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Millenarian Moderns: A Study of Utopian Desire

Brisbois, Michael

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Millenarian Moderns: A Study of Utopian Desire

By

Michael J. Brisbois

A THESIS

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the influence of millenarian and utopian thought in Modernist poetry. Drawing on an interdisciplinary framework of literary studies, history, anthropology, and political science, I argue that the violence of the early twentieth century necessitated a movement towards millenarian thought in order to express a positive image of future. By focusing on the poems and essays of W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and W. H. Auden, Modernism is shown to express a millenarian conception of the future in response to the socio-cultural pressures of modernity. These poets create a historical period ranging from 1885-1973 which permits a chronological approach and allows my argument to trace the shifts and developments how the period and its poets represent the future. Modernism's turn towards experimental forms and an increased exploration of subjectivity reflect an attempt to construct a radical, utopian idea of the world to come.

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I have searched in several communities to find some form of wisdom more enduring than the present. I have found glimpses of truth, but rarely beyond the joy of family. My son, Christopher—and the future he will face—was a constant motivation and distraction during the writing of this study and so this is a work best dedicated to him.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Dedication	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures	vi
Epigraph.....	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
A. Defining Millenarianism	1
Millenarianism and Modernism	3
The Origins of Millenarianism	11
The Spectrum of the Future	15
The Academic Study of Millenarianism	21
B. Millenarian Narratives	36
Burridge’s Anthropological Model.....	42
Overview of this Study.....	47
CHAPTER ONE: THE <i>FIN DE SIÈCLE</i> , 1885-1900.....	49
The Occult Orders of W. B. Yeats.....	52
The Irish Poet.....	68
CHAPTER TWO: PROGRESS TO CRISIS, 1900-1920	81
Yeats: Theatre, Politics, and Revolution.....	84
T. S. Eliot: Tradition, History, and Faith.....	105
CHAPTER THREE: HIGH MODERNISM, 1921-1930	124
Eliot’s Trivium: <i>The Waste Land</i> , <i>The Hollow Men</i> , and <i>Ash Wednesday</i>	129
Yeats’s Byzantium.....	162
CHAPTER FOUR: UTOPIAN IDEOLOGIES, 1931-1937.....	172
Yeats’s Vision.....	174
Eliot and the Heresy of Heterodoxy	184
Auden in England	188
CHAPTER FIVE: UTOPIAN CONFLICTS, 1937-1946.....	206
The Loss of a Visionary	209
The Utopia of Continuity	221
A New Homeland	242
CHAPTER SIX: THE CHANGING CENTURY, 1946-1973	265
The Age of Anxiety	267
Meditating on the Pre-Millennium.....	285
A Utopia in Language	304
CONCLUSION	320
WORKS CITED.....	328

List of Figures

Figure 1: The Historical Cones of Yeats's <i>A Vision</i>	181
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Accordingly, the poet should prefer probable impossibilities to improbable possibilities.

— *Aristotle, Poetics, XXIV.10*

INTRODUCTION

Since we continue to 'prescribe laws to nature'—Kant's phrase, and we do—we shall continue to have a relation with the paradigms, but we shall change them to make them go on working. If we cannot break free of them, we must make sense of them.

— Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, 24.

A. Defining Millenarianism

Studying millenarianism is like opening Pandora's Box; once opened, millenarianism unleashes its attended terms upon the reader: apocalypse and utopia, nihilism and dystopia, the Fall and the Golden Age. It takes very little effort to find these forces at work in our modern culture, whether popular or elite, religious or secular. As in the myth of Pandora, millenarianism's final gift is always the hope at the bottom of the box, for the millenarian impulse imagines a better world (however much the clause of "better" may be partisan to the needs of the dreamer). No matter how far back in written history one looks, traces of millenarian thought can be found. As early as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the world is a fallen place and perhaps, just perhaps, the titular hero of the world's oldest recorded story might be able to overcome death if he can uncover the secrets of the world which existed before his. Gilgamesh finds the two survivors of the world before the flood, Utanapishtim and his wife, who tell him the secret of renewed

youth, a secret promptly stolen from the hero by a serpent. In the end, the dream is lost and Gilgamesh is laid to rest in state, the gifts of the prelapsarian world lost and his dream of a new age unrealized.

Modernism, with its sense of fragmentation and its struggle to represent subjectivity, is a strange echo of *Gilgamesh*. Many of the problems Gilgamesh faces resonate with the Modern period: the sense that the world was once better, more coherent, less fragmented, that death did not undo so many as it does now (to paraphrase one of the poets of this study). Gilgamesh's quest for knowledge of the earlier, not-yet-Fallen world is akin to the way many Modernists turn to more distant figures, reaching past the Enlightenment and Renaissance to claim the influence of older traditions—Celtic Mythology, Dante, or Augustine—in order to use these mythologies to counter modernity. Like the heroic King of Ur, this quest backwards was really meant to guarantee a future. Gilgamesh seeks immortality to secure his reign and make the present eternal, while many Modernists sought to find new modes of expression to inspire a better world.

