 4 could be – how at the mercy of small things…Stay in the zone long enough and you'll start getting ideas about Destiny yourself. (431).

Just as it is suggested that Pokler was "an extension of the Rocket, long before it was ever built" (477), Enzian, in a slightly different fashion, views the Rocket in terms of a messianic-millennial symbol: "Somewhere, among the Wastes and the World, is the key that will brings us back, restore us to our earth and our freedom" (622). For Enzian, the (re)building of the Rocket is an allegorical representation of the historical process and a strange hybrid of Western millennialism and African mythology which points towards a recurring desire for apocalyptic transcendence:

> … say we are supposed to be the Kabbalists out here, say that's our real Destiny, to be the scholar-magicians of the Zone, with somewhere in it a text, to be picked to pieces, annotated, explicated, and masturbated until its all squeezed limp of its last drop…well we assumed … that this Holy Text had to be the Rocket … our Torah … Its symmetries, its latencies, the cuteness of it enchanted and seduced us while the real Text persisted, somewhere else, in its darkness, our darkness … even this far from the Sudwest we are not to be spared the ancient tragedy of lost messages, a curse that will never leave us. (616)

The "curse" of the Herero is their sense of apocalyptic expectation which, as Enzian hints at, is forever forestalled and frustrated: "But we, Zone-Hereros, under the earth, how long will we wait in this north, in this locus of death?" (383). The Herero, separated from their homeland and dwelling in a stalled or suspended period of history, continue to await a new historical narrative that will supposedly transcend the deathly emptiness of The Zone. Eugen Weber suggests that "If … apocalypticism is about judgements, accountings, and ends, millennialism … is about new beginnings: restoration and regeneration" (Weber 31), and so it is that an alternative to the destructive apocalyptic narrative of the Rocket exists in the minds of those Herero who imagine that the future might still give birth to a new nation or historical epoch.

To complicate matters further, the Zone-Herero are divided into two groups, which Steven Weinberger rightly suggests "embody the two predominant, and opposed attitudes towards time and history handed down by nineteenth century German philosophy – the historicism of Hegel and the anti-historicism of Nietzsche" (Weisenberger 69); those Herero known as "the Empty Ones" belong to the former, while Enzian belongs to the latter. The Empty Ones view themselves in terms of those who are "passed over" (431) and so perpetuate those providential ideas of elect and preterite which they were indoctrinated with by the German colonial regime in West Africa. In believing that they are destined to become an extinct race, the Empty Ones' progress towards their "Signal Zero" is not a time of return or renewal, but instead an eschatological narrative of sublime annihilation:

> Though they don't admit it, the Empty Ones now exiled in the Zone, Europeanised in language and thought, split off from the old tribal unity, have found the why of it just as mysterious … They calculate no cycles, no returns, they are in love with the glamour of a whole people's suicide – the pose, the stoicism, and the bravery … The Empty Ones can guarantee a day when the last Zone Herero will die, a final zero to a collective history fully lived.
> (378-9)

Enzian, by contrast, has adopted a more sceptical or detached position and sees history as moving in quasi-mythical cycles without any kind of historical direction; least of all does he imagine that history could come to a final, teleological conclusion. Enzian's anti-eschatological stance resembles Oswald Spengler's theory of history,

which the latter described as "a picture of endless formations and transformations, of that marvellous waxing and waning of organic forms" (Spengler 149). In a similar fashion to Hesiod, who saw history in terms of stages of decline, from a golden age to an age of iron, Spengler's history was equated with the natural life processes of the individual: "Every culture passes through the age phases of the individual man. Each has its childhood, youth, manhood, and old age …" (Spengler 153). For Enzian, this organic treatment of historical processes imagines an eventual end to the historical situation of The Zone and the epoch of history dominated by "Them":

> To believe that each of Them will personally die is to believe that Their system will die – that some chance of renewal, some dialectic, is still operating in history. To affirm their mortality is to affirm return. (639)

Enzian thus becomes a sort of prophet whose history implies regressions, cycles, and repetitions, much like Nietzsche's Zarathustra who will "return eternally to this identical and self-same life … to teach once more the eternal recurrence of all things" (Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* 237-8). In this way, he sees himself and others, such as Slothrop, as joined in a mystical-apocalyptic quest to reconstruct an apocalyptic narrative which will transcend the time of "Them", the "crippled keepers", the spoilers of the earth:

> What Enzian wants to create will have no history. It will never need a design change. Time, as time is known to the other nations, will wither away inside this new one. The Erdschweinhohle will not be bound, like the Rocket, to time. The people will find the centre again, the Centre without time, the journey without hysteresis, where every departure is a return to the same place, the only place … (379)

Enzian's version of history emphasises the artificially constructed nature of one monolithic grand narrative such as Revelation which for Nietzsche was simply an "imaginary teleology" (Nietzsche, *Twilight* 137). It is Enzian's desire to throw away the script of history, to dispense with those commanding meta-narratives which by their very nature come to assume a teleological direction, and, importantly, an ending. Enzian's apocalyptic narrative, if we can call it that, is therefore a subjective journey away from ideas about the "end of history" towards the imagined *beginning* of a new

period of history. Enzian, like Slothrop's ancestor William, therefore offers a counter-narrative to that highly constructed and totalising narrative known as Revelation.

In discussing the nature of the apocalyptic narrative Daniel Wojcik suggests that

> Until recently, the end of the world has been interpreted as a meaningful, transformative, and supernatural event, involving the annihilation and renewal of the earth by deities or divine forces. During the last half of the twentieth century, however, widespread beliefs about a meaningless apocalypse have emerged and now compete with traditional religious apocalyptic worldviews. (Wojcik 1)

Indeed, the apocalyptic narrative, if it has lost its traditional theological and metaphysical associations, nevertheless persists in a more secularised sense. The various narratives inside *Gravity's Rainbow* are representative of both versions of the apocalyptic narrative, the utopian-transcendent on the one hand, and dystopian-destructive on the other. The ending of Pynchon's novel, in which the Rocket has finally been launched, leaves us with little to believe that the apocalyptic narrative, as it exists, can be anything other than a destructive one. Although *Gravity's Rainbow* questions and subverts the apocalyptic meta-narrative, especially that of Revelation, it nonetheless emphasises the sense of crisis inside that emergent epoch we have come to call postmodernity, both at the level of the collective and the individual.

The historical setting of *Gravity's Rainbow* therefore represents a juncture between beginnings and endings and the entry into a new and uncertain epoch in which meta-narratives of a hopeful or utopian nature have all but disappeared. Pynchon's novel describes the emergence of postmodernity's state of apocalyptic crisis in what Paul Crosthwaite rightly suggests is "an endless suspension" occasioned by "an impacted traumatic kernel at the core of the 'postmodern' imagination" (Crosthwaite 74). Indeed, trauma lies at the heart of *Gravity's Rainbow* and perhaps Pynchon, like Walter Benjamin, had Novalis' Angel of History in mind when writing his novel, as history accumulates like so much debris, pushing us inexorably towards an uncertain future. According to the logic of *Gravity's Rainbow*, if there is indeed an historical process, it is less that described by Hegel, an unfolding realisation of reason in the world, than it is a Nietzschean conception of history; an ongoing and often

brutal struggle, a manifestation of the "will-to-power". The unfolding path of history is therefore not so much characterised by the appearance of reason as it is by *unreason*, of a humanity which fails time and again to create those long-hoped-for utopias and, like the angel imagined by Benjamin, is hurled headlong into an increasingly disastrous future as one apocalyptic event begets another. The disappointments of history then necessitate further apocalyptic narratives of expectation, of utopias and eschatological millennial narratives, the likes of which will become a recurring theme throughout the next three chapters of this thesis.

Chapter Two

"The complete and final version": History and Eschatology in Graham Swift's
Waterland

> …a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence
> that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the
> future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward…
> (260)
> -Walter Benjamin *Illuminations*

> We always want a conclusion, an *end*, we always want to come, in our mental
> processes, to a decision, to a finality, a full-stop. (93)
> -D H Lawrence *Apocalypse*

The logical place to begin a discussion of Graham Swift's *Waterland* (1983) would be at the end of the novel when, following Dick Crick's plunge into the River Ouse, the captain of the dredger says "Someone best explain" (310). The need for an explanation would take us back to the beginning of the novel, thereby completing the circularity of Tom Crick's narrative which frustrates any sense of beginnings and endings, despite his apocalyptic pronouncement to his students that he wishes to give them "the complete and final version" (6). It is the very impossibility of endings – most importantly, the end of history – which is *Waterland's* defining feature and central message. Like *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Waterland* takes in a large sweep of history so as to interrogate apocalyptic narratives, namely those of an eschatological nature which hypothesise historical conclusions. In the course of this chapter, I will argue for a reading of *Waterland* which discredits apocalyptic and eschatological thinking, and the imagined end of history scenario which Price and others endorse.

It would be useful for a moment to consider *Waterland's* historical context so as to understand some of the themes addressed in the novel. Although history is the major concern of *Waterland*, its subject matter necessarily reflects contemporary societal anxieties which its narrator, Tom Crick, and his anxious student, Price, respond to. Published in 1983 but ostensibly set in 1980, the novel has as its background ascendant Thatcherism, the Cold War, and the United States' burgeoning

Star Wars missile defence programme, as well as other headline-capturing events such as the ongoing war in Afghanistan and the Teheran hostage crisis. It is the nuclear arms race and the prospect of a thermo-nuclear war which most arrests Price's attention. Price, who like many people of his own age is principally concerned with the present moment, the "here and now", challenges the worth of studying the French Revolution by proclaiming that "The only important thing about history, I think, sir, is that it's probably got to the point where it's about to end" (6). Price's statement, impetuous as it might appear to be on the surface, is of course loaded with a greater significance when we learn that Tom Crick's career as a history teacher is finished, along with his subject, history having run afoul of Thatcherite educational policies. This is realised in the remarks of the school principal, Lewis, who informs Crick that "We're cutting back on history" (4, 18, 21). To compound matters, Crick's wife has recently been committed to a mental asylum after abducting a child from a local supermarket, thus making his position as a teacher untenable. Crick's response to these present crises is to partially scrap the assigned curriculum so as to embark upon the telling of his personal history which he uses to illustrate the endlessness or open-endedness of history, thus denying the apocalyptic tenor of his (and Price's) current predicament.

In its attention to history and the nature of historical narrative, *Waterland* might well be assigned the category of "historiographic meta-fiction", a term used by Linda Hutcheon to describe those novels which through their interrogation of history are "intensely self-reflexive" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 5) and prevent historical narratives from being "conclusive and teleological" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 110). Hutcheon suggests that such a novel necessarily

… refutes the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their claim to truth from that identity. (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 93)

Through its engagement with historiography, and by articulating an apocalyptic sense of crisis occasioned by the spectre of nuclear war, *Waterland* sets up the dialectical argument between teacher and student over the matter of whether or not history might

come to an end. Despite the apocalyptic nature of their shared circumstances, it will be Crick's parting legacy to emphasise history's inevitable continuation as opposed to its imminent conclusion.

Waterland, like *Gravity's Rainbow*, is a novel situated inside postmodernity and specifically engages with that sense of apocalyptic crisis as theorised by Patricia Waugh. Unlike Pynchon's novel, however, *Waterland* has a central character and narrator who shows a self-conscious awareness of what it means to live within the postmodern. Indeed, as a good postmodern subject Tom Crick demonstrates an unmistakeable "incredulity" towards meta-narratives of any kind to the extent that he dispenses with the set history curriculum, thereby offering a challenge to orthodox methods of teaching history and to the very idea of "history" itself. More specifically, his personal narrative is aimed at defeating apocalyptic narratives which proclaim or theorise a "complete and final version".

The first way in which Crick denies the apocalyptic and the eschatological is through his favouring the *petit recit* over the *meta recit* (the totalising "meta-" or "grand" narrative) which has traditionally given to history a direction, meaning and value. Crick sets out to discredit traditional ideas of historicism, as engendered by the *meta recit*, by reflecting upon the "*h*istories" of his paternal and maternal ancestors, and their relationship to local and national "*H*istory." In doing so, he emphasises history's continuity and its multiple narrative strands:

> Consider your seventeen-year-old history teacher, who, while the struggle for Europe reaches its frantic culmination, while we break through in France and the Russians race for Berlin, spares little thought for these Big Events … and immerses himself instead in research work of a recondite and obsessive kind: the progress of land-reclamation (and of brewing) in the eastern Fens, the proceedings of the Leem Navigation and Drainage Board, the history, culled from living memory and from records both public and intensely private, of the Crick and Atkinson families. (169)

Crick's narrative here necessarily reminds the reader of the wide and varied nature of historical narratives and how one commanding meta-narrative can never offer a satisfactorily comprehensive account of the past. While far from rejecting history as a worthy endeavour – indeed, he desperately affirms its value as a disciplinary field – it

is Crick's desire to impress upon his students its inherent limitations and so reminds us, and here I quote Hayden White, that "historical narrative is thus necessarily a mixture of adequately and inadequately explained events" (White 51). Crick advocates the study of history on a more modest scale as opposed to the sweeping and generalising meta-narrative with its supposed claim to be the absolute truth or the "complete and final version". In doing so, he highlights the importance of histories, plural, and draws us away from the sort of objective history which, according to Michel Foucault, "aims at dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity – as a theological movement or natural process" (Foucault, *Genealogy* 88) with "a necessary belief in providence, final causes and teleology" (Foucault, *Genealogy* 92). Crick's incredulity towards the meta-narrative, with its implied emphasis on teleology and linearity, and its claim to be the official version of events, is evident in the following passage:

> Our troops were pushing hard, *so we were told*, in Sicily; the Russians, also, were pushing … But except for the Lancasters and B-24s which favoured for their roosts the flat and strategic country of East Anglia, no hint of Universal strife reached us in our Fenland backwater. (24, my italics)

The first sentence of this passage reflects Crick's manner of questioning the commonly accepted point of view which is propagated via the commanding meta-narrative. The second sentence points to the deeply subjective nature of historical narrative and suggests that there are always many versions of history and never just one. History, for which Crick continually expresses both love and ambivalence, is always an account that purports to be "the complete and final version", the kind of totalising and eschatological narrative that Crick distrusts: "I present to you History, the fabrication, the diversion, the reality-obscuring drama" (34).

Although Crick emphasises the importance of studying history with its "longing for presence, for feature, for purpose, for content" (34-5) he, like Friedrich Nietzsche before him, denies any claims to absolute truth, suggesting at various times that historical narrative is merely "story-telling", a "yarn", a "bedtime story" and a "fairytale", and reminds us of the unreliability of historical sources: "time blurs details" (30). Any narrative is therefore rendered suspect, not least the apocalyptic narrative(s) which Crick's ancestors and his students have been seduced by. As Crick

explains, apocalyptic or eschatological narratives are just one more attempt to fill historical time with the metaphysics of meaning and presence, a yearning which he understands and sympathises with: "And can I deny that what I wanted all along was not some golden nugget that history would at last yield up, but History itself, the Grand Narrative, the filler of vacuums, the dispeller of fears in the dark?" (53). The more one presses for historical truth and "the complete and final version", the more apparent it becomes that no such version exists, and, as Crick himself would no doubt agree, history comes down to us not as the word of God shining resplendently with the light of metaphysical "truth", but instead from the numerous and unreliable narratives constructed by humanity. This denial of history's claim to truth, so often attributed to a particular kind of postmodern relativist position, was first put forward by Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886):

> As happened lately in all the clarity of modern times with the French Revolution, that gruesome and, closely considered, superfluous farce, into which, however, noble and enthusiastic spectators all over Europe interpreted from a distance their own indignations and raptures so long and so passionately that the text disappeared beneath the interpretation: so a noble posterity could once again misunderstand the entire past and only thus make the sight of it endurable. (Nietzsche, *Beyond* 67-8).

Nietzsche here emphasises in clever fashion not only the interpretive nature of history, but also the deeply subjective and predetermined position of the student of history. (One need only think of a text such as Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* to see such political bias at work in the study of history.) History therefore must be seen as being what people *want it to be*; history, in short, becomes an ideological tool with which to construct a suitable mythology of the present. Linda Hutcheon proceeds from Nietzsche's position in emphasising the highly textual nature of history: "We cannot know the past except through its texts: its documents, its evidence, even its eye witness accounts are *texts*" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 16). Such a position, which Crick's own view of the study of history accords with, necessarily denies that there can ever be one "complete and final version" and as such deconstructs the apocalyptic meta-narrative which, after all, is just another text.

It is Crick's maternal ancestors, the Atkinsons, who come to embody ideas of historical direction and meaning as imagined by the Hegelian historicism of their time. The Atkinsons, farmers, dredgers, and then brewers, become deeply invested in ideas of historical direction, namely the idea of progress, so that Crick is forced to wonder, "Why has the spread of merriment been transformed into the Idea of Progress? And why has land reclamation in the eastern Fens become confused with the Empire of Great Britain?" (81). In pondering these questions, Crick offers a tentative answer, which once again highlights the artificiality of historical narrative and the desire to impose meaning onto the processes of history: "Because if you construct a stage you must put on a show" (81). Crick says of the Atkinsons that "what moves them is indeed none other than that noble and impersonal Idea of Progress" (80), but is quick to point out that the fortunes of the Atkinson family, which would appear to be so inextricably linked to ideas of Empire, enter into terminal decline at the end of the nineteenth century. Crick addresses his ancestor, Arthur Atkinson, the quintessential Empire-builder, as he considers the ongoing decline of Great Britain: "Does he see that the fate of the future … will be only to lament and wearily explain the loss of his confident sentiments?" (81).