This study will focus on three very significant, very central figures in Modernism: W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, and W. H. Auden. The argument of this study is that Modernism, and Modernist Poetry in particular, is deeply millenarian in its vision of the future. Without the concept of a utopian and millenarian future, Modernist poetry would have been incapable of finding expression and maintaining poetry's relevance during the early twentieth century. Millenarian thinking goes beyond ideas of prophecy or meditation to offer a scaffold upon which Yeats, Eliot, and Auden construct a literary and intellectual response to nihilism and catastrophe.

There are other authors that would make good subjects of analysis—Ezra Pound or D. H. Lawrence to name two possible writers—but the choice of poets made here is very deliberate in its conventionality and canonicity. The utopian impulse was not a small one among the authors of the early twentieth century, nor was it found in minor or marginal figures, a fact that conflicts with some of the most common academic theories of millenarianism. Millenarian thought has been consistently and broadly interpreted as a liminal, extreme, or insane expression of the human mind, and the wide acceptance and importance of Yeats, Eliot, and Auden as poets and literary figures helps to counter such claims.

Millenarianism and Modernism

Although the primary focus of this introduction is to define millenarianism and its relationship to literature, it is important to nonetheless elaborate on the concept of Modernism. To be “modern” is to be related not only to the present, which might be more properly considered “contemporary,” but it is also to place certain values at the forefront of one’s thought. In many ways, the most important sensibility “modern” carries with it is a sense of advancement or even rationality. Simultaneously though, any literary definition of “Modernism” will emphasize the subjective or fragmented nature of its expression, an aesthetic quality which attempts to express new perceptions of human experience. The apparent gulf between being “modern” and Modern is in part one of erudition—Modernist works are often complex, daunting linguistic constructions which demand a

sophisticated reader. This in turn, affords them a prestige among educated circles and differentiates them from more populist forms of literature.

Even as Modernism is a subjective aesthetic, it is still based in an engagement with rationalism. One example of this is the way Modernism explores the tension between Freud's rational scientific methodology and his construction of a psychological unconscious. The Modernist use of myth is influenced by the anthropological thought of its day, drawn to the idea found in Frazer's *Golden Bough* that we can understand the original sources of religious ritual and belief. Even in its most abstract form, Modernist literature attempts to systemize, to order, and to be understood rationally and emotionally (otherwise, "why write?" becomes the operative question).

The periodization of Modernism presents a serious challenge to scholars, in large part because it has been suggested that Modernism is both a historical moment and an aesthetic style. Peter Childs summarizes the historical period as 1890-1930, but also notes that those who argue for the stylistic perspective find Modernism in much earlier figures, such as John Donne or Laurence Sterne (19). A contemporary textbook insists the period is from 1890 to 1950, with earlier influences in the nineteenth century (Day 1). Another oft-cited claim is Virginia Woolf's phrase "on or about December 1910, human character changed" (421), but this starting date seems quite late compared to the general scholarly consensus.

One example of the aesthetic school of Modernism is Hugh Kenner's *The Pound Age*. This idiosyncratic and playful approach to the period emphasizes the thematic quality of experimentation. Kenner pushes the period back to Henry James, for the reason

that he made a great impression upon Pound (7), but Kenner ultimately focuses on what he calls “the ‘Men of 1914’”: Pound, Eliot, Joyce, and Wyndham Lewis (550-551). These figures were engaged in a radical attempt to reshape art and expression, to the exclusion of all others:

They had come of age to commence that revolution, and been old enough after Europe blew up instead to know what had been lost in that vast amnesia. Yeats’s generation, Ford’s, for whom they were ‘les jeunes,’ was too old to make the transition, Auden’s too young to know what needed transferring. (553)

The revolution Kenner describes is really the culmination of the Victorian continual present, and so it is tempting to argue that Kenner’s aesthetics are really the announcement of a millenarian response to World War I. But this is not the case, as Yeats was engaged in millenarian ideals long before the war, and while the war was certainly a great catalyst for millenarian and catastrophic thought, the social pressures it created do not culminate until Auden’s generation. As compelling as Kenner’s insights are, they fail to address the whole of Modernism, or even the whole of Anglo-American Modernism. There are further problems with Kenner’s theory of an aesthetic Modernism. The first is its entirely masculine personage.¹ The second is Kenner’s rather strategic avoidance of the period’s political and social movements, a practice which allows him to ignore Pound’s infamous Fascism (Surette, *Dreams* xi).