The decline and fall of the Atkinson family empire, which has its beginnings in the late nineteenth century and reaches its inexorable nadir with the approach of the First World War, is fully realised when Earnest Atkinson's apocalyptic fantasies lead him to father a "saviour of the world" with his daughter, Helen. Earnest's delusional ideas, which mirror those of Crick's wife and, to a lesser extent, the terrified Price, is the final expression of the Atkinsons' desire to impose meaning upon history; in short, the Atkinson investment in the grand narrative simply fails to pay off. Instead of providing a curative to the ills of his own apocalyptic epoch, Earnest's misplaced efforts to father a saviour of the world has the reverse effect and results in the birth of Tom's older brother, Dick, a "potato head" who will come to represent not only a biological and genealogical dead-end, but will also contribute to the later crisis which results in the death of Freddie Parr. Dick, Earnest's mentally defective progeny, thus symbolises humanity's failed attempts to (re)direct history towards utopian ends; as Damon Marcel Decoste notes, Dick "represents both the redemptive goal of the Atkinson narrative of Progress and the apocalyptic conclusion of this narrative in a return to the meaninglessness of the real" (Decoste 392). History is therefore revealed to be less a reflection of rational and meaningful processes than it is a random,

chaotic, and ultimately destructive series of events. Furthermore, human efforts to "transform" history are, in the end, hubristic and futile.

The desire to impose meaning on history is thus the Atkinson family curse, described by Catherine Bernard as their "harmatia, their fatal flaw" (Bernard 136). As suggested by his initials E.R.A, Earnest Atkinson completes the final chapter of the history of the Atkinson Empire, and, as his grandson Tom Crick points out, he has committed the grave *error* of assuming that history would reveal meaning, content, purpose or form. Any narrative which assumes that history has a purposeful direction or meaning is anathema to Crick, who says

> It cannot be denied, children, that the great so-called forward movements of civilisation, whether moral or technological, have invariably brought with them an accompanying regression. That the dissemination of Christian tenets over a supposedly barbarous world has been throughout the history of Europe – to say nothing of missionary zeal elsewhere – one of the prime causes of wars, butcheries, inquisitions and other forms of barbarity.
>
> … And as for the splitting of the atom – (117-8)

In the knowledge that progress is a highly questionable concept, and that we must exercise a precautionary principle in our desire to shape the future, Crick is forced to conclude that

> … history is that impossible thing: the attempt to give an account with incomplete knowledge, of actions themselves undertaken with incomplete knowledge. So that it teaches us no shortcuts to Salvation, no recipe for a New World, only the dogged and patient art of making do. (94)

Indeed, there is never a "complete and final version", a version to end all others, but only "incomplete knowledge", loose ends, further questions. Earnest Atkinson's "earnest" efforts to understand history, and to shape it towards utopian ends, reveals the inherent lack of teleology inside history and the poverty of the apocalyptic-utopian meta-narrative.

Crick's postmodern approach to history reflects a certain pessimistic acknowledgement that despite our best efforts to dissuade others from the temptations

of the meta-narrative and the "complete and final version", it is nonetheless difficult to dispel the timeless striving after meaning and with it, the utopian fantasies that so seduced his Atkinson forebears. Tom Crick indicts the very concept of utopia and its assumption that history will arrive at some final satisfactory conclusion, the eschatological claim to truth which so many belief systems and ideologies promise. So it is that Crick holds up the French Revolution as yet another example of human folly and disaster in its attempt to see history as a neatly progressing narrative which gives to history a direction and a conclusion: "Do not fall into the illusion that history is a well disciplined and unflagging column marching unswervingly into the future" (117). Despairing of the human need to assign meaning to history, Crick discusses the apocalyptic events of the Great Terror and the ensuing chaos before Napoleon ascended to the throne:

> When the children of the French Revolution threw off their tyrannical father Louis XVI and their wicked stepmother Marie Antionette … they thought they were free. But after a while they discovered that they were orphans, and the world which they thought was theirs was really bare and comfortless. So they went running to their foster-father, Napoleon Bonaparte, who was waiting by the old puppet theatre; who'd dreamed up for them a new drama based on old themes and who promised them an empire, a purpose, a destiny – a future" (290-1).

Crick emphasises how one grand narrative, once destroyed, is replaced with another. John Gray suggests that the narratives of early modernity persisted in a teleological view of history and so was the will of God replaced with notions of *geist* or "world-spirit":

> The philosophers of the Enlightenment aimed to supplant Christianity, but they could do so only if they were able to satisfy the hopes it implanted. As a result they could not admit -- what pre-Christian thinkers took for granted -- that history has no overall meaning. (Gray 23-4)

This idea, that history is essentially meaningless and without direction, is the overarching theme and lesson of Crick's classroom narrative, but he nonetheless emphasises just how deeply we are wedded to apocalyptic and eschatological ways of

thinking. Many ideologies and historical narratives, whether they be religious, secular, or otherwise, are therefore prone to millennial and eschatological fantasies and in doing so hold an imaginary claim to historical laws or truths. John R Hall rightly suggests that "Revolution and terror, war, colonialism, and empire – all seemingly secular phenomena – are potentially infused with apocalyptic dimensions" (Hall 133). In using the French Revolution and the history of the Atkinson family as historical models, Crick demonstrates how the apocalyptic narrative is repeatedly (re)imagined by various peoples for many different reasons, each age promising the "complete and final version" which will supposedly explain all and act as a final curative to the ills of history.

It is Price, obsessed with the spectre of nuclear war and the imagined end of the world, who continues the sort of millennial thinking which afflicted Crick's grandfather. Like all millennial views of history, of which the French Revolution was only a secularised version, Earnest's apocalyptic thinking assumed the closure of one historical epoch and the imminent entry into another utopian one. Price's apocalyptic thinking, however, would appear to be grounded in a negative theology which imagines endings without an attendant utopia. In response to Price's gloomy apocalyptic predictions, Crick attempts to convince him that eschatological narratives are always human constructs, "Which only goes to show that if the end of the world didn't exist it would be necessary to invent it" (291), and as such are re-imagined time and again:

> In 1946 I had a vision of the world in ruins. (And my wife-to-be, for all I knew, was having visions, too – but let's not get into that). And now here you are, Price, in 1980 with your skull face and your Holocaust Club, saying that the world may not have much longer – and you're not much younger than I was then. (207)

As someone who was young once and who also had a "vision of the world in ruins", Crick is sympathetic to the concerns Price has about endings, but says, "Yes, the end of the world's on the cards again – maybe this time it's for real. But the feeling's not new" (232). He reminds his students of how the apocalypse is re-imagined throughout the ages, and that our age always seems to be the last:

> In 1793 the Apocalypse came to Paris (just a few thousand heads); in 1917 it came to the swamps of Flanders. But in August, 1943…it came in the form detonating goose eggs to Hamburg, Nuremberg and Berlin … (259)

The totalising apocalyptic meta-narrative is therefore reduced to a personal narrative of existential crisis and doubt which is repeated throughout human history. According to Crick's logic, the apocalyptic narrative arises out of existential fear and doubt, and as such is not unique to our own time. It is a reflection of the individual's confrontation with the chaos of history, and our inability to comprehend cataclysmic events. In this way, Frank Kermode suggests that "Apocalypse is a part of the modern Absurd" (Kermode, *Sense* 123), having its origins in "existential anxiety" (Kermode, *Waiting* 254). Once again, Crick admits to a certain resigned pessimism and shows a reluctance to engage in any assumptions regarding historical direction or progress; to the contrary, Crick declares, in the language of Hesiod and Spengler, "That history is the record of decline" (122) and asks "Why is it that history so often demands a bloodbath, a holocaust, an Armageddon?" (123). Crick, invoking the spirit of Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, displays a bewildered pessimism:

> Every so often, there are these attempts to jettison the impedimentia of history, to do without that ever-frustrating weight. And because history accumulates, because it always gets heavier and the frustration greater, so the attempts to throw it off (in order to go – which way was it?) become more violent and drastic. Which is why history undergoes periodic convulsions and why, as history becomes inevitably more massive, more pressing, and hard to support, man – who even without his loads doesn't know where he's heading- finds himself involved in bigger and bigger catastrophes. (119)

Not for Crick, then, Hegel's "cunning of reason", in which dialectical processes of thesis and antithesis supposedly play off against each other so as to create a "synthesis" or historical progression; rather, what Hegel called the "slaughter bench of history" must simply be that, a series of pointless disasters inflicted upon humanity. One revolution necessarily begets another, and so the process continues, to no apparent purpose. In an essay entitled '*Nietzsche, Genealogy and History*' Michel Foucault says "Humanity does not gradually progress from combat to combat until it arrives at universal reciprocity, where the rule of law finally replaces warfare;

humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination" (Foucault, *Genealogy* 85). If in Crick's view history only teaches us the "dogged and persistent art of making do", then we cannot hope for much from the future, least of all the fanciful notion that it will somehow improve or reach a satisfactory "conclusion". (Neo-conservative political theorists such as Francis Fukuyama, it could be said, come dangerously close to assuming that a secular eschatology based upon a universal political consensus might be upon the horizon). According to Crick, the best we can hope for is a way of mitigating history's inevitable disasters and in doing so reject those "quick-fix" remedies which the desperate grasp after. In keeping with the Fenland imagery of the novel, we should perhaps view his lessons as a stop-bank which will hold back the flood of apocalyptic or messianic zeal expressed by the likes of Price and Earnest Atkinson. As if to highlight his own historical agnosticism, Crick then suggests, in very Nietzschean terms, that history is a "lucky dip of meanings. Events elude meaning, but we look for meanings. Another definition of man: the animal who craves meaning – but knows …" (122).

In this way Andrzej Gasiorek rightly suggests that Crick's anti-teleological view of history, likely modelled on that of Greek thinkers such as Polybius and Heraclitus, "leads him to satirise all notions of past arcadia or future utopia" (Gasiorek 152). In Crick's view humanity is condemned to an eternal, Sisyphean struggle in which there is no historical progress towards utopia and the thin veneer of "civilisation" is constantly in danger of peeling away. Gasiorek points to Crick's insistence on a "perpetual conflict between innate human nature and the artifice of society" (Gasiorek 154), and as Crick himself says

> Children, there's this thing called civilisation. It's built of hopes and dreams. It's only an idea. It's not real. It's artificial. No one ever said it was real. It's not natural, no one ever said it was natural. It's built by the learning process; by trial and error. It breaks easily. No one ever said it couldn't fall to bits. And no one said it would last forever. (291)

Scratch the surface, Crick suggests, and civilisation is always something rather less than what it claims to be. For Crick, civilisation is perhaps just one more meta-narrative which imagines that history has somehow arrived; the revolution and the

guillotine would, however, suggest otherwise. Perhaps Crick had the revolutionary martyr Condorcet in mind, who, in one of the great ironies of history, went to the guillotine professing the righteousness of French Revolution. Condorcet and those countless others who have been sacrificed to history's great "slaughter bench" embody the betrayal of those meta-narratives which modernity constructed. For the likes of Crick, there is something inevitable about the journey between the guillotine and Auschwitz, but the lesson is that humans rarely, if ever, "learn their lesson". Crick's Lyotardian incredulity is tempered by Price's naïve assumption that history can once again be forced to face up to its responsibilities and reach a teleological conclusion, and John Schad rightly suggests that Price "represents ghostly … deconstructed traces of both revolutionary and sacred narratives" (Schad 922). Crick, however, dismisses Price's position and sees in it a persistence of those apocalyptic and utopian energies which were expended throughout the course of (post)modernity:

> Ah, the idols and icons of history, ah, the emblems and totems of yesterday. How when we knock one down, another rises in its place. How we can't get away from – even if you can, Price – from our fairytales. (155)

For Crick, historical truth, like the idea of historical completion, is a mirage which disappears from sight as one approaches it. In impressing upon his students that history is something that is artificially constructed, and that time is subject to meaningless reversals, cycles and repetitions, Crick seeks to awaken Price from his apocalyptic and eschatological fantasies.

Along with the French Revolution, Crick uses the Fenlands as another historical model for his anti-teleological and cyclical theory of history, in particular silt – "which shapes and undermines continents; which demolishes as it builds; which is simultaneous accretion and erosion; neither progress nor decay" (7) – as well as the floods which throughout history have periodically deluged the region. Resigned to this inevitable process, Crick says "We have to keep scoop, scooping up from the depths this remorseless stuff that time leaves behind" (299). Just as Crick believes that "Whatever moves forward will also move back" (63), he sympathises with the idea of return and the retrieval of what is *imagined* to have been lost: the golden age, arcadia, and so on. Silt is his metaphor for recurrence and repetition, which he believes to be a

natural law in the affairs of humankind: "Whatever moves forwards will also move back … it is a Law of the natural world; and a law, too, of the human heart" (63).

Throughout Crick's narrative nature is assigned the a-temporal and mythical qualities traditionally associated with the pastoral, as opposed to the artificially constructed diachronic time of civilisation and human history. In stressing the subjectivity of time and the mythical versus the temporal there are parallels with D H Lawrence, and in *Lady Chatterly's Lover* (1928) Connie comes to sense something of the mythical and a-temporal nature of the woods:

> From the old wood came ancient melancholy, somehow soothing to her, better than the harsh insentience of the outer world. She liked the inwardness of the remnant forest, the unspeaking reticence of the old trees. They seemed a very power of silence, and yet a vital presence. They, too, were waiting: obstinately, stoically, waiting, giving off a potency of silence. Perhaps they were only waiting for the end; to be cut down, cleared away, the end of the forest, for them the end of all things. But perhaps their strong and aristocratic silence, the silence of strong trees, meant something else. (68)

Lawrence here contrasts the potent vitalism of nature and the organic, with its associations of Dionysian fertility and renewal, against the apocalyptic decay of the human world, of which her husband, Clifford, is both a victim and yet one its strongest proponents. The collision of the natural and organic with the artificial and historical assumes for Lawrence an apocalyptic dimension and as Connie imagines:

> This is history. One England blocks out another. The mines had made the halls wealthy. Now they were blotting them out, as they had already blotted out the cottages. The industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One meaning blots out another. The new England blots out the old England. And the continuity is not organic, but mechanical. (163)

A similar process occurs in Crick's Fenlands in the supplanting of the primitive way of life of the Cricks by the modernising and capitalist-minded Atkinsons. In the course of several decades the Atkinsons transform the Fenlands through industry and the construction of canals. However, as Crick mindfully points out, efforts to tame the Fenlands throughout history were frequently thwarted and floods continued to inundate the region. Unlike the Crick's, who were "water people" and who "belonged

to the Old Prehistoric flood" (13), the Atkinsons sought to tame and conquer the Fenlands so as to bring it within the orbit of rational order and "progress". According to the logic of the Atkinson family, improving the land was synonymous with the idea of progress and the idea of progress was what supposedly gave history its direction and meaning. In this way the Fenlands were absorbed into the world of modernity, into chronological and directional time, yet the return of the floods in recurring cycles is a reminder not only of the sublime power of nature, but perhaps more importantly, it points to the fragility of that grand narrative known as progress. Crick reminds his audience of how easily the grand narrative is at once both artificially constructed and, at a stroke, *deconstructed.*

Crick extends the idea of the artificiality of history through his meditation on the life cycle of the European eel, *Anguilla Anguilla*. This animal becomes a totemic symbol inside Crick's personal history, as well as a metaphor for his wider narrative project. The eel comes to symbolise return, as well as the often mysterious and unknowable nature of history. Crick here reminds us of the continuation of history despite its numerous apocalyptic upheavals such as the Second World War:

> And yet it must be said that this catastrophic interval, to which such dread words as apocalypse, cataclysm, Armageddon have not been unjustly applied, does not interrupt the life cycle of the eel. In the Spring the elvers still congregate in their millions at the mouth of the Po, the Danube, the Rhine and the Elbe, just as they did in Alexander's day and Charlemagne's. (174)

To Crick's mind, the mysterious nature of the eel also comes to symbolise the larger metaphysical desire for presence and lost origins, for that elusive and slippery historical truth which we imagine resides somewhere in the past, if only we could find it.

Crick is fond of reminding his students that we, all of us, are constantly returning to our past, and his own narrative repeatedly addresses past events. Like the eel who returns to its ancient breeding grounds, in our memory we repeatedly make the journey backwards in an attempt to comprehend our present situation. In this manner, David Malcolm rightly points out that throughout *Waterland* "The past is forever returning - seizing, and affecting the present" (Malcolm 88), either through story-telling, personal narrative, or through the recurrence of floods. This also accords

with E H Carr's definition of history as a "continual process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past" (Carr 30) and Crick's narrative is largely based within and around the traumatic events of his childhood. Historia (inquiry), story-telling, and mythology thus signal a repeated irruption of the past into the present, and vice-versa. Crick thusly ponders the repetitive and cyclical nature of history as if it were less a directional phenomenon and more a static one: "How it repeats itself, how it goes back on itself, no matter how we try to straighten it out. How it twists, turns. How it goes in circles and brings us back to the same place" (123).

     The fact that we cannot ever hope to escape the past is a fact which Crick bases on his own personal tragic experiences and those of his family. Crick stresses the eternal recurrence of past experience: "And that remark first put about, two and a half thousand years ago, by Heraclitus of Ephesus, that we cannot step twice into the same river, is not to be trusted" (127). In recounting the grisly episode in which Mary Metcalfe has an abortion performed on her at the cottage of Martha Clay, Crick asks of his students the strangely rhetorical question:

> Children, have you ever stepped into another world? Have you ever turned a corner where now and long ago are the same and time seems to stand still? (262)

This attests to Crick's conviction that we are historical creatures who live as much in the past as in the present, the "here and now" that Price is so obsessed with. In short, we can never hope to escape from that chaotic and destructive process known as history. Crick demonstrates to Price how history, a seemingly meaningless chain of events, goes into making up our own present, as well as our own identities as human beings. Indeed, the destruction of the binary opposites of past/present, truth/fiction, history/story goes into forming Crick's theory of history:

> We are one-tenth living tissue, nine-tenths water; life is one-tenth Here and Now, nine-tenths a history lesson. For most of the time the Here and Now is neither now nor here. (52)

Crick's boyhood crises in which Mary becomes pregnant and Freddie Parr is murdered by his brother Dick reminds us that history is made in the meaningless

"real" of the present; we are, thus, historical subjects, inextricably bound to its chaotic and unpredictable progress through time. History, like mythology, therefore takes on a sort of immanence and as Crick explains:

> My earliest acquaintance with history was thus, in a form issuing from my mother's lips, inseparable from her other bedtime make believe – how Canute commanded the waves, how King Charles hid in an oak tree – as if history were a pleasing invention. And even as a schoolboy, when introduced to history as an object of Study, when nursing indeed an unfledged lifetime's passion, it was still the fabulous aura of history that lured me, and I believed, perhaps like you, that history was a myth. Until a series of encounters with the Here and Now gave a sudden urgency to my studies. Until the Here and Now, gripping me by the arm, slapping my face and telling me to take a good look at the mess I was in, informed me that history was no invention but indeed existed – and I had become a part of it. (53)

As Crick suggests, there are times when the past will suddenly rush in to fill up the present, just as history, a "thin garment", is "easily punctured by the knife blade called Now" (31). The human subject, then, situated in the present and caught between the competing poles of past and future, must inevitably come to feel the enormity of the past and the uncertainty of the future bearing down upon his/her present situation. Frank Kermode suggests that "… we are always somehow ready for the end, and for a beginning; we instantly identify our moment as transitional" (Kermode, *Waiting* 259), and so does Crick's lesson teach us that apocalyptic thinking arises from just such a sense of our always being situated between the traumatic events of the past and a deeply uncertain future.

The Fenlands, which for Crick are "A fairytale land"(16), and a "magical, a miraculous land" (101), thus signify a space which is neither simply past nor present, being instead a site of story-telling, mythology and eternal recurrence, which precludes endings, that is to say the "complete and final version". Like many of the characters in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Crick's bewildering and traumatic personal experiences have shattered many of his ontological and epistemological coordinates, but it is the Fenlands to which he continually returns in an attempt to comprehend his present difficulties. The unreliability of the stories which have been handed down to

Crick, and which he passes on to his students, further complicates the idea of history itself and of conclusive or satisfactory explanations. In this manner, Crick once again deconstructs the very idea of historical narrative:

> Children, you are right. There are times when we have to disentangle history from fairy-tale. There are times (they come round really quite often) when good, dry, textbook history takes a plunge in the old swamps of myth and has to be retrieved with empirical fishing lines. History, being an accredited sub-science, only wants to know the facts. History, if it is keep on constructing its road into the future, must do so on solid ground. At all costs let us avoid mystery-making and speculation, secrets and idle gossip. And, for God's sake, nothing supernatural. And, above all, let us not tell *stories*. Otherwise, how will the future be possible and we will anything *get done*? So let us get back to that clear and purified air and old Tom tucked up in his new white grave. Let us get back to solid ground … (74)

The Fenlands, just as they thwart human "progress" and development through flooding and siltation, likewise thwart understanding and so present unsolvable problems for the historian. Crick emphasises the point that we are never really on "solid ground" when it comes to historical narrative, as the irony in the above passage makes abundantly clear. Crick suggests that some things can never be fully explained and that there is no point at which we can seize upon the origins of history or mythology, that "golden nugget" which we imagine lies buried beneath the sediment of time.

An example of this is the story of Sarah Atkinson, who, after losing her mind, was purported to have haunted the Fenlands after diving into the River Ouse, "… like a very mermaid beneath the water never to surface again" (90). Crick ironically discounts the story as folk legend: "Ah Fenland superstition. The dead are dead aren't they? The past is done with isn't it?" (245) However, this myth returns to haunt the Crick family when, a century later, Dick Crick effects a similar disappearance. If, as Roland Barthes suggests, "myth transforms history into nature" (Barthes, *Mythologies* 140), then we see in Crick's narrative an immanence associated with mythology in the way in which stories reappear and return to the "real", to the "Here and Now", and in doing so become a body of (incomplete) knowledge. Precisely because no satisfactory resolution occurs in Crick's narrative (Dick's body is never found), the opposition

between myth and historical fact breaks down and history becomes here Crick's own oral account of the episode, transforming it into the same kind of myth associated with the disappearance of Sarah Atkinson. Crick's recounting of Dick's disappearance emphasises the various strands of oral and written histories which go into making historical narrative and highlights the near impossibility of "disentangling history from fairy-tale". In this manner eschatological narratives and the apocalypse, which, according to Kermode "depends upon a concord of imaginatively recorded past and imaginatively predicted future" (Kermode, *Sense* 8), achieves the sort of recurring immanence associated with those other mythologies which Crick describes. For Crick, the apocalypse, if never actually arriving, in being a part of our collective mythology is always somehow anticipated:

> Once upon a time people believed in the end of the world. Look in the old books: see how many times and on how many pretexts the end of the world has been prophesised and foreseen, calculated and imagined. But that, of course, was superstition. The world grew up. It didn't end … But then the end of the world came back again, not as an idea or belief but as something the world had manufactured for itself all the time it was growing up. (291)

Crick, as a good postmodernist, therefore points to both the constructed and unreliable nature of history and historical narrative, and of the blurring between the various strands that go into making up history: myth, story-telling and personal experience. Linda Hutcheon suggests that "One of the lessons of the doubleness of postmodernism is that you cannot step outside that which you contest, that you are always implicated in the value you *choose* to challenge" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 223), and so is Crick aware of how his own narrative is grounded in subjectivity and so cannot ever hope to be the "complete and final version". The frequent lacunae in Crick's narrative, the stoppages, rhetorical questions, ironic reversals, to say nothing of its unresolved ending, serves to highlight the sort of speculation that is both unavoidable and necessary in the study of history, and all of which deny any sense of closure or eschatology.

Frank Kermode's suggestion that apocalyptic fear stems from existential anxiety accords with Crick's narrative, which is largely grounded in tragedy and

trauma, past and present. Crick constantly returns to those experiences in the Fenlands which have inflicted trauma on the people around him, perhaps the most important of these being Mary's mental deterioration which he sees as being linked to the episode of the abortion. Like Sarah Atkinson, whose personality was extinguished by a blow on the head inflicted by her husband, Mary is likewise imprisoned in a teleological dead end, in the empty space of the present, robbed of her past and her future, as well as her capacity to bear children. In this way both women become "empty vessels", emblematic of history's lack of purpose, (meta-physical) presence, and its inherent meaninglessness. Pamela Cooper rightly remarks that "Here the myth of the woman's body as the ground of origins and site of emergence is eradicated: the novel dramatises neither birth nor death but abortion – the disruption of the teleological narrative of beginnings and endings, the biological fable of centred structure" (Cooper 390). It also signals the sense of an apocalyptic ending of an era or a paradise lost, as remembered by the young Crick after learning that Mary is pregnant:

> But we lay there, waiting, that golden August evening, as if it was the last place on earth. Because that's what I thought, despite wheat fields and poppies and cornflower heavens: everything's coming to an end (256).

Tom and Mary's fall from the Eden of innocence marks the beginning of their later long, inexorable decline towards the unhappy circumstances of their adult lives. Mary's inability to conceive and her empty womb both signify the sort of blank, uncomprehending despair which lies at the heart of Crick's narrative. Crick, faced with the prospect of a deranged wife, who, like Earnest Atkinson, has "caught ideas", shows us how the destructive events of history lead us to a meaningless and apocalyptic present.

In continuing the theme of birth and sterility, Tom reminds us that "history begins only at the point where things go wrong; history is *born* only with trouble, with perplexity, with regret". (92, my italics) In *Waterland*, this is highlighted by the bodily mutilations and deformities which symbolise the accidents, mistakes and tragic circumstances of history. According to Foucault, "The body manifests the stigmata of past experience and also gives rise to desires, failings errors" and is "the inscribed surface of events" (Foucault, *Geneaology* 83), and so the bodies of Dick Crick, Mary Metcalfe, and Freddie Parr, as well as the executed monarch of Crick's classroom

narrative, Louis XVI, all carry the scars of history. Even Crick sees himself as someone who has, albeit metaphorically, blood on his hands, and must somehow, perhaps through story-telling, imagine that he can construct a coherent narrative out of the meaningless chaos of history:

> And we know that little Tom, whose initiative in this whole affair is so conspicuous by its absence, did. He watched; weighed evidence. Put facts together. Saw a new bruise on an old bruise. Fished a bottle – Ah yes, he's hooked now, it's got serious, this historical method, this explanation-hunting. It's a way of getting at the truth – or, as you would have it, Price, a way of coming up with just another story, a way of dodging reality. (227)

It is the desire to avoid reality which Crick imagines contributes to the "myth" of historical narrative, with its imagined meaning and direction, and its fantasy of utopian endings. In this way he believes that we have an overwhelming desire to see history as meaning something, going somewhere, and having a satisfactory conclusion. Yet Crick himself suggests that his study of history is simply a retreat into story-telling and a way of avoiding present realities and anxieties. Reflecting upon the imminent demise of his teaching career and his beloved subject, Crick wearily reflects upon his role as a teacher:

> … And thus the history teacher – though his relation with his young charges echoes first the paternal, then the grand-paternal, though he sees in their faces … less and less the image of the future, more and more that of something he is trying to retrieve, something he has lost – could always say … that he looked back in order to go forward. (109-10)

To Crick's way of thinking, our present circumstances are always, somehow, a product of past events; indeed, we are always compelled to look backwards in order to "explain". The lesson of *Waterland* is, however, that "explanations" can never hope to be the whole story, and can never be "the complete and final version".

Crick's biggest fear is that history as a subject will be scrapped and that the pleasures of history – its stories, mysteries and myths – will be lost. It is therefore an apocalypse of the human imagination which Crick dreads most: "… when curiosity is

exhausted … that is when the world shall have come to its end" (176). Such is his appeal to the school master, Lewis, that history should be saved from the market-driven narratives of Thatcherite rationalisation. Crick's heartfelt and subjective plea is that history should be saved from the present:

> But hold on Lewis. Cutting back history? Cutting history? If you're going to sack me, then sack *me*, don't dismiss what I stand for. Don't banish my history … (18).

His parting message to his students is that they should hold onto that subversive question, "Why?", which always defeats the "complete and final version":

> Children, don't stop asking why. Don't cease your Why Sir? Why Sir? Though it gets more difficult the more you ask it, though it gets more inexplicable, more painful and the answer never seems to come any nearer, don't try to escape this question Why. (113)

In this manner, Crick's narrative teaches the return and continuation of history, despite those eternally repeated pronouncements that "it's probably about to end." History, in Crick's view, does not neatly conform to any one reading or interpretation, nor does it follow a meaningful teleological trajectory. Instead, it might be read as a catalogue of disasters but it is, ultimately, a fascinating story, or, rather, a *series of stories*, of which meta-narratives of an apocalyptic nature are revealed to be one of many. Crick's anti-historicist and anti-eschatological narrative reminds us that there is never one "complete and final version" but always several versions, none of which can ever hope to be the final one. *Waterland* therefore both questions the apocalyptic narrative while also emphasising its enduring quality, echoing Linda Hutcheon's view that the "simultaneous desire for and suspicion of such representations [unifying narrative structures] are a part of the postmodern contradictory response to emplotment" (Hutcheon, *Politics* 68). This contradictory position with regards to history and historical narrative must be seen as symptomatic of postmodernism, and certainly contributes towards that sense of crisis as theorised by Patricia Waugh. Such contested ideas of past, present and future, how it is to be written, and who will write it, provides much of the subject matter of the next chapter.

<u>Chapter Three</u>

"Terror makes the new future possible": The Millennial and the Messianic in Don DeLillo's *Mao II*

> The mind of man is capable of anything -- because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. (64)
> -Joseph Conrad *Heart of Darkness*.

> The terrorists of September 11 want to bring back the past. (34)
> -Don DeLillo *In the Ruins of the Future*

Mao II, like *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Waterland*, is a novel very much concerned with the apocalyptic crises of the postmodern epoch. While John A McClure rightly suggests that "Don DeLillo's work … repeatedly constructs contemporary Americans as a people driven by homeless spiritual impulses and mesmerised by new religious movements" (McClure 142), I would suggest that *Mao II* shows this to be not only an American phenomenon, but rather something more profoundly global. *Mao II* thus describes the (re-)emergence of apocalyptic-millennial narratives inside postmodernity, the most spectacular of these being apocalyptic terrorism. Indeed, the events of September 11 prompted DeLillo to suggest that "Today, again, the world narrative belongs to terrorists" (DeLillo, *Ruins* 33). The question of who will lay claim to the future, and how that future will be shaped, lies at the heart of the novel.

Mao II also articulates a deeper millennial urge for the return of not only the grand narratives of history and religion, but also the authentic personal narrative, the latter of which is best represented by that of the author Bill Gray and, by extension, the (unfinished) novel. In this chapter I will argue for a reading of *Mao II* which emphasises a messianic impulse among all of its actors, with a focus on the writer, who, I will suggest, is in many respects a secular messianic figure, one whose voice necessarily works against the totalising and apocalyptic grand narrative.

Mao II opens with what has become a familiar DeLillo obsession; the crowd. The novel contains three iconic crowd images, the first section being sandwiched

between a photograph of mass Moonie weddings and the deathly mayhem of the Hillsborough football disaster. A third photograph depicts a sea of bearded faces beneath the menacing portrait of Ayatollah Khomeini. Not only does the crowd seem to stand for an apocalyptic annihilation of individual consciousness and a messianic longing for a new world, in a more sinister way it is also a traditional tool with which totalitarian leaders have sought to crush individuals and dissenting voices. In one of DeLillo's previous novels, *White Noise* (1984), Jack Gladney, a lecturer in Hitler studies, is mesmerised by scenes from the Nuremburg rallies:

> Halls hung with banners, with mortuary wreaths and death's head insignia. Ranks of thousands of flag-bearers arrayed before columns of frozen light, a hundred and thirty anti-aircraft searchlights aimed straight up – a scene that resembled a geometric longing, the formal notation of some powerful mass desire. There was no narrative voice. Only chants, songs, arias, speeches, cries cheers, accusations, shrieks. (25-6)

Importantly, we are told that "There was no narrative voice", hinting at the irrationality that is unleashed by crowd consciousness. While not as terrifying perhaps as a Nuremburg rally, the crowd scenes which open *Mao II* nonetheless depict a similarly powerful "mass desire", an apocalyptic spectacle in which the individual is submerged or annihilated by some greater, collective will and a shared belief in a messianic return. As Rodge Janney (whose daughter Karen has been mass-married by the Reverend Sun Yung Moon) scans the crowd with a pair of binoculars he realises that he is no longer looking at several thousand individuals but a single "undifferentiated mass" who, in their devotion to their dear leader, are "immunised against the language of the self" (8). This crowd, who "chant for one language, for the time when names are lost" (16) are thus willing to swap their personal freedom and their identity for the debased slogans and formulas of "Master" Moon. Karen Janney and Moon's other followers have taken on a life of ascetic missionary work and theirs is an other-worldly apocalyptic narrative, a chant which leads them "out past religion and history" (15) and "brings the End Time closer" (16). We fleetingly inhabit Karen's inner consciousness as she seeks to justify her marriage and deny the cultish nature of Moon's church: "The other word is "cult". How they love to use it against us" (9). Echoing the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood Said Qutb's contempt for American culture, Karen says "They want to snatch us back to the land of lawns" (9).

This "land of lawns", indicative of suburban life, commercialism, spiritual sterility, and the (apparently) failed American dream, drives the Moonies into the arms of a messianic figure, *Mansei*, who promises spiritual redemption and an escape from such a vapid postmodern existence. So it is that we see Karen standing alongside her new husband in a replicated column of paired worshippers: "They stand and chant, fortified by the blood of numbers" (8).

DeLillo writes in the *Harpers* essay that "Ideas evolve and de-evolve and history is turned on end" (DeLillo, *Ruins* 40) suggesting a cyclical or, as Jean Baudrillard theorises, "recyclable" theory of time and history (Baudrillard, *Illusion* 27). John R Hall suggests that "the apocalyptic brings the sacred into conjuncture with history" (Hall 201) and in *Mao II* we witness the long-wished-for return of God and reconstituted millennial narratives. Moon and his followers reject the stalled or recyclable time of post-modernity, and attempt to set history back along a meaningful and teleological path. However, as David Cowart suggests, Moon's imagined utopia represents "a debased version of the West's linear and transcendental model of Apocalypse" (Cowart 120) and Karen Janney's father, Rodge, reads the Moonie weddings as a phenomenon which appropriates tradition and history and attempts to reconstitute it as sublime transcendence: "They take a time-honoured event and repeat it, repeat it, until something new enters the world" (4). Rodge, who wonders "When the old God leaves the world, what happens to all the unexpended faith?" (7) suggests that

> When the old God goes they pray to flies and bottletops. The terrible thing is that they follow the man because he gives them what they need. He answers their yearning, unburdens them of them of free will and independent thought. See how happy they look. (7)

These opening scenes thus set up much of the drama of *Mao II*, which pits the individual consciousness, and the consciousness of one writer, in particular, against the will of the crowd, the religious leader, and the terrorist.