Later scholarship moved away from the isolated literature of Kenner and the New Criticism to embrace a wider range of textual and contextual approaches. A representative

¹ For a more detailed critique, see Eysteinnsson 88-90.

text of this period is Leon Surette's *The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats and the Occult*. Surette is manifestly aware that his thesis—"to bring the occult provenance of portions of literary modernism into a harsher light" (5)—was something of a "radical revision of the standard view" (ix). For Surette, the occult's influence on Modernism had been overlooked because it was distasteful or counter to prevailing attitudes, describing "modernist scholars [as]...loath to grant any serious attention to the acknowledged occult provenance of Yeats's poetry and drama" (5). His claim may be a bit broad—some scholars had written on Yeats's occultism—but the extension of this claim to Pound and Eliot was potentially divisive.

Surette's methodology does not embrace the 1980s and 1990s interest in literary theory, but an important work that does is Astradur Eysteinnsson's *The Concept of Modernism*. His argument emphasizes a process of exchange by which scholars valorized Modernist texts in order to build their own reputations: "The fact that modernism was gaining significant ground at a time when literature was become a 'respectable' field of academic study is salient" (76). Modernism and its complexity helped to lend authority to critics like I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis and stressed the difficulty of studying English as a discipline. We might therefore be cautious, perhaps even cynical, about Modernism, seeing it as the product of intellectual elitism or social oppression.

But to reject Modernism is not entirely possible—Eysteinnsson does not reject it and so we should not. One should recognize that Modernism is not necessarily the mainstream of its society, but it is an important and vital social expression. Just as it is possible to use Romantic motifs and not be from the Romantic period, it is equally possible to be a

Modernist and not belong to what many would call “High Modernism.” This position may create a cul-de-sac of logic, wherein it is impossible to periodize and yet also necessary to periodize the Moderns. For the purposes of this study, I will use Modern, Modernism, or Modernist to denote the period most broadly conceived of as “Modernist” — 1890-1945— and to suggest a kind of aesthetic project described most generally as a “tendency of experimental literature of the early twentieth century to break away from traditional verse forms, narrative techniques and generic conventions in order to seek new methods of representation appropriate to life in an urban, industrial, mass-oriented age” (Lewis *Modernism* xvi). The periodization used here also connects the idea that Modernism moves away from the Victorian conception of the future as a better present towards a conception of the future as a utopia. After the end of World War II and the rise of the nuclear weapon, both literature and society begin to shift towards different models of the future. However, it is worth noting that the experience of modernity has not ended, nor have we settled the question or “crisis” of representing modernity (Lewis xvii). This is in part due to the fact that modernity and modern are tropes, which, as Stephen Ross notes, “names a break with the past and establishes the current moment as qualitatively distinct and new” (3). The supposed Modernist break with the past is not as dramatic as the slogan of “make it new” might suggest. This is in part because there are two further points to be made about Modernism, both of which underscore its millenarianism. First, there is the matter of religion and modernism, and second, the influence of organic community on modernist thought.

Pericles Lewis's recent study of Modernist prose, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, argues that Modernism is keenly aware of religion and spirituality. Lewis connects Romanticism's turn from churches to nature to Modernism's turn from nature to society: "If the romantics pursued a 'natural supernaturalism,' for the Modernists it was no longer nature but society that embodied the power once understood as supernatural. There was a social supernaturalism" (4). This social supernaturalism can be connected to the millenarianism of its authors, as arguments towards utopia are an important social force during the period.

Modernism negotiates a place for the sacred and irrational in a world witness to radical technological and social change. Lewis links the period's concern with Freud's analysis of the twin drives of sex and death with a similar concern over Durkheim's ideas of the sacred and profane to serve as examples of how Modernism struggled with modernity and religion. In its exploration of what Lewis calls "mysteries," Modernism acknowledges "the limits of secularization" (20-21). Due to his focus on prose, Lewis is forced to approach the subject differently: "Perhaps because its characteristic concerns are sociological or anthropological rather than spiritual, the novel tends to approach the sacred more obliquely than poetry" (4). Despite the difficulty of his approach, he is able to address a wide range of authors—James, Proust, Joyce, Kafka, and Woolf—and demonstrates if not the religiosity of Modernism, then at least its spirituality.

Interestingly, Lewis links Modernist poetry and religion in his introduction, suggesting that "a study of religious experience in Modernist poetry could certainly be undertaken" (4). He even stresses the line of Yeats, Eliot, and Auden (as I do here), but

does not develop it. While this dissertation is not exactly a study of religious experience, millenarianism is often a key element of such experiences. Poetry is more suited to the expression of faith and mysticism and where the novel may engage with Durkheim's social model of religions, the poem better engages with William James's more individual model. However, I would suggest that the study of religious experience in Modernism must consider how the individual experience of faith works in a dynamic setting of social millenarian forces like Fascism and Communism. While poetry may deal with individual religious desires, Modernist poets often combine their personal and social goals in their verse, such as Yeats's "The Second Coming," Eliot's *The Waste Land*, or Auden's "Memorial for the City." Modernism is therefore neither secular nor irreligious, but engaged in a serious exploration of its meaning and place in modernity.