If, then, "the future belongs to crowds" (16), or, indeed, to the omnipresent spectre of the religious leader or the terrorist, then what is the fate of the writer in such a brave new world? *Mao II* frequently hints at the possibility that the writer's time is past, already consigned to a sort of nostalgia: "There is the epic and bendable

space-time of the theoretical physicist, time detached from human experience, the pure curve of nature, and there is the haunted time of the novelist, intimate, pressing, stale and sad" (54). Bill Gray, holed up in his bunker-like house in upstate New York, has withdrawn into Salinger-esque obscurity. Despite the hopes of his literary agent, Charlie Everson, that Bill will make a return to public life, either through writing or by involving himself in a bid to free a young poet taken hostage by terrorists, Bill's Second Coming would appear to be a thing of the past, represented by the "two lean novels" (20) he published three decades earlier. Bill plays "god's own trick" (37) by hiding his face from the world and while this perpetuates his writerly mystique, it also appears to have consigned him to the position of a literary relic, mute and somewhat impotent.

   While some critics have equated Bill Gray with Don DeLillo, citing similar personal traits such as their shared disdain for media attention, DeLillo has in fact spoken admiringly of Norman Mailer, a very public writerly figure, who DeLillo believes was a "strong force … at the centre of culture" and "highly visible" (DeLillo, *Intensity* 5). The issue of whether a writer should remain hidden or become a public personality is debated intensely at the beginning of *Mao II* and sets up the later confrontation between author and terrorist. Bill Gray, the reluctant hero, thus embodies both Romantic and Modernist ideals of the artist which is made problematic by the society of the spectacle, commercialism and mass consumption. Richard Hardack suggests that "DeLillo's writer belongs to a lineage of isolate white male individuals who oppose, yet also depend upon, the mass in American literature" (Hardack 376) and Bill Gray's situation highlights the difficulty of retaining artistic integrity in a society whereby the novel is not only a consumer product but also secondary to the all-powerful image, especially those spectacular apocalyptic images gleaned from the evening news broadcast.

   Out of sight, and out of step with his times, Bill adheres to both a Romantic ideal of the solitary, questing artist as well as a Modernist aesthetic – "When I think of cities where I lived, I see great cubist paintings" (39) – and sees the writer as being a part of Lionel Trilling's "adversary culture" for which he is berated by his agent; as Charlie says to Bill "You have a twisted sense of the writer's place in society. You think the writer belongs to the far margins, doing dangerous things" (97). Yet Bill is far from ignorant as to the realities of consumer culture and only too aware of how the publishing houses are complicit in the decline of the literary novel as a medium of

cultural currency and critical thought: "The more they publish, the weaker we become. The secret force that drives the industry is the compulsion to make writers harmless" (47).

Bill's statement alludes to one of the predominant themes of the novel, that is to say how can artists, namely writers, maintain their position as shapers of consciousness within postmodern consumer society; if Bill relents and allows his image to become disseminated, is he somehow compromised? Importantly, Bill's re-emergence or Second Coming is less a literary event than it is one confined to the replication of his own image. Confiding in Brita Neilson, whose photographic assignment suggests a documentary decline of the author, Bill admits that "I'm sitting on a book that's dead" (48). Likewise, Brita asks of him "Are you fading at all?" (45), hinting at his increasingly marginalised status. As Bill's face is captured by Brita's lens he is inevitably absorbed into the sort of celebrity culture of which he is so disdainful of and so becomes yet another tradable postmodern commodity, in Guy Debord's phraseology "capital's faithful portrait" (Debord 33). It is therefore the image that neutralises Bill Gray the writer, turning him into "someone's material" (43). If, as Susan Sontag theorises, the photograph "is a part of, an extension of that subject; and a potent means of acquiring it, of gaining control over it" (Sontag 155), then Bill's identity has been appropriated by the "culture industry" and he imagines that the circulated image overshadows the importance of his literary work. In an ironic reworking of Mallarme's dictum that "everything exists to end up in a book", Bill suggests that "Everything tends to channel our lives toward some final reality in print or on film" (43). Aware of the deathliness associated with the photographic image, Bill says to Brita

> Something about the occasion makes me think I'm at my own wake. Sitting for a picture is a morbid business. A portrait doesn't begin to mean anything until the subject is dead. (42)

Brita's photographic essay therefore enmeshes Bill in the world of recyclable images, reminding the latter of how deeply even artists are implicated in the culture industry. Laura Barrett likewise suggests that "The demise of the individual is particularly felt in the reproduction of photographs of crowds in *Mao II*, which ostensibly reject the possibility of uniqueness: distinct humans are literally lost in the throng, and the

replicated image itself serves to echo the end of singularity" (Barrett 797-8). Bill Gray is thus only too aware of how he is caught in a double-bind: whether he remains hidden or in the public eye, he realises the potential difficulty of mounting a meaningful challenge (via the novel) to such an image-saturated world, a mass culture which according to Theodor Adorno makes for "automised reactions" and weakens "the forces of individual resistance" (Adorno 138). Although Bill still believes that "There's a moral force in a sentence when it comes out right", which "speaks the writer's will to live" (48), such an affirmation of the artist's role in society is necessarily undermined by contemporary culture which, as Frank Lentricchia and Jody McAuliffe suggest, is the "rigorous and superb denier, marginaliser and destroyer" (Lentricchia and McAuliffe 32). The challenge to writing (and writers themselves) comes from innumerable sources; the image and mass media, the unthinking crowd, terrorism, and religion, all of which deny the subjectivity and individual thought necessary to Bill's Modernist aesthetic and his Romantic ideal of the solitary, embattled artist. The literal and metaphorical death of the author is enacted at the end of Brita's camera lens and as Bill says to Brita, "You're smart to trap us in your camera before we disappear" (42).

Bill is also manipulated by his interfering and know-it-all personal assistant, Scott Martineau, who acts as his self-appointed spokesperson. No less a controlling force than the publishing house who, for monetary reasons, want to get their hands on Bill's manuscript, Scott, either for purely selfish reasons or because he genuinely believes the novel to be a failure, wants to keep Bill hostage while carefully stage-managing his career:

> The book is finished but will remain in typescript. Then Brita's photos appear in a prominent place. Timed just right. We don't need the book. We have the author. (71)

Convinced that "Bill gets bigger as his distance from the scene deepens" (52), Scott aims to work the media so as to make as much out of Bill's name as possible, without actually allowing his benefactor to publish the manuscript, fearing that once it is released Bill's messianic aura would diminish: "But it would be the end of Bill as a myth, a force" (52). His agent, Charlie Everson, also believes in the power of a famous name and encourages Bill to involve himself in a public reading in support of the Swiss poet-hostage, Jean-Claude Julien: "I want one missing writer to read the

work of another. I want the famous novelist to address the suffering of the unknown poet … Don't you see how beautifully balanced?" (99). Although Charlie assures Bill that this carefully choreographed event would mean "One less writer in the hands of killers" (102), Bill is nonetheless sceptical, only too aware of how such a media stunt not only smacks of commercial opportunism but would also allow terrorists to seize upon such an event so as to publicise themselves and, furthermore, intrude upon the writer's territory. We see Bill's fears to this effect expressed in his conversation with Brita:

> There's a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. In the west we become famous effigies as our books lose their power to shape and influence. Do you ask writers how they feel about this? Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of the culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated. (41)

Bill's Romantic notion of the writer as one who is necessarily independent of spirit and single-minded, a Byronic hero, perhaps, is made problematic through his need to provide the publishing industry and the public with an accessible and saleable work of literature. Furthermore, his decidedly Modernist aesthetic, while perhaps exaggerating the power of a writer in society, even that of say a Norman Mailer, a Samuel Beckett or an Albert Camus, emphasises the difficulty of "making it new" inside an image-dominated world where, according to Bill, "writers are being consumed by the emergence of news as an apocalyptic force" (72). The idea that society shapes the novel rather than the other way around becomes Bill's ongoing nightmare, and as Adorno suggests: "The more the system of merchandising culture is expanded, the more it also tends to assimilate the "serious" art of the past by adapting this art to the system's own requirements" (Adorno 138). Bill's fear that as a writer he has already been "incorporated" or taken hostage by commercial interests is perhaps confirmed when he inquires into the ownership of the publishing house and is met with a rather unpromising answer from Charlie Everson, who says, "You don't want to know" (101).

The idea that not only is writing being destroyed from within by the system, but that writers themselves are under siege and must fear for their personal safety, is

extended by the entry (or continued infiltration) of violent actors into the cultural sphere, namely terrorists, who in the historical context of *Mao II*, became something of a new and terrifying cultural phenomenon. There is no doubt that the Iranian Revolution and that nation's subsequent state sponsorship of Islamic terrorism exerts its long shadow over the novel, not least in Ayatollah Khomeini's momentous decision to issue a fatwa (Islamic decree) against Salman Rushdie and his novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988). There is not the space here for a detailed description of those events, suffice it to say that the fatwa represented a significant threat to freedom of speech and the writer's role in society, and arguably still does, as subsequent events in the United Kingdom and Europe would suggest.

Christopher Hitchens, writing on the twentieth anniversary of the fatwa which sent his close friend into hiding, described the impact of such an event: "For our time and generation, the great conflict between the ironic mind and the literal mind, the experimental and the dogmatic, the tolerant and the fanatical, is the argument that was kindled by *The Satanic Verses*" (Hitchens 4). Soon after the fatwa was announced the American writer Raymond Federman made the comment that "Khomeini has proclaimed the new era of fear for literature" (qtd. in Pipes 195). There can be no doubt that this event had an impact on DeLillo himself, who was one of several writers to sign a petition in support of Rushdie, and that this famous encroachment of terrorists onto the territory of the novel resonates throughout *Mao II*. As scenes from the news showed crowds calling for the death of Rushdie and his publishers, writers throughout the world understandably became fearful of what could result when leaders such as the Ayatollah harnessed the rage of the crowd so as to condemn and censor works of literature. In privileging one book and one narrative, namely the Koran and its putative author/narrator, the prophet Mohammed, over many subjective narratives, the Ayatollah's fatwa must be read as a violent reaction against various aspects of (post)modernity such as secularism and democracy, and, more importantly, the individual voice which, throughout *Mao II*, is constantly threatened. Margaret Scanlan rightly emphasises the influence of the Rushdie affair on *Mao II* and sees the character of Bill as articulating a writerly response to this specific event: "Like Rushdie, and also like Mikhail Bakhtin and Milan Kundera, Bill sees the essence of the novel as scepticism, the representation of conflicting voices, a tolerance of ambiguity" (Scanlan 241). Importantly, Bill believes in the novel as "a democratic shout" (159) and says "Books are never finished" (72), one of many utterances he

makes in the novel which denies the eschatological and apocalyptic impulses expressed by other characters, namely terrorists and their apologists. Silvia Corporale Bizzini says of DeLillo's own motivation in providing a novelistic response to the Rushdie affair that "… the writer has to write and through his or her writing develops a criticism of the meaning – or the lack of it – not only through the multiplicity of discourses that has been created by the society of spectacle, but of myth and of the so-called end of history as well" (Bizzini 255). Importantly, John Carlos Rowe sees *Mao II* as being a counter-authoritarian text: "… DeLillo thinks that literary representation can and should challenge the totalitarian impulses fuelled by postmodern dislocation" (Rowe 27). *Mao II* must therefore be read -- both textually and contextually -- as a literary reaction to terrorism, perhaps even a messianic call for the return of the novel and novelists to the forefront of society where the battle lines between competing ideologies have been drawn.

Either in hiding or on the run, DeLillo's novelist is cast as an embattled individual whose unique voice risks being drowned out by those other apocalyptic agents within the novel. Although not extinct, the novelist is at the very least an endangered species whose craft reaches an increasingly smaller audience in a society obsessed with imminent disaster and captivated by spectacular violence. There is a suggestion that the proliferation of images and news "which provides an unremitting mood of catastrophe" (72) serves to destroy the individual's imagination and his or her capacity to engage with works of art. The age of televised apocalypse which, apparently, renders the novel redundant, "We don't need the novel" (72), and provides "emotional experience not available elsewhere" (72) suggests a fearful new world which plays on people's *fin de millennium* anxieties and those feelings of spiritual emptiness and postmodern exhaustion.

The televised images which bring about such an "unremitting mood of catastrophe" therefore become the medium for a shared experience, even if it is something debased, voyeuristic, and, ultimately, inauthentic. This phenomenon is remorselessly satirised in *White Noise* when Jack Gladney confesses to his family's addiction to televised mayhem: "Every disaster made us wish for something bigger, grander, more sweeping" (64). In *Mao II* televised images seem to likewise feed an unconscious desire for the apocalyptic and the messianic, embodied in the violent energies of crowds, terrorists and religious leaders. *Mao II* therefore describes a postmodern world in which the spaces of terror and violence are slowly converging,

made possible by the inexorable advance of technology and the annihilation of distance which Bill muses upon: "You enter your code in Brussels and blow up a building in Madrid" (91). Just as the image and the society of spectacle serves to diminish Bill and slowly undermines or supersedes the novel, so does it likewise hypnotise the masses, as witnessed by Karen Janney's fixation with apocalyptic news items:

> There were times she became lost in the dusty light, observing some survivor of a national news disaster, there's the lonely fuselage smoking in a field, and she was able to study the face and shade into it at the same time, even sneak a half second ahead, inferring the strange dazed grin or gesturing hand, which made her seem involved not just in the coverage but in the terror that came blowing through the fog. (117)

This televised scene, with its chilling allusion to the 1989 Lockerbie bombing, illustrates the power of the culture of the image and its far-reaching impact upon the consciousness of the individual, which is in turn, in the postmodern, linked to some wider collective unconscious or mass desire. In the case of Karen, who has previously undergone a programme of partial "de-Moonification" but who is nonetheless still susceptible to millennial fantasies, there is a recurring and reinvigorated desire to (re)connect with some lost master narrative, as well as the continued longing to escape from the language of the self and its replacement with a more collective identity. Karen, who according to Bill "carries the virus of the future"(119), and who has swapped one father figure (Rodge) for another (Reverend Moon) and then for another (Bill Gray), epitomises the lost generation, "Generation X", in which time and history have imploded into an eternal (and recyclable) now. So it is that Karen, following Bill's departure, once again yearns for a God-like figure and reverts to the apocalyptic slogans of the Moonies: "Only those sealed by the messiah will survive" (153). It is Scott, Karen's erstwhile boyfriend and fellow member of Generation X, who articulates this apparent need to resurrect these apocalyptic grand narratives. As he explains to Brita,

> Bill doesn't understand how people need to blend in, lose themselves in something larger. The point of mass marriage is to show that we have to survive as a community instead of individuals trying to master every complex force. Mass interracial marriage.

> The conversion of the white-skinned by the dark. Every revolutionary idea involves danger and reversal. I know all the draw backs of the Moon system but in theory it is brave and visionary. Think of the future and see how depressed you get. All the news is bad. We can't survive by needing more, wanting more, standing out and grabbing all we can. (89)

What Karen therefore craves, in Scott's view, is what the crowds who fill her television screen also crave; the return of a leader, of a messiah, who will redeem them from the empty space of a Godless universe and so return them to a teleological history which transcends the postmodern epoch. Such is the case of the Iranian masses who "do not accept that their father is dead" (189) and "want him back among them" (189). Their "father" is of course the Ayatollah Khomeini, the "idol-smasher" (192) whose Islamic revolution capitalised on the messianic beliefs of Shia Muslims that in time the so-called "hidden Imam" would return so as to redeem the present age. Like the Iranians, Karen is awaiting that "total vision" (193) of the apocalypse. The crowd from which she emerged at the beginning of the novel, "Here they come, marching into American sunlight" (3), is mirrored in a darker fashion by the Iranian crowds who surge towards the body of their leader: "Here they come, black-clad, pushing toward the grave" (192). Karen, having watched the Ayatollah's funeral and having been abandoned by Bill Gray, is returned to her former millennial world view with its desire for apocalyptic transcendence. Mark Osteen rightly suggests that Karen has become a "character in a global narrative captured by a spectacular authority that extends beyond the nation, beyond the moment, and even beyond the grave" (Osteen 204) and David Cowart notes that "The language of apocalyptic expectation links groups as disparate as the Moonies of Korea and America, the Shiite mullahs of Iran, and the followers of Abu Rashid, the Middle Eastern terrorist who also wants to hurry time" (Cowart 113). Such messianic fervour is therefore a global phenomenon, a reversion to the totalising apocalyptic meta-narrative which would (supposedly) seek to defeat the temporal postponement of postmodernity.

Yet what the masses cannot or will not accept, and what Scott omits to mention, is the potential for the crowd to express less a metaphysical or collective transcendence and rather a deathly urge to annihilate subjectivity and the lone voice(s) of dissent. This is of course epitomised by the image of Chairman Mao whose will-to-power, like those of other absolutist leaders, created not the long-awaited utopia but

an authoritarian and conformist *dystopia*. It is perhaps not surprising, then, given DeLillo's fascination with the apocalyptic energies of the crowd, that the echoes of Tiananmen Square should resonate through the haunted narrative of *Mao II*: "It is the preachment of history, whoever takes the great space and can hold it the longest. The motley crowd against the crowd where everyone dresses alike" (177). So it is that the "revolution" entails obedience and transforms such apocalyptic desire into obedience, encapsulated in the terrorist leader Abu Rashid's Maoist aphorism "All men one man" (233). In the sequence in which Karen watches televised images of the Chinese crowds there lurks "in the deep distance a portrait of Mao Zedong" (176), a sinister reminder of how the image takes on a life of its own, becoming an object of veneration or worship which eclipses the individual. In the Maoist state, the individual is subordinated to the tired clichés of the ruling party and a devotion to the "dear leader". This is how China under Mao was reduced to one image and one "little red book" to which over a billion people were forced to submit, just as the Iranian people were likewise made subservient to the austere gaze of the Ayatollah and the authority of one religious text.

In contrast to Bill's aversion to celebrity and hero-worship, a number of the novel's other principal characters, Karen Janney, Scott Martineau, and George Haddad, express their dedication to a leader who will, supposedly, stage a messianic return. While Karen readily swaps one "mythical father figure" for another, Scott remains singularly devoted to Bill, who he imagines to be "devising his own cycle of death and resurgence" (141) just as "Mao used photographs to announce his return … to reinspire the revolution"(141). Scott believes that the photographs of Bill would be "a means of transformation" (141), a subtle allusion to Christ's transfiguration on Calvary in which Christ the man became God. As Scott lovingly cleans Bill's typewriter, which has already become a kind of museum piece, a relic perhaps, from a literary age, he speculates as to the possibility of Bill's Second Coming:

> Bill would make a return to the book. This was the essence of Bill's return. He would work on the novel with fresh energy, cut it back, gut it, strip it six ways to Sunday. He's a new man now. He has the power of a reconstructed secret. Scott imagined him hunched over his desk, working the old spare territories of the word. (142)

Bill does not, however, make "a return to the book" in the way that Scott imagines, but he does offer a heroic gesture, perhaps the only character to do so in the novel, a personal means of holding out against the seductive narrative of terrorists. Bill Gray's final triumph is that of the personal will and the affirmation of the individual, and of writing, in the face of violent impulses and apocalyptic ideologies.

When the London reading in support of the Swiss poet-hostage is disrupted by a bomb blast, Bill decides to meet with George Haddad, a Lebanese academic who provides the link to the terrorists who have held Jean-Claude Julian hostage. Scott's monkish devotion to Bill has parallels with the terrorist spokesperson George Haddad's enthrallment with Abu Rashid, the terrorist leader who wishes to reshape a war-torn Lebanon. George attempts to convince Bill of the righteousness of Abu Rashid's cause so as to convert him to his Maoist-Marxist-Islamist politics. One of these conversations is strongly reminiscent of Razumov and Haldin's conversation in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* (1911) where Haldin, an avowed anti-Tsarist and anarchist, outlines his vision for the future and suggests the need for bloodshed so as to redeem the world, a new world in which writers like Razumov will supposedly be the beneficiaries: "Men like me are necessary to make room for self-contained men like you" (19). Similarly, George Haddad suggests that the sympathies of the writer should lie with the revolutionary or terrorist:

> And isn't it the novelist, Bill, above all writers, who understands this rage, who knows in his soul what the terrorist thinks and feels? Through history it's the novelist who has felt affinity for the violent man who lives in the dark. Where are your sympathies? With the colonial police, the occupier, the rich landlord, the corrupt government, the militaristic state? Or with the terrorist? (130)

George points to the prevailing system as the shared enemy of both the writer and the terrorist, the latter being the last line of defence against a totalising world order or Weberian iron cage:

> In societies reduced to blur and glut, terror is the only meaningful act…Is history possible? Is anyone serious? Who do we take seriously? Only the lethal believer, the person who kills and dies for faith … Only the terrorist stands outside. (157)

Likewise, in Conrad's novel Haldin maintains that the terrorist or anarchist stands alone against the monolithic state apparatus: "But consider that the true destroyers are they who destroy the spirit of progress and truth, not the avengers who merely kill the bodies of the persecutors of human dignity" (19). George, in a similarly seductive manner, urges Bill to put his faith in this new world narrative which will eliminate the social injustices of the age, but Bill realises that this is largely recycled Maoist rhetoric and propaganda and an appeal to crowd mentality: "Think of fifty million Red Guards" (158). George laments Bill's lack of enthusiasm, suggesting that he would have made a good Maoist: "You would have written what the culture needed in order to see itself" (163).

In this way George, like Haldin, sees the writer and the terrorist as paired together in opposing the prevailing system or ideology. Peter Boxall has therefore suggested that the writer-terrorist distinction in *Mao II* is "always on the brink of collapse" (Boxall 164), while Ryan Simmons argues for a reading of *Mao II* which stresses their shared antipathy for globalisation, postmodern complacency, and the society of the spectacle : "To a startling extent, then, the Unabomber's thoughts on the acquisition of a cultural voice parallel Bill Gray's: the priority that, both believe, was once given to the rational, culturally valuable voice no longer exists, and so the only option for the consciousness that wishes to be heard is violence" (Simmons 688). However, it is important to note that Bill's own idealism harks back to the sort of Romanticism which is committed to the individual, the imagination, and the artist's necessarily isolated position which shuns the collective; on the other hand, George and Abu Rashid's Romantic-apocalyptic ideology points to the radical, the meta-physical, and the utopian. Whereas Bill is cautious and sceptical, George Haddad and Abu Rashid are committed in the political sense, sharing more in common with the Jacobins of the French Revolution or the Bolsheviks of the Russian Revolution.

George Haddad not only sees the terrorist and the writer as paired in some mission to transcend history and the moment, but he does so in quasi-Hegelian terms, invoking the idea of the "world historical individual" who channels the zeitgeist and so has a hand in (re)writing the world narrative: "The killing is going to happen. Mass killing asserts itself always. Great death, unnumbered death, this is never more than a question of time and place. The leader only interprets the forces" (163). George is unapologetic about the sacredness of shed blood so as to reorient the course of history and infuse it with teleological meaning. His and Abu Rashid's imagined revolution

which would either seek to institute an Iranian-style theocracy or a Maoist republic, or, perhaps, a combination of both, imagines the return of one guiding narrative voice and one book which would supposedly transcend an exhausted age: "This is the unchanged narrative every culture needs in order to survive" (162).

In his *Harpers* essay DeLillo clearly views the events of September 11 as a return to the religious apocalyptic narratives of the past: "This is heaven and hell, a sense of armed martyrdom as the surpassing drama of human experience" (DeLillo, *Ruins* 34). Likewise, the Canadian writer Michael Ignatieff in responding to the destruction of the twin towers suggested that "Terror does not express a politics, but a metaphysics, a desire to give ultimate meaning to time and history through ever-escalating acts of violence which culminate in a final battle between good and evil" (Ignatieff qtd. in *The Guardian*). I would suggest that in *Mao II*, George Haddad (deliberately) confuses a political agenda with a more religious or metaphysical one, and that his is chiefly a millennial-messianic impulse, embodied in the secluded figure of Abu Rashid. Like the Hidden Imam of the Shia Muslims, or the previously elusive Osama Bin Laden, Abu Rashid is therefore representative of the messiah or prophet who will supposedly return to redeem a decadent and Godless epoch. With reference to how Osama Bin Laden harnessed this messianic myth, Chris Brown suggests that

> The idea of primitive nomadic peoples burning out the corruption of city life has been a regular trope of the sociology of Islamic societies since at least the time of philosopher, historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldun … and Bin Laden's presentation of himself in the mountains of Afghanistan wearing traditional dress, carrying a rifle and often on horseback plays to this image, probably consciously. (Brown 298).

The secluded terrorist leader or prophet, whether it be a Mao, a Moon or a Rashid, therefore gives his followers a sense of messianic-apocalyptic expectation in the hope of defeating the stalled, recyclable time of postmodernity. It is the image, so prevalent throughout *Mao II*, and so intrinsically tied to the postmodern experience, which is the principle conduit of the renewed apocalyptic narrative.

Mao II therefore depicts the numerous ways in which religion and apocalyptic narratives still somehow capture the imagination of people within even the most

(seemingly) secular societies. Even Bill, who is committed to the individual voice and the novel, which is the "great secular transcendence" and the "Latin Mass of language, of character, occasional new truth" (72), can't help but sympathise with the true believer who carries within his or herself tradition and mystery, like the Orthodox priests he sees in Athens: "Bill thought they were deathless in a way, fixed to national memory, great black ships of faith and superstition" (154). Bill's issue is therefore not necessarily with the faithful who, like Karen, seek to transcend their postmodern and post-religious existence, so much as it is with those fundamentalists who wish to reassert the rule of the saints or their own brand of cultural revolution through violent means. When George suggests that terrorists are "the only possible heroes for our time" (157), Bill emphatically rejects this and goes on to say

> It's pure myth, the terrorist as solitary outlaw. These groups are backed by repressive governments. They're perfect little totalitarian states. They carry the old wild-eyed vision, total destruction and total order. (158)

Bill then clearly sees acts of terror as the thin end of the wedge, "the first tentative rehearsal for mass terror" (163), and the language of terrorist leaders as clichéd tautologies: "Incantations. People chanting formulas and slogans … Rote, rote, rote." (162). Indeed, as the conversation progresses, George's revolutionary theology is slowly unmasked and revealed to be what Bill had suspected all along; an inexorable escalation of gratuitous and unremitting violence. While Bill points to the futility of keeping the poet-hostage Jean-Claude captive and protests his innocence, George is brutally matter-of-fact: "Of course he's innocent. That's why they took him. Terrorise the innocent" (129). Finally, the true character of this future narrative is fully revealed as George says

> We need a model that transcends all the bitter history. Something enormous and commanding. A figure of absolute being. This is crucial, Bill. In societies struggling to remake themselves, total authority, total being. (158)

Both George and Abu Rashid therefore wish to see an apocalyptic transfiguration of history, a re-casting of the world and of human consciousness in which a new generation of young men would be freed from the constraints of conscience and

morality, a brotherhood of killers as imagined by the ageing anarchist Karl Yundt in Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1906):

> I have always dreamed … of a band of men absolute in their resolve to discard all scruples in the choice of means, strong enough to give themselves the name of destroyers, and free from the taint of that resigned pessimism which rots the world. No pity for anything on earth, including themselves, and death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity – that's what I would have liked to see. (43)

George's "revolutionary politics", like Karl Yundt's, betrays the seamless passage between revolution and oppression, as well as the individual act of resistance and the collective willingness to submit, both to ideology and to authoritarian leadership. Indeed, in George's apocalyptic vision, the future has no room for individualism or subjectivity and instead relies on tautological obedience: "Isn't there beauty and power in the repetition of certain words and phrases?" (162). George goads Bill with his confident assertion that the time of the individual and the writer is finished, "And this is what you fear, that history is passing into the hands of the crowd" (162), and that the value of a writer lies solely in his celebrity status, to be exploited as a bargaining chip. As he explains to Bill, the writer-as-hostage is a new cultural phenomenon, a brutal reality inside the society of the spectacle: "Gain the maximum attention. Then probably kill you ten minutes later. Then photograph your corpse and keep the picture handy for the time when it can be used most effectively" (164).

Conversely, Bill's proximity to terror leads him to reaffirm the "secular transcendence" of the novel which is, he tells George, "a democratic shout" and "One thing unlike another, one voice unlike the next. Ambiguities, contradictions, whispers, hints" (159). He counters George's totalitarian ideology by explaining how the writer perpetuates dialectics and a Keatsian negative capability: "The experience of my own consciousness tells me how autocracy fails, how total control wrecks the spirit, how my characters deny my efforts to own them completely, how I need internal dissent, how the world squashes me the minute I think it's mine"(159). He believes that the writer succeeds or fails on his or her own terms and is one who necessarily takes risks, who seeks to enhance and extend consciousness, the very opposite of totalitarian thinking: "And when a writer loses his talent, he dies democratically, there it is for everyone to see, wide open to the world, the shitpile of hopeless prose" (159).

Just as Jack Gladney in *White Noise* imagines that "all plots tend to move deathward" (26), so does *Mao II* depict the deathly plots of terrorists as well as the death of the author, both in a literal sense and in the way Roland Barthes suggests that an author's voice is submerged within the text, writing being "the destruction of every voice, every point of origin" (Barthes, *Text*142). Yet this is not to say that DeLillo's novel predicts the end of writing or the demise of the literary consciousness, or indeed that the novel cannot continue to impart an important message or theme. To the contrary, Bill's close encounter with the totalitarian mind seems to reaffirm his need to write. Before finally succumbing to his mortal injury on the ferry crossing en route to Lebanon, he has a moment of insight in which he views the forces of history in precisely those terms of the narrative of the crowd and the narrative of the self:

> One fiction taking the world narrowly into itself, the other fiction pushing out towards the social order, trying to unfold into it. He could have told George a writer creates character as a way to reveal consciousness, increase the flow of meaning. This is how we reply to power and beat back our fear. By extending the pitch of consciousness and human possibility. (200)

Writing for Bill is therefore decidedly anti-eschatological, a ground zero site for artistic possibilities and ongoing intellectual enterprise. Unlike the terrorist, who insists upon one commanding meta-narrative, the writer seeks to free human consciousness from the limitations and imprisonment of recycled or "unchanged narratives" which are so often used as repressive tools. What's more, the novel is part of a long tradition of narrative which survives through time and history, a genuine model of transcendence at the most personal level. Whether or not he realises it, Scott Martineau's reflections indicate that even an unpublished novel takes on a value which transcends the individual's time and place: "But the manuscript would sit, and word would travel, and the pictures would appear, a small and deft selection, one time only, and word would build and spread, and the novel would stay right here, collecting aura and force, deepening old Bill's legend, undyingly" (224).

In an important doubling technique, *Mao II* ends with Brita Neilson journeying to Beirut so as to photograph the elusive terrorist. The sense that Abu Rashid is equally the victim of commercialism and the society of the spectacle as Bill

Gray is hinted at by the fact of his becoming a sort of consumable image, and that the photographer, Brita, is a necessary conduit between him and the outside world. In the bombed-out neighbourhoods of late-twentieth century Beirut, Abu Rashid nevertheless imagines himself to be a messianic figure who will bring to the young men of his country a means with which to shape the future. As if to accentuate the sense of his being a latter-day messiah or prophet, Abu Rashid's statements largely come via an interpreter who imparts his message to Brita:

> He is saying that terror is what we use to give our people their place in the world. What used to be achieved through work, we gain through terror. Terror makes the new future possible. All men one man. Men live in history as never before. He is saying we make and change history minute by minute. History is not a book or the human memory. We do history in the morning and change it after lunch (235).

The interpreter says that in sacrificing individual identity for a collective dedication to Abu Rashid his young followers are "sacrificing these things to something powerful and great" (234), and that "The image of Rashid is their identity" (233). Rashid seems to believe that in the wasted, ruined streets of Lebanon the time has come for a new way of transcending time and history and as he himself says to Brita, "This room is the first minute of a new nation" (236). Rashid incorporates a Maoist-Marxist ideology with a millennial metaphysics, supposing that his own time possesses a messianic quality. Just as his spokesman and apologist George Haddad suggests that a leader merely "interprets the forces" of history, Rashid sees himself as standing at an historical juncture in which a shattered nation is ripe for revolutionary violence and apocalyptic renewal. This is the time that, according to Walter Benjamin, is "filled with the presence of the now (*Jetztzeist*)" (Benjamin 263): with respect to the French Revolution he says "Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a time charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history" (Benjamin 263). Rashid thus comes to see himself as one who must realign the shape and direction of history away from an entropic or exhausted epoch back towards a time filled with transcendent value and/or meaning.

Indeed, the idea that postmodernity is characterised by recyclable or stalled time is found throughout *Mao II* and adds to its sense of being a millennial novel, a narrative infused with the expectation of imminent return, whether this be a televised

disaster, a terrorist outrage, or a celebrity (re)appearance. Yet the sense that the final event -- the apocalyptic reconfiguration of time and history or the messianic Second Coming -- is a thing of the past or a thing of myth would appear to make some actors more desperate to effect a violent change in their historical circumstances. This explains the messianic impulse which is omnipresent throughout *Mao II*, the sense that the return, of the metanarrative, of writing, of resistance, is more necessary than ever so as to prevent history's disappearance. Jean Baudrillard neatly sums up this desire to see the millennial and the messianic reconstituted inside postmodernity:

> And terrorism apart, is there not a hint of this parousic exigency in the global fantasy of catastrophe that hovers over today's world? A demand for a violent resolution of reality, when this latter eludes our grasp in an endless hyper-reality? For hyper-reality rules out the very occurrence of the Last Judgement or the Apocalypse or the Revolution. (Baudrillard, *Illusion* 8)

As DeLillo's novel suggests, it is the society of the spectacle, and in particular the image, which both contributes to a sense of living in a perpetual present and our sense of having lost history itself. It is therefore appropriate that the novel should end at the point of a camera: "Brita stays on the balcony for another minute, watching the magnesium pulse that brings an image to a strip of film. She crosses her arms over her body against the chill and counts off the bursts of relentless light. The dead city photographed one more time" (241).

Yet despite the novel's death of an author, and its portrayal of a world where everything is transformed into or mediated by the image, *Mao II* hints at the enduring quality of writing. Indeed the novel's *raison d'etre* is to give voice to the conflicting and disparate narratives contained within the postmodern, and to show that individual subjectivity is both important and necessary so as to counter the apocalyptic and monolithic narratives of crowds, terrorists and other fundamentalists. If, as Roland Barthes suggests, a text is a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes, *Text* 146), then *Mao II* is surely a text which describes many recycled (and recyclable) narratives which the author, Bill Gray, seeks to counter; it is Bill's voice which slowly emergenses within the text and resonates with conviction and originality. His writerly aesthetic, shaped by both Romanticism and Modernism, is a quest for truth and transcendence, a bid to

understand and transform one's own position inside postmodernity. In *Mao II*, DeLillo and Bill Gray, and here I believe that they are one voice, suggest that the novel, a "democratic shout", is more necessary than ever.

       Similar themes of millennial expectation, as well as apocalyptic responses to the empire of postmodernity, provide the subject matter of the next chapter.

<u>Chapter Four</u>

"Destroy the past, make the future": the End of History in Don DeLillo's
Cosmopolis* and J G Ballard's *Millennium People

> The image of the stricken and disordered city, hovering wildly before his mind's eye,
> inflamed him with hopes that were beyond comprehension, beyond reason and full of
> monstrous sweetness … What could art and virtue mean to him now, when he might
> reap the advantages of chaos? (259)
> -Thomas Mann *Death In Venice*

> What is the city over the mountains
> Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
> Falling towers
> Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
> Vienna London
> Unreal (372-77, 49-50)
> -T S Eliot *The Wasteland*

In the preceding chapters we have met with speculations as to the apocalyptic demise of the so-called grand or meta-narratives of history inside the epoch known as postmodernity. In this, the fourth chapter, the focus is largely upon the idea of "post-history" and stalled or recyclable time. The idea that history as a temporal and directional process has exhausted itself largely stems from the idea that the grand narrative of the market has triumphed to the detriment of all other narratives. Although (post)modernity might be considered an open-ended or unfinished project, and while events such as September 11 suggest a new rearrangement of geo-politics, the dominant narrative(s) within the postmodern would indeed appear to be in some way linked to or driven by ubiquitous market forces and based upon a neo-liberal political model which Francis Fukuyama suggests has "no serious ideological competitors" (Fukuyama 211). For the foreseeable future, we must assume that the monolithic narrative of globalisation will continue to exert a significant influence in the sphere of geopolitics and society, and will therefore play a role in determining the direction and nature of history itself. Indeed, for some, globalisation has come to be viewed as the final chapter of history.

While in some circles such a providential view of historical fulfilment has been either welcomed or accepted as something inevitable, many others have reacted to this "end of history" hypothesis in a less than enthusiastic fashion, viewing it in decidedly dystopian terms. The triumph of a unipolar world order where the market reigns supreme, and where the market appears to be the sole remaining grand narrative, has more often than not been severely criticised for its contribution to uneven global development and huge wealth disparities between the West and "the rest". Julian Murphet suggests that postmodernity is characterised by "a geography of class struggle" and an "intensification of capital" (Murphet 130), and according to Frederic Jameson, postmodern culture is "the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination" (Jameson 191). The overwhelmingly powerful narrative of the global market, backed up by (for the most part American) military power, and characterised by the ubiquity of the multinational corporation, would appear to have changed our traditional ideas of space, time and history.

This once again forces us to consider whether or not history has come to an end. Without a competing narrative, ideology, or dialectic in opposition to that of global capital, how could history become anything other than static, entropic, or, as Jean Baudrillard has suggested, "recyclable"? (Baudrillard, *Illusion* 27). If, as Jean-Francois Lyotard insists, the prevailing system is "continually revised by its integration of winning strategies" (Lyotard, *Intimacy* 181), what alternatives are there to the omnipotent world narrative of global capital which either annihilates or appropriates any competing narratives? If resistance to this monolithic grand narrative is worthwhile, or indeed possible, what form would it take?

These are precisely the issues which we are confronted with in Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* and J G Ballard's *Millennium People*. In my discussion of *Cosmopolis* I will explore the nature of this dystopian system created by the forces of global capital; in the section on *Millennium People* I will examine the ideologies of those who seek its apocalyptic destruction. I therefore suggest that both novels give expression to the apocalyptic sense of crisis which is a feature of postmodernity, and describe the collision of competing or emergent narratives as well as the apocalyptic responses to the advent of globalisation. This chapter therefore encloses the wider discussion of apocalyptic themes in the postmodern epoch begun in the preceding chapters on *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Waterland* and *Mao II*.

Part One: *Cosmopolis*

Following the events of September 11 and prior to the publication of
Cosmopolis, Don DeLillo articulated a sense of history having stalled inside
postmodernity:

> In the past decade the surge of capital markets has dominated discourse and shaped
> global consciousness. Multinational corporations have come to seem more vital and
> influential than governments. The dramatic speed of the internet summoned us all to
> live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber-capital, because there is no
> memory there and this is where markets are uncontrolled and investment potential has
> no limit. (DeLillo, *Ruins* 33)

DeLillo also refers to those anti-globalisation protests which dominated news
coverage during the free trade discussions of the late 1990s. Such chaotic street scenes
came to reflect the flipside to the post-Cold War global order, a stark reminder that
not all were so eager to embrace the philosophy of the free market. DeLillo says, "The
protestors in Genoa, Prague, Seattle and other cities want to decelerate the global
momentum that seemed to be driving unmindfully towards a landscape of consumer
robots and social instability with the chance of self-determination probably
diminishing for most people in most countries" (DeLillo, *Ruins* 33).

Such apocalyptic street scenes feature heavily in DeLillo's thirteenth novel*,
Cosmopolis*, a novel which describes the nature of the postmodern global market and
those who are its unwavering disciples, and yet it also shows us a counter-narrative of
discontent and the potential for societal unrest. Russell Scott Valentino emphasises
the novel's portrayal of bodily and social corruption and suggests that *Cosmopolis*
"gestures towards the global edifice of contemporary commercial culture and pokes at
its precarious foundation" (Valentino 141). As such, *Cosmopolis* is one part dystopia,
one part satire, in that it imagines a character who single-mindedly seeks to bring
history to its postmodern conclusion, but it also emphasises the inherent instability
and contradictions of the global system he has helped to construct.

Cosmopolis is therefore a depiction of the postmodern city at the end of time
and Eric Packer, a billionaire currency trader, embodies the spirit of late capital and

the monolithic narrative of the market. Like the "investment banker, the land developer, the venture capitalist … the global overlord of satellite and cable" (10), Eric is a "rogue capitalist" (Varsava 75) whose power, on the surface of things, would appear to be without limit. Likewise, the system he thrives in and has helped to construct would appear to be indestructible.

During his journey through the heart of New York, Eric's state-of-the-art limousine is held up in gridlock traffic while an anti-globalisation demonstration is dispersed. As Eric watches, the protestors' cause is dismissed out of hand by one of his financial advisors, Vija Kinski: "These people are a fantasy generated by the market. They don't exist outside the market. There is nowhere they can go to be on the outside. There is no outside" (90). Kinski believes that the protestors exist to "invigorate and perpetuate the system" (90). Eric agrees with such a formulation when he imagines that "It attested again, for the ten thousandth time, to the market culture's innovate brilliance, its ability to shape itself to its own flexible ends, absorbing everything around it" (99). Packer's is the dynamic and nebulous global system of capital which Lyotard suggests "constructs itself" (Lyotard, *Intimacy*181) and which Jameson theorises as "the whole new decentred global network of the third stage of capital itself" (Jameson 197). Clearly then, for Eric Packer and Vija Kinski, the global market has penetrated every aspect of life in the postmodern world and has slowly but surely annihilated or, at the very least, neutralised any opposition and absorbed alternative narratives. Eric's "chief of technology" ensures him that "There's no vulnerable point of entry … we're buffered from attack" (12).

In this manner, postmodernity in *Cosmopolis* is a reflection of the apparently unlimited and unboundaried power of the market. Ideas of time and space are made problematic, as suggested by the looming bank towers which Eric regards fondly from his limousine: "They were the end of the outside world. They weren't here, exactly. They were in the future, in a time beyond geography and touchable money and the people who stack and count it" (36). Likewise, the residential tower that Eric lives in is a gratuitous statement in itself which reflects the curious *illogic* of late capital: "It was nine hundred feet high, the tallest residential tower in the world, a commonplace oblong whose only statement was its size. It had the kind of banality that reveals itself over time as truly brutal" (8). In this way, the postmodern, which for Jameson is characterised by a "new depthlessness" and "a consequent weakening of historicity" (Jameson 191), is revealed to be a dystopian zone in which space reflects the

consequent loss of traditional concepts of time and history. According to Joseph M Conte, the world that Eric Packer has fashioned has lead to "the collapse of an American future determined by the pure synergy of finance and technology" (Conte 190) into a Baudrillardian realm of simulacra in which past ideas of society, tradition, culture, and history have been overlaid by something wholly ephemeral and intangible. Indeed, the hyper-capitalism of *Cosmopolis* is constructed by a system of decentred cyber-capital in which "All wealth has become wealth for its own sake" and "Money has lost its narrative quality the way painting did once upon a time. Money is talking to itself" (77). History has been replaced by the repetitious, static time of the global market and as Vija Kinski suggests "It's cyber-capital that creates the future" (79), a future that doesn't seem to progress to anywhere.

The end of history/historical momentum and the destruction of time in *Cosmopolis* is also embodied in the various forms of technology at Eric's disposal. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner suggest that in the postmodern age "The human-technology dialectic has progressed to the point where subjects are imbricated with, penetrated by, and reconstructed through objects and technologies" (Best and Kellner 193) and throughout *Cosmopolis* the line between the human and the technological is frequently blurred. Guns and screens respond to voice activation, and while travelling in his bullet-proof limousine, Eric observes computer screens which chart the rise and fall of currencies as well as security cameras which monitor activity on the street outside; much, indeed most, of Eric's existence is mediated via screen images. The real world is frequently treated at a second remove, and likewise do images possess an aura of intense mystery, transcendence and power which relegates the postmodern subject to the position of perpetual voyeur while effecting a separation between the subject and his/her environment. When a doctor visits Eric for his daily check-up he watches his own heart on a monitor: "The image was only a foot away but the heart assumed another context, one of distance and immensity, beating in the blood plum raptures of a galaxy in formation … There it was and it awed him, to see his life beneath his breastbone in image-forming units, hammering on outside him" (44). Confusingly, Eric sees himself flinch on a monitor prior to a bomb blast, further complicating issues of time and space and the individual's place within it. In a similar fashion, both *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Cosmopolis* demonstrate how humanity and technology are wedded together in a way that suggests a greater decentring of human consciousness in the postmodern. The highly omniscient quality of technology in

Cosmopolis, as well as its abiding immanence, therefore suggests, much like J G Ballard's *Crash*, the alienation of the postmodern subject from traditional ideas of time, history and space. As the narrator of *Crash* confesses, "I realised that the entire zone which defined the landscape of my life was now bounded by a continuous artificial horizon" (40) and in a similar fashion the system that Eric and those of his ilk perpetuate is one frequently divorced from reality, epitomised by the bullet proof limousine which separates Eric from the outside world. Eric professes his love for the limousine and the screens which show rising and falling stock prices, "so radiant, so seductive", but admits, "I understand none of it" (78), suggesting that technology has assumed a logic of its own which outruns even those who imagine themselves to have a mastery over it.

It is within the heavily decentred and uncontrollable realm of cyberspace that Eric buys and sells currencies and wreaks havoc on a global scale. Eric's seeming omnipotence (to say nothing of his sheer recklessness) extends to the manipulation of time and history and the fate of nations:

> He thought of the people who used to visit his website back in the days when he was forecasting stocks, when forecasting was pure power, when he'd tout a technology or bless an entire sector and automatically cause doublings in share price and the shifting of worldviews, when he was effectively making history, before history became monotonous and slobbering, yielding to his search for something purer, for techniques of charting that predicted the movements of money itself. He traded in currencies from every sort of territorial entity, modern democratic nations and dusty sultanates, paranoid people's republics, hellhole rebel states run by stoned boys. (75-76)

In this manner, human affairs in "every sort of territorial entity" are dictated by the vagaries of global capital; time, space and history fall under the sway of technology and the workings of the market, and as Vija Kinski explains to Eric

> … time is a corporate asset now. It belongs to the free market system. The present is harder to find. It is being sucked out of the world to make way for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential. The future becomes insistent. (79)

In *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990), David Harvey suggests that it is rather the *present* which becomes "insistent"; he argues that the overwhelming power of capital and production inside postmodernity seems to annihilate both past and future, creating a sense of time perpetually stalled:

> … accelerations in turnover times in production, exchange, and consumption produce, as it were, the loss of the sense of the future except and insofar as the future can be discounted into the present. Volatility and emphemerality similarly make it hard to maintain any firm sense of continuity. Past experience gets compressed into some overwhelming present. (Harvey 291)

In this manner, many theorists of the postmodern suggest that concepts of time and space have been significantly altered to the point where history and historical progress has been irrevocably altered, stalled, or annihilated. Peter Koslowski suggests that "The postmodern effects a temporal postponement" which "postpones that final decline which is supposed to occur after the utopian expectations contained in modernisms philosophy of history" (Koslowski 146). This sense of time being both stalled and directionless, and beholden to global economics, accords with Vija Kinski's sinister suggestion that "time has become a corporate asset". Eric Packer's world city therefore operates not within the bounds of traditional ideas of time and space, but instead within the parallel realm of cyberspace where he can, supposedly, manipulate foreign currencies at the stroke of a key. Mounting resistance to such a system must also become more problematic as such a neo-colonial enterprise is no longer carried out via revolutions, palace coups or cross-border incursions, but is instead largely effected inside cyberspace. Like a viral infection, Eric's currency trading destroys resistance from *within*.

It is therefore important to underscore the violence of the system Eric has helped to build and maintain, a global network of unrestrained markets and cyber-capital which, as Vija Kinski suggests, will "send people into the gutter to retch and die" (90). She maintains that "Old industries have to be forcibly eliminated. New markets have to be forcibly claimed … Destroy the past, make the future" (92-3). Eric's own psychopathological tendencies are laid bare when he confesses:

> I've never liked thinking back, going back in time, reviewing the day or the week or the
> life. To crush and gut. To eviscerate. Power works best when there's no memory
> attached. (184)

In attempting to create a world in their own image, rogue capitalists such as Eric therefore accept the need for violence so as to implement their vision of the free market while simultaneously fending off opposing narratives. As violence is met with violence, the system constructs new ways with which to meet threats to its own legitimacy, whether it be via a company take-over, control of media networks, or methods more overtly violent. *Cosmopolis* depicts the beginnings of such a battle and the upping of the stakes as an apocalyptic confrontation between Eric and those he would seek to crush contest the future of the world.

Even if this battle is a decidedly asymmetrical one, both Eric Packer and Vija Kinski would appear to overestimate the strength or viability of the system which they have helped to construct. Displaying a sublime hubris, Eric's egotistical and delusional solipsism leads him to imagine that his powers are unlimited: "When he died he would not end. The world would end" (6). In an ironic statement one of his aides says to Eric "You live in a tower that soars to heaven and goes unpunished by God" (103) and when a fellow billionaire Nikolai Kaganovich is gunned down at his dacha, Vija Kinski parodies biblical scripture and says, "Don't examine the matter … he died so you could live" (82). Furthermore, Eric compares himself to a postmodern Pharaoh and fantasises about Kendra Hayes, who he fancies looks like a woman from the "Middle Kingdom", washing his viscera in palm wine as part of an embalming ceremony.

In imagining himself as some kind of corporate emperor, or an *ubermensch* of the third millennium, it is Eric's desire to see even death conquered, as evinced by his longing to see the corpse of the assassinated rapper Brutha Fez "pass by again, the body tilted for viewing, a digital corpse, a loop, a repetition" (139). Eric suggests that in the future "People will not die" and that instead they will be "absorbed in streams of information" (104). Eric's belief that death is to be overcome by technology attests to his quasi-utopian vision of a post-human, post-religious world outside of chronological time and history. To his mind, death is no longer real because in the

absence of ideology and belief it thereby becomes an empty signifier, stripped of its sacrificial and sacred value.

It is this nihilistic prospect that the anti-globalisation protestors in *Cosmopolis* would appear to be reacting most strongly against; it is their desire to roll back the advance of cyber-capital, a system which annihilates time, history, and meaning, and so alienates the subject from his or herself. The body, and its violent destruction, therefore becomes a means by which to defy the system, the final protest against that which Baudrillard describes as a "system whose ideal is an ideal of zero deaths" (Baudrillard, *Spirit*16). In *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1993), Baudrillard discusses the aestheticisation of death as a sacrificial gesture: "… death becomes interesting once again because *willed* death has a meaning" (Baudrillard, *Symbolic*165). This highlights the importance of agency and resistance in the context of *Cosmopolis*, and it explains Eric's surprise when he witnesses an act of self-immolation on the street; even the upbeat Vija Kinski appears to be shaken by the spectacle, her face "downcast" and "dejected" (100). Eric is forced to realise the power of what would appear to be the final revolt in a world where notions of agency and free will have become problematic. In the aftermath of this willed self-destruction Eric suddenly decides that

> Kinski had been wrong. The market was not total. It could not claim this man or assimilate his act. Not such starkness and horror. This was a thing outside its reach. (99-100)

In this scene there are of course echoes of September 11, an event which was if anything a forceful reminder of the latent power of the body when turned to suicidal acts of terror. Such possibilities are even more potentially deadly when the human and the technological are combined, as September 11 and other acts of terror have proven with horrifying consequences. Efraim Sicher and Natalia Skrodol theorise that in dystopian fiction "… the reconstitution of society seems impossible while, on the other hand, technology threatens basic concepts of individual freedom and of human life" (Sicher and Skrodol 166) and so does *Cosmopolis* witness the advent of a disenchanted epoch and the increasingly desperate and confused responses to it, evidenced by gestures of self-sacrificing violence.

The reminder of the body's vulnerability and its potential for unpredictable acts of suicidal resistance explains Eric's continued fascination throughout the novel with bodily scars and mutilations, in one case a missing finger, "a serious thing, a body ruin that carried history and pain" (17) and in another the driver Ibrahim Hamadou's "collapsed eye" (163) which describes "a brooding folklore of time and fate" (170). These scars and mutilations hint at the alternative reality to that constructed by cyber-capital, wherein time, history, and meaning are either preserved or reactivated, and agency rediscovered. The body thus becomes the ultimate tool of resistance and as Eric is forced to realise, it is the body, willed towards (self-)destruction, which is the chink in the armour of global capital. The potential for the body to be a site of apocalyptic resistance is slowly impressed upon Eric, not only through violent acts, but also through his proximity to other human beings from which he has become increasingly alienated. When Eric happens upon a film set on the street and observes those around him, he is once again struck by the mystery of the human form:

> He felt the presence of the bodies, all of them, the body breath, the heat and running blood, people unlike each other who were now alike, amassed, heaped in a way, alive and dead together. They were only extras in a crowd scene, told to be immobile, but the experience, was a strong one, so total and open he could barely think outside it. (174)

Eric wonders, "How many bodies bearing surgical scars?" which once again attests to his increasing realisation of both the vulnerability of the human body as well as its potential to be used as a weapon. Furthermore, Benno Levin, who has been stalking Eric, insists that "we're all uncontrollable" (153). This emphasis upon free will and the use of the body as a means of violent destruction hints at a darker suggestion, implied throughout the novel, that the only effective method of resistance left to opponents of the new world order are gratuitous act of violence, namely suicidal violence. This is hinted at by DeLillo in *Mao II* when George Haddad, an apologist for terrorism, suggests that the only person we can take seriously is "the lethal believer, the person who kills and dies for faith … only the terrorist stands outside" (157). This is perhaps why Baudrillard suggests that September 11 is "the act that restores an irreducible singularity to the heart of a system of generalised exchange" (Baudrillard, *Spirit* 9), "the absolute, irrevocable event" (Baudrillard, *Spirit* 17). The

act of suicidal terror or martyrdom, both in *Cosmopolis* and in the context of terrorism in the contemporary era, would appear to be one of the most significant strategies in undermining the system of global capital, an act which returns us to the horror of the real while conjuring the spectre of apocalyptic destruction. Baudrillard writes of this inherently violent system of symbolic exchange:

> This is our theatre of cruelty, the only one we have left – extraordinary in that it unites the most extreme degree of the spectacular and the highest level of challenge … It is at one and the same time the dazzling micro-model of a kernel of the real violence with the maximum possible echo – hence the purest form of spectacle – and a sacrificial model mounting the purest form of defiance to the historical and political order. (Baudrillard, *Spirit* 30)

This is not to suggest of course that either DeLillo or Baudrillard endorse or seek to explain away acts of terror, but they both seem to suggest that through such acts of violence, even the most gratuitous, there is perhaps an implied negative theology at work whose purpose is to resurrect those meta-narratives which have seemingly been destroyed or deconstructed in the postmodern age, or that value is (re)discovered through the apocalyptic aesthetic of suicidal death and/or martyrdom. It is also, perhaps, a stark reminder that outside the Western world history continues to unfold and the meta-narrative is far from obsolete; indeed, meta-narratives of an apocalyptic nature come to assume a wholly new and frightening dimension.

There is a sense, then, that *Cosmopolis*, while on the one hand portraying a system of global capital that is robust, dynamic and persuasive, nevertheless also hints at the possibility of its apocalyptic collapse. While for some, like Eric Packer, the Cosmopolis is the fullest realisation of a utopia constructed by liberal market forces, for others, perhaps even for most, this system represents a decidedly *dystopian* vision which must necessarily be resisted. It is, perhaps, a system that has over-reached itself, and as Baudrillard theorises, with every system of domination inevitably comes its opposite: "There is a global perfusion of terrorism, which accompanies any system of domination as though it were its shadow, ready to activate itself anywhere, like a double agent" (Baudrillard, *Spirit* 10). This accords with Benjamin R Barber's formulation that

> What we face is not a war of civilisations, but a war within civilisations, a struggle that expresses the ambivalence within each culture as it faces a global, networked, material future and wonders whether cultural and national autonomy can be retained; the ambivalence within each individual juggling the obvious benefits of modernity with its equally obvious costs. (Barber 249)

Barber is certainly right to emphasise the clash *within* civilisations which global capital engenders, and Joseph M Conte suggests that *Cosmopolis* portrays the "stunning collapse of the dot.com bubble" and a "system on the edge of chaos" (Conte 188). Indeed, the flipside to the world narrative of globalisation is a stunning descent into wholesale economic and social disorder and the potential for an apocalyptic struggle inside a faltering and fragmenting system.

Eric Packer's nemesis, Benno Levin, might then be read as his schizophrenic double, or a reflection of Eric's previously unacknowledged realisation of the limitations of global capital and the extent of the apocalyptic forces arrayed against it. Whether he is simply a figment of Eric's paranoid imagination or a real character intent upon revenge, Levin is at any rate a manifestation of the violence that Eric has unleashed upon the world. Levin seems set upon the sacredness of violence so as to bring about an apocalyptic change in his historical situation:

> But to take another person's life? This is the vision of the new day. I am determined finally to act. It is the violent act that makes history and changes everything that came before it. (154)

It is therefore the act of murder, whether it be the killing of an arch duke in an earlier time, or the killing of the head of the IMF or a rogue capitalist in our own, which can indeed change the course of history. A parallel to this is seen in the character of the Professor in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1906), whose hand-held pocket bomb might at any moment cause panic and terror and so undermine the entire social order. John R Hall suggests that the apocalyptic violence advocated by the Professor is intended to "interrupt unfolding time and intervene in history by violent acts both symbolic and strategic" (Hall 136). Likewise, the street protestors in *Cosmopolis* seek to cause a rupture in the fabric of postmodern time and so anticipate the coming of a

new era with their modification of Marx's aphorism, "A spectre is haunting the world – the spectre of capitalism". Their animal totem, the rat, doubles as an apocalyptic symbol of pestilence and death, indeed of viral infection, "heralds of civilised collapse" (Cowart 219), but the rat is also a symbol of survival and of the organic life world which stands in opposition to the sterile and deathless world of simulacral space which postmodernity has constructed. As hinted at by the novel's epigraph, taken from Zbigniew Herbert's poem *The Besieged City*, the rat becomes the "unit of currency", a symbol pregnant with apocalyptic possibilities. In the same way in which Oberst Enzian in *Gravity's Rainbow* comes to believe in the possibility of the demise of the system controlled by 'Them', the protestors in *Cosmopolis* wish to perpetuate historical dialectics so as to ensure the continuation of history itself, and with it, the continuation of meaning and value and the restoration of civic society.

As well as this utopia-dystopia dialectic which lies at the heart of *Cosmopolis*, its apocalyptic tone is informed by possibilities of transcendence, a counter-narrative to the market and the disenchanted sterility of the postmodern. An implied transcendence appears in those unexpected events within the novel (the self-immolation of the anti-globalisation protestor, Eric's recollection of the Siberian tiger, Brutha Fez's funeral) which brings Eric to consider once again the mystery of death: "But it was the threat of death at the brink of night that spoke to him most surely about some principle of fate he'd always known would come true in time" (107). Death, for DeLillo's postmodern subjects, is the final mystery, and Eric, who has attempted to immunise himself from death, in doing so has become someone who is less than real. Just as he believes that "money has lost its narrative quality", Eric's own existence has ceased to have meaning, shape and form. This seems to trigger his own desire to finally confront his stalker and apparent nemesis, Benno Levin, who recites to Eric the words of St Augustine: "I have become an enigma to myself"(189). Levin says to Eric, "I want to kill you in order to count for something in my own life" (187). Levin, who is seemingly a man of Eric's own creating, therefore desires the death of his "maker"; the system Eric has constructed and its values, or lack thereof, thus comes to implode in on itself. Violent death, as hinted at throughout *Cosmopolis*, becomes the last transcendent narrative remaining to those trapped inside postmodernity's flattened temporal horizon.

DeLillo's novel should therefore be read as a novel which warns us against a headlong rush towards the "white hot future", and a reminder of the potential for a

monolithic, globalised system to collapse under the weight of its own inherent contradictions, with deadly consequences. Such a totalising meta-narrative must necessarily, by its very nature, engender counter-narratives as resistance to globalisation consolidates itself. As the present continues to be contested at the beginning of the third millennium, the words of St Augustine's *City of God* carry a curious resonance:

> Hence, in so far as the general plan of the treatise demands and my ability permits, I must also speak of the earthly city – of that city which lusts to dominate the world and which, though nations bend to its yoke, is itself dominated by its passion for dominion. (*St Augustine* 18)

Part Two: *Millennium People*

J G Ballard is another writer whose novels have increasingly examined the state of postmodernity and what it means to exist within an apparently a-temporal or post-historical age. In his 1995 introduction to *Crash* (1973) Ballard writes

> Increasingly, our concepts of past, present and future are being forced to revise themselves. Just as the past, in social and psychological terms, became a casualty of Hiroshima and the nuclear age, so in its turn the future is ceasing to exist, devoured by the all-voracious present.

Experimental, surrealist, and decidedly apocalyptic, *Crash* describes an a-temporal dystopia and points to the emergence of escalating acts of violence which would seem to be a direct result of our living in a depthless, simulacral and increasingly voyeuristic world. The "extraordinarily demoralising and depressing original new global space" which Jameson (199) suggests is a defining feature of the present epoch helps to explain the violent psychopathologies of Ballard's postmodern subjects who seem to live in a world devoid of meaning, morality and value. Furthermore, Ballard, like Jameson, believes that postmodernity has enmeshed the subject within the fabric of market culture so completely so as to make alternative strategies and narratives an increasingly unlikely prospect. In an interview with Jeanette Baxter, he suggests that "social and political change of a radical kind are virtually impossible …" (Ballard,

Age of Unreason 5). The protagonist of *Millennium People* expresses a similar sentiment after taking part in an abortive suburban revolt in London: "Chelsea Marina was the blueprint for the social protests of the future, for pointless armed uprisings and doomed revolutions, for unmotivated violence and senseless demonstrations" (293).

Like DeLillo, Ballard has identified within the zeitgeist a longing for meaning, and for narratives which transcend the temporal and historical indeterminacy of the postmodern epoch. Elana Gomel rightly says of Ballard's fiction, "By probing the narrative 'time/shape' of the apocalyptic plot, Ballard forces his readers to consider not what might happen after the end, but rather their own desire for time to end" (Gomel 189). Like DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*, Ballard's *Millennium People*, the focus of the second half of this chapter, highlights the conflict between those forces which have sought to bring history to an end and those who seek its continuation, return, or apocalyptic renewal. The architects of apocalypse, that is to say those characters in *Millennium People* for whom violence is held out as a way of escaping from a meaningless present, wish to reconstitute or reanimate the apocalyptic narrative in the hope of their being liberated from an historical terminus.

Published in 2003, *Millennium People* reflects the potential for radical unrest in the postmodern city. Its inherent pessimism reflects postmodernity's failings to answer humanity's search for meaning which the meta-narratives of history formerly provided. Ballard presents us with a quasi-dystopian depiction of disillusionment and an attendant desire to radically reorder time.

David Markham, an industrial psychologist, is unwittingly drawn into the drama of revolution and suburban terrorism following the bombing of a Heathrow airport terminal which claims the life of his ex-wife. Importantly, the word "terminal" in the novel takes on a multi-dimensional meaning, hinting at society's "terminal decline" and the "terminal point" at which the meta-narratives of history have either collapsed or coalesced into one unified narrative commanded by the global market. Peter Koslowski says, "The exhaustion of postmodern energies points to the beginning of the postmodern epoch" (Koslowski (143) and suggests that postmodernity is characterised by a "temporal postponement" (Koslowski 146), and so it is a sort of historical terminus which Markham and the other characters of the novel seem to have found themselves in.

Millennium People is, then, a novel which reflects not only a sense of history having come to an end, but also, more importantly, asks whether it is possible to live a meaningful life inside postmodernity. Markham's character is a means by which Ballard explores the possibility of society's (and his own) willingness to not only identify those forces which constrain or diminish the postmodern subject, but also the latter's readiness to engage in acts of resistance and/or revolution. Markham himself is at times an enigmatic character, deeply cynical and prone to irony, but he is nonetheless sympathetic to the plight of those whose postmodern lives are either stale, oppressive, or meaningless. In the lead-up to the short-lived middle class revolution at Chelsea Marina, Markham observes that "The middle class was the new proletariat, the victims of a centuries old conspiracy, at last throwing off the chains of duty and civic responsibility" (9).

In the course of the Chelsea Marina revolt, David Markham encounters a number of characters who explain the necessity of revolution. One character who seeks to awaken the middle classes from their Althusserian slumber is Kay Churchill, a former film studies lecturer. Kay points to the way in which contemporary culture is designed to ensure docility and passivity and believes that film as an art form no longer challenges the imagination and has simply become "entertainment" (52). Furthermore, history is the object fetish of the Victoria and Albert museum, "an emporium of cultural delusions" (154), while the BBC is, according to Kay, complicit in constructing false consciousness: "They poisoned a whole century. They rotted your mind, David." (118). Kay explains how we are all imprisoned in the gilded cage that is postmodernity:

> Genocidal wars, half the world destitute, the other half sleep walking through its on brain death. We bought the trashy dreams and now we can't wake up. All these hypermarkets and gated communities. Once the doors close, you can never get out. You know all this David. It keeps you in corporate clients. (64)

Kay suggests that the door of (post)modernity is slowly closing and humanity is now reduced to living in a sort of padded cell, with nothing but pointless consumerism left. The Chelsea Marina revolt and the acts of petty terrorism that David is increasingly drawn into signify the attempts by Kay Churchill, the priest Stephen Dexter and the doctor Richard Gould, to (re)awaken class consciousness and to make the middle

classes, people like David Markham, realise how they have become victims of the system which they also unwittingly help to perpetuate. As one character says of the middle classes, "They see that the private schools are brainwashing their children into a kind of social docility, turning them into professionals who will run the show for consumer capitalism" (104). These are people who are living beyond history, ideology and, most importantly, meaning, the epitome of Herbert Marcuse's "one dimensional man". For Kay, art and culture are absorbed into what Adorno called "the prevailing ideology of our time" (Adorno 138), and as such fail to offer a genuine critique or a credible challenge to the system. Unlike DeLillo's Bill Gray, who still holds to the hope that writing might challenge or contest the less desirable aspects of postmodernity in a credible fashion, *Millennium People* would appear to reflect Jameson's contention that we are "so deeply immersed in postmodernist space, so deeply suffused and infected by its new cultural categories, that the luxury of the old-fashioned ideological critique, the indignant moral denunciation of the other, becomes unavailable" (Jameson 197-8). This certainly poses a number of problems for Kay and the other revolutionaries, and questions the validity, or indeed the possibility, of genuine social revolution.

Without exception, all of Ballard's later novels emphasise the social and spiritual malaise which would appear to be a feature of the contemporary Western World. *Super Cannes* (2001), like *Millennium People*, portrays the middle classes, made up of professionals, technocrats and other white collar workers, as both the lackeys and victims of market forces and global corporations, imprisoned in an alienating post-human(ist) and post-Enlightenment world: "Despair was screaming through the bars of the corporate cage, the hunger of men and women exiled from their deeper selves" (258). Like *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Cosmopolis*, Ballard's later novels emphasise the disappearance of progressive or utopian narratives. The apparent death of utopia must therefore go some way to explaining that apocalyptic sense of crisis inside the postmodern epoch.

In Ballard's fiction the disappearance of history and meta-narratives are largely reflected in the alienating constructed landscapes of the postmodern city. Those "Ballardian" constructs which his characters inhabit are cut off from time and history and so it is that in *High-Rise* (1975) we are told "The internal time of the high-rise, like an artificial climate, operated to its own rhythms, generated by a

combination of alcohol and insomnia" (12). In such environments we witness the death of the social, the end of community, and a waning of affect. The Eden Olympia development in *Super-Cannes* exemplifies this depthless and value-less new world and in such a landscape the protagonist, Paul Sinclair, wonders "Where are the moral compass bearings that hold everything together?" (95). Likewise, in *Millennium People* David Markham gazes out upon the post-industrial landscape of London, "a zone without past or future" (168) while Heathrow is imagined to be a "huge illusion, the centre of a world of signs that pointed to nothing" (251).

Furthermore, throughout these novels there is the suggestion that humanity has been shaped not only by where we live, but also through the objects and technologies we live with. *Crash* in particular reveals the extent to which humanity has been altered and alienated by technology, and as the narrator of that novel says, "I realised that the human inhabitants of this technological landscape no longer provided its sharpest pointers, its keys to the borderzones of identity" (36). In a similar manner to *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Crash* describes society's fatal addiction to technology as well as a latent apocalyptic death drive, of which Vaughan is the chief exponent. The narrator of *Crash* comes to realise the sinister nature of Vaughan's addiction to the image of the crash, and of his own inevitable involvement in this death pornography:

> Like everyone else bludgeoned by these billboard harangues and television films of imaginary accidents, I had felt a vague sense of unease that the gruesome climax of my life was being rehearsed years in advance, and would take place on some highway or road junction, known only to the makers of these films. (28)

For Ballard, the enacting and expectation of apocalyptic violence seems to be both a consequence of, and a reaction to, postmodern existence. Ballard's car crash, like Pynchon's rocket, shows us the inevitable destruction and chaos which necessarily accompanies humankind's investment in technology. In this way both Pynchon and Ballard offer a severe critique of the meta-narrative of science which would appear to have subordinated humanity to its own terrible internal logic. Science and technology come to be seen as the handmaidens of the system, perpetuating humanity's reliance on the monolithic master-narrative of global capital and consumerism. The television screen, the automobile, and many other seemingly familiar and innocuous objects thus become the target of an alienated humanity's rage and despair.

The first step in David's awakening comes with his involvement in the burning of the National Film Theatre which, according to Kay Churchill's logic, is representative of society's enslavement to the entertainment industry. These violent acts of terrorism, masterminded by Richard Gould, excite in David a latent or repressed desire to deconstruct and destroy his own comfortable, middle class existence. His divided self is further revealed as he reflects upon his own part in the destruction:

> I had taken part in a serious crime, against a museum of film and my memories of my first wife, but I felt curiously uninvolved. I was an actor standing in for the real self in who lay asleep beside Sally in St John's Wood. A dream of violence had escaped from my head into the surrounding streets, driven on by the promise of change. (127)

David's wife is astute enough to realise how a part of him has thrilled in the violence: "The meaningless violence – it excited you" (161). What therefore starts off ostensibly as a detective story plot becomes a psychological inquiry into the mind of the contemporary British middle classes, and, arguably, into the mind of Ballard himself. Andrjez Gasiorek is right to suggest that "Ballard's late novels lay bare the psychopathologies of everyday life in a post-humanist world" (Gasiorek 20) and like Baudrillard, who equates postmodernity with "the destruction of meaning" (Baudrillard, *Simulacra*161), Ballard's characters are in revolt against the artificiality and meaninglessness of postmodern existence. Just as Friedrich Nietzsche in the nineteenth century proclaimed "the advent of nihilism", David Markham imagines that "A vicious boredom ruled the world, for the first time in human history, interrupted by meaningless acts of violence" (28).

Millennium People therefore describes an orphaned humanity that has been cut adrift from its ontological moorings. The latent psychopathologies of the novel's characters are a reflection of the indifferent and deeply individualistic society they inhabit. They would also in some ways appear to be victims of the disappearance of meta-narratives such as progress, which provided ideologies and morals grounded in notions of community and civic society. Markham himself is the product of a dysfunctional family life, and he and his wife Sally live largely separate and estranged lives. Furthermore, Markham is used as a tool by Gould's revolutionary clique, not

least when it is revealed later in the novel that Gould was attempting to kill Markham in the Heathrow bombing. Despite the threat to his own safety and the increasingly deranged behaviour of those around him, Markham is drawn towards the perverse spectacle of violence and social anarchy. Lacking a proper family of his own, Markham sees in Gould and his associates a revolutionary brotherhood. Reflecting upon his own desire to find meaning in a worthy cause, Markham articulates this apparently shared need to rediscover meaning and purpose: "At times, as I joined a demonstration against animal experiments or Third World debt, I sensed that a primitive religion was being born, a faith in search of a God to worship" (38). Instead of finding a religion as such, Markham creates a Kurtz-like idol of Gould, the one person who in his madness would appear to be able to confront the possibility of nihilism:

> The gods have died, and so we distrust our dreams. We emerge from the void, stare back at it for a short while, and then rejoin the void. A young woman lies dead on her doorstep. A pointless crime, but the world pauses. We listen, and the universe has nothing to say. There's only silence, so we have to speak. (261)

In a way which suggests that Gould is Markham's alter-ego, Richard Gould cites Markham's own book when reminding him of the human search for meaning: "You said that only a psychopath can cope with the notion of zero to a million decimal places" (136). Another of Gould's disciples, won over by his strangely seductive logic, says, "Richard says that people who find the world meaningless find meaning in pointless violence" (81). Gould's quest for an ever-more pointless or gratuitous act of violence would therefore seem to be a challenge to a post-Enlightenment society's faith in rationalism and secularism, as well as a gloomy prediction of where humanity might be headed inside postmodernity.

Despite his apparent madness and ruthlessness, Richard Gould is to David's mind a sort of savant or messiah. As David later reflects "He (Richard) was trying to find meaning in the most meaningless times, the first of a new kind of desperate man who refuses to bow before the arrogance of existence and the tyranny of space-time" (292). Gould becomes the embodiment of Nietzsche's *ubermensch*, a new kind of post-historical, postmodern subject who creates value. He is both a Zarathustra and a Kurtz, one who seeks to transcend his historical predicament as well as one who has

seen into the heart of darkness and embraces its fearful consequences. For Gould, apocalyptic violence is the only reality left to the individual who lives within the deadened space of "post-history", theorised by Lutz Niethammer as "a mortal life lived without any seriousness or struggle, in the regulated boredom of a perpetual reproduction of modernity on a world scale" (Niethammer 3). Violence for Gould therefore becomes, rather perversely, a life-affirming value, whereby humanity (re)discovers ideas of free will, agency, and autonomy.

In this way, Gould continually stresses the importance of random or seemingly pointless acts of destruction which necessarily transcend any rational motive:

> Blow up the stock exchange and you're rejecting global capitalism. Bomb the Ministry of Defence and you're protesting against war … But a truly pointless act of violence, shooting at random into a crowd, grips our attention for months. The absence of rational motive carries a significance of its own. (194)

As in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, to which *Millennium People* owes a considerable amount of its thematic inspiration, anarchistic violence is instrumental in fomenting chaos, and is perhaps less about making a political statement as it is about instilling fear and loathing in society as a whole; as the First Secretary suggests to Verloc, "A bomb outrage to have any influence on public opinion now must go beyond the intention of vengeance or terrorism. It must be purely destructive" (35). Throughout *The Secret Agent*, the act of terror is held out as a way of rejecting the project of modernity by rejecting outright all those values which have gone into its creation and is an attempt to destroy the ontological and epistemological foundations of society. In a discussion of this novel in *History and Value* (1998) Frank Kermode writes, "In Conrad's novel London is the world metropolis, and the bomb plot against Greenwich observatory is an attempt on the heart of the world and the wholeness of the world" (Kermode, *History* 136). Such an observation accords with Markham's own views on destructive violence: "A terrorist bomb not only killed its victims, but forced a violent rift through time and space, and ruptured the logic that held the world together" (182). This destructive terror is therefore equated with the apocalyptic sublime, an event beyond the pale of rational order or representation and a singularly authentic act.

The apocalyptic violence of *Millennium People* thus appears to be a reflection of an exhausted society's desire to see the reanimation of history and historical direction. Violence becomes a means of overthrowing the tyranny of empty, static, or recycled time. In the absence of meaningful or teleological grand narratives and opposing dialectics, this staged violence expresses a return to apocalyptic-utopian revolutionary acts instigated against a society which is, as Gould suggests, "in flight from the real" (133). Likewise, the thuggish Wilder Penrose of *Super-Cannes* suggests to Paul Sinclair that "In a totally sane society, madness is the only freedom" (264). Yet it is unclear whether Gould is a Danton, a genuine revolutionary hero, or a mad Robespierre, consumed with the idea of violence as an end in itself. Gould's apocalyptic theology, "Violence is like a bush fire, it destroys a lot of trees but refreshes the forest, clears away the stifling undergrowth, so more trees spring up" (177), carries with it no assurance of a coming utopia, and as Markham reflects at the end of the novel, "Violence, as Richard Gould once said, should always be gratuitous, and no serious revolution should ever achieve its aims" (293). The rather depressing implication of such a statement reflects a loss of faith in all progressive, revolutionary, or utopian grand narratives, a truly nihilistic position. Furthermore, the climactic point of the novel in which Markham discovers that it is Gould who has in fact murdered the popular young female television presenter, and furthermore, planted the bomb which killed Markham's ex-wife, leaves us with little to believe that Gould's violence holds out the potential for positive change.

Bizarrely, Markham's reaction to Gould's admission of guilt in his wife's murder, in which he was also an ostensible target, is one of enhanced understanding and even of liberation: "The long search for Laura's murderer had come to an end and, by claiming to have killed her, this demented paediatrician had set me free" (263). The suggestion here is that Markham, like his mentor Gould, has been liberated from the remaining vestiges of morality and the imagined "false consciousness" which he has hitherto been controlled by. This conclusion suggests either a deeply sinister development in terms of the complete shedding of any remaining values and the further implosion of the social, or it hints at a new fearless realisation on the part of Markham as to his enslavement within the system, and the necessity of resisting it. Either way, Markham experiences an apocalyptic event on the personal level, leaving him changed, for better or for worse. What such an epiphany means for society as a whole is less clear, but *Millennium People* certainly points to the possible collapse of

societies no longer guided by meaningful narratives and whose subjects no longer have a sense of their living a meaningful existence.

In an essay entitled *The Intimacy of Terror*, Jean-Francois Lyotard writes

> When the head of Louis XVI was cut off in January 1793 in the Place de la Revolution, God was the one whose word was cut off. The republic, and hence interlocution, can only be founded upon a deicide; it begins with the nihilist assertion that there is no Other. Are these the beginnings of an orphaned humanity? (Lyotard, *Intimacy* 186)

In the absence of those historical dialectics which have traditionally propelled the course of history, and perpetually reinvigorated it with apparent meaning and value, humanity would indeed appear to be "orphaned": both *Cosmopolis* and *Millennium People* examine the potential consequences of humanity's being divorced from the values and narratives which give shape and meaning to existence. Furthermore, both novels hint at an apocalyptic desire to rediscover or re-establish new values and historical narratives which contest or indeed reject the contemporary global socio-political model. Eric Packer in *Cosmopolis* and David Markham in *Millennium People* are, respectively, implicated in such a monolithic system, and in both cases they come to see the possibility of alternative strategies and narratives which have slowly emerged to oppose the system. The dark suggestion which is implied in both novels is that the end of the prevailing global narrative(s) would not necessarily come peacefully, and that some sort of apocalyptic upheaval might accompany or enact its departure. The last sentence of John R Hall's *Apocalypse* attests to the apocalyptic uncertainty which both novels articulate, and, in an age of terror, I would suggest that this quote is decidedly apposite:

> Whether God is dead or alive, or lives in us, we will either find a general basis for affirming the sacredness of existence, or we will descend into a new netherworld where even violence has lost its meaning, where the time of modernity has faded, history as we invented it has ended, the last apocalypse arrived. (Hall 226)

Conclusion

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed
away, and the sea was no more.
-Rev. 21: 1

The narrative ends in the rubble and it is left to us to create the counter-narrative. (34)
-Don DeLillo *In the Ruins of the Future*

      In the introduction to this thesis I quoted Patricia Waugh in her view that the
postmodern is apocalyptic in its sense of crisis. In the four subsequent chapters we
have encountered four novelists who have given expression to this sense of crisis and
who have, in different ways, responded to the apocalyptic narrative. It would seem
that Waugh's formulation largely holds true, in that a very real sense of apocalyptic
crisis, urgency, or anticipation is encountered in these novels and in the epoch we
have come to call the postmodern.

      One factor that clearly goes into shaping this postmodern sense of crisis is the
breakdown, fracturing, or loss of the meta-narrative, and with it those utopian or
eschatological expectations which the apocalyptic meta-narrative promises to fulfil. In
the religious meta-narratives of the Judeo-Christian biblical tradition, the faithful
awaited history's imminent conclusion, with the promise that a utopia would follow.
In a similar way, certain secular ideologies, one of the most important of these being
Marxism, also held out the promise that history would see some apocalyptic
resolution or fulfilment of the historical process. However, (post)modernity has
questioned our faith in those various historicisms which suppose that an inherent
meaning, value, or direction exists within the historical process. In this way, the
apocalyptic narrative, where it is taken seriously, has commonly taken on a negative
character, supposing either catastrophic or entropic endings without an attendant
utopia and as Krishnan Kumar suggests, "It is only in the twentieth century that the
two – millennium and utopia – have seriously parted company from each other"
(Kumar 214).

      We might then suppose a loss of confidence as being an important aspect of
the postmodern condition; a sense of doubt and crisis in the present, coupled with a
sense of uncertainty with regards to the future. I have suggested that *Gravity's*

Rainbow articulates the desire to (re)construct a coherent narrative out of the chaos and destruction of the twentieth century. *Gravity's Rainbow* also describes the dialectic that operates between eschatological and anti-eschatological ideas of history, in the same way that Graham Swift's *Waterland* does so. Both *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Waterland* are centred within periods of history that are felt to be somehow apocalyptic, and many of their respective characters respond to this sense of crisis by deferring to the apocalyptic meta-narrative which anticipates endings followed by millennial return and renewal. However, there are other characters in both of these novels, as well as in Don DeLillo's *Mao II*, who show a decided "incredulity towards meta-narratives" (Lyotard 123), and an unwillingness to endorse eschatological approaches to time and history, whether they are redemptive-utopian or pessimistic-dystopian. This is exemplified by Tom Crick's belief that history is something random, chaotic, and non-directional, and that meta-narratives such as progress, utopia, and apocalypse have been artificially created: "Which only goes to show that if the end of the world didn't exist it would be necessary to invent it" (291). Crick's history lesson teaches that historical narratives are human inventions, and in this way the apocalyptic narrative is no different to any other; indeed, as John Gray suggests, it is "an anthropocentric myth" (Gray 209).

However, despite Crick's assurances that the apocalyptic narrative, like any other narrative, is an artificially constructed one, he cannot get away from another possibility, in that to deny the legitimacy of the meta-narrative and ideas of historical direction also implies the possibility of an associated loss of meaning and value. To discount the possibility of meaningful direction or a teleological purpose inside history, and in showing that history repeats itself in cycles and regressions, suggests that social and political struggles might simply be for nothing. There is the implication here, that beneath the fairytales and stories that make up history, there is a hollow void of existential absurdity. If all that really exists for certain is the "Here and Now", the eternal present, how does humanity regain its sense of purpose and not become a species condemned to a pointless Sisyphean existence?

This is largely the dilemma which confronts the characters of Don DeLillo's *Mao II* and *Cosmopolis*, and J G Ballard's *Millennium People*. Interestingly, *Mao II* gives some of its best lines to terrorists and their apologists, the latter suggesting that "Terror begins with a handful of people in a back room" (158). History has proven the truth of such a statement, and September 11 has shown what twelve men fired by

religious fervour of an apocalyptic nature can accomplish in the way of changing the course of history. *Mao II*, *Cosmopolis*, and *Millennium People* show how apocalyptic violence becomes a new guiding force in history, one which is able to shake us out of our postmodern complacency or indifference. These novels suggest, however, that the descent into something even worse than postmodern resignation is possible, whereby terrorism operates according to no persuasive logic or political agenda but only in accordance with the murderous deed itself. Indeed, in *Millennium People* violence would seem to beget violence for its own sake and the principle architect of the struggle suggests that "no serious revolution should ever achieve its aims" (293). Faced with the nihilistic prospect that any political struggle has become ineffective or pointless implies a certain defeatism or, indeed, a *nihilism* inherent in postmodern approaches to history. A number of theorists of the postmodern seem to suggest that this is exactly what has happened, and that we are now no longer, strictly speaking, historical subjects. Importantly, Gianni Vattimo suggests that "If we no longer live in the framework of one or another metarecit, we no longer live historically" (Vattimo 134). Such ideas are expressed in all five of the novels encountered in this thesis and are indicative of that postmodern sense of crisis which Waugh hypothesises. In this way, the apocalyptic sense of crisis is not only occasioned by some final, irrevocable, and cataclysmic event as traditionally imagined, or heightened through a clash of competing ideologies as witnessed inside modernity, but is also depicted through the idea of a *post*-apocalyptic world in which history has run its course and fallen into obsolescence.

The apocalyptic sense of crisis which we encounter throughout these novels must therefore reflect a wider crisis in (post)modernity's having dispensed with many of those historical meta-narratives which provided ontological and epistemological coherency and meaning for previous generations of people. One of the predominant challenges of postmodernity would therefore involve filling up the vacuum left behind by those apparently lost meta-narratives with alternative positions whereby authentic value and meaning might be (re)discovered. This is of course not to say that for millions of people around the world certain historical, religious and political meta-narratives haven't retained their integrity and importance, and are, perhaps, just as meaningful as ever. Indeed, the crisis of postmodernity might well be a product of the continuing *clash* of meta-narratives, especially those of a religious, political or economic nature; indeed, *Mao II*, *Cosmopolis*, and *Millennium People* reflect such a

collision between competing ideologies. In this way John R Hall suggests that the apocalyptic narrative will continue to be of importance to many people inside the postmodern epoch: "Apocalyptic religious violence now portends a new structuring of modernity's empire, a new, postmodern apocalyptic epoch, the form of which remains as yet open to the play of events." (Hall 164)

All five of the novels I have chosen to study, in one way or another, imagine the continuation of the apocalyptic narrative, but perhaps more in terms of a psychological and deeply subjective sense of crisis than was imagined in past ages, whereby whole societies anticipated the final, irrevocable apocalyptic event. The apocalyptic narrative might therefore be seen less in terms of a commanding meta-narrative so much as it is a recurring psychological theme within the postmodern consciousness. In *Mao II*, Bill Gray fears that "writers are being consumed by the emergence of news as an apocalyptic force" (72), a statement which reflects both the power of terrorism in shaping the consciousness of individuals and societies, as well as the sense of immanence associated with televised disaster. Such phenomena might be read as very much apocalyptic, if one assumes that the apocalypse can no longer be thought of as a single eschatological event, but instead as a recurring narrative of fear, destruction and death. Furthermore, so-called apocalyptic events inside the postmodern are very much staged or viewed phenomena, mediated by the television screen, cinema screen, or computer screen, and so familiar to us so as to discount the very possibility of such an event. I believe this is what Jean Baudrillard means when he writes that "The real event of the Apocalypse is behind us, among us, and we are instead confronted with the virtual reality of the Apocalypse, with the posthumous comedy of the Apocalypse" (Baudrillard, *Vital* 36). Perhaps what Pynchon, Swift, DeLillo, Ballard, and Baudrillard are all hinting at is the *nostalgia* for the apocalypse, for an event which now seems either impossible or unimaginable. Postmodernity thus reduces the apocalypse to the endless expectation of cataclysmic but unfulfilled events, plural.

I end this thesis with the suggestion that the apocalyptic crisis of postmodernity is occasioned by an abiding schizophrenia. Our postmodern condition, which on the one hand shows a decided incredulity towards the meta-narrative, nonetheless persists in its desire for the return or reconstruction of (lost) meta-narratives. The apocalyptic narrative, while it has been alternatively embraced, dismissed out of hand, or mythologised, is nonetheless a recurring one that no amount

of postmodern incredulity can hope to completely undermine or dispel. So long as humanity is able to conceive of the very concept of the future, someone, somewhere, will always be able to anticipate its eventual end.

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