The second element of Modernism that highlights a need to understand its millenarianism is the period's interest in organic communities. This term is used to reflect the idea that cultures or groups were originally more unified and that unity was the result of their physical, linguistic, and social environment; essentially the community is organic as opposed to syncretic, multicultural, or artificial. In *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams traces the development of this concept to Edmund Burke and the Romantic period (11). In this line of thinking, the development of organic cultures occurs simultaneously with Edward Young's valorization of originality, an argument that Williams suggests is rhetorically necessary due to industrialization (37). The growing capitalist and industrial base of society was so violent that notions of a better past were necessary, as were ideas of intellectual copyright. While the idea of organic and original

cultures remains highly influential, it is also possible to extend Williams's discussion further back, certainly to Hesiod's idea of a golden age in his *Works and Days*, suggesting the longing for organic communities is pre-modern. Clearly, the idea of an organic community is an indication of a human longing for a time when life and culture was unified, essentially a lost utopia.

Such communities do not exist, of course. Williams indicates this in *The Country and the City* as he examines the idea of a golden age: "When we moved back in time, consistently directed to an earlier and happier rural England, we could find no place, no period, in which we could seriously rest" (35). Williams means that every period of literature has produced a prior organic community to valorize, a period in the past when things were better. This idealization of a non-existent idyllic past is likely a necessary part of how humans think about the future, in particular how individuals and societies communicate utopian ideas.

For Modernism, that ideal of the organic community is most readably applied to the Middle Ages. Yeats's interest in an organic Irish culture, Eliot's use of Dante as an organic poet, and Auden's idealization of the Sagas as organic literature are important indications of this focus. Jed Rasula, through his analysis of Reinhart Koselleck's *Critique and Crisis*, has argued that modernity is only to be overcome by a constant movement "into the future—hence its (and any subsequent) utopianism" (238). Rasula's argument is situated in medieval studies (it is included in a collection titled *The Legitimacy of the Middle Ages*), but he does reflect on a key element of millenarianism that is transhistorical: the combination of past and future. The Moderns, he argues, "for all their imputed

derelictions...were if anything hypersensitive to the past, feeling it 'deep in their bones' as Eliot put it" (239). Fredric Jameson concludes the volume by extending Rasula's argument a bit further: "our own genres—Modernism in one way, science fiction in another—also seek desperately to escape our force field and the force of gravity of our own historical moment" (246). While Jameson demurs to elaborate on the subject of fantasy, calling it "too closely backwards to the area of sheer personal taste," fantasy literature in one line of Tolkien's influence is engaged in a similar attempt to create a golden age out of the medieval. The fact that the fantasy genre crystalizes over the same period of time as Modernism, arriving at a distinct derivation of the romance, indicates that the utopian impulse of the period was widespread. Ultimately, Modernism and the early twentieth century appealed to the idea of an organic community that predated the Enlightenment in order to construct a model of utopia.

The Origins of Millenarianism

The future Modernism envisions is not one of incremental and coherent progress, but of radical transcendence: millenarianism. Many of the terms associated with millenarianism—apocalypse, future, Armageddon, utopia and dystopia—are important enough on their own to be to the subject of book length studies, as Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*, Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future*, or Peter Y. Paik's *From Utopia to Apocalypse: Science Fiction and the Politics of Catastrophe* exemplify. The complexity of terminology that surrounds millenarian studies is only compounded by what Crawford Gribben and Timothy C. F. Stunt describe in their collection *Prisoners of Hope* as a "lack of

an agreed vocabulary of inquiry” (3). Scholars variously use the terms millenarianism and millennialism as synonyms, or consider millennialism a specific expression of millenarianism, and vice versa. Faced with such changes in meaning, scholars sometimes choose to do away with “millenarianism” and argue for a restoration of the word “apocalypse” to its original meaning of sudden revelation, arguing against the contemporary use of apocalypse to describe end-of-civilization scenarios.²

Perhaps the most direct way to define millenarianism is to describe it simply as a socio-cultural response to alienation or disenfranchisement that combines an idealized past with a desire for imminent redemption in order to create a hopeful, utopian society in the future. Such a definition is serviceable and encapsulates the most important and most salient developments in current research, but it lacks a historical or contextual grounding. Conventionally, millenarianism is most often associated with the religions of Abraham and with Christianity specifically. It is certainly true that *The Epic of Gilgamesh* may contain some elements of millenarianism, but it is a story more concerned with the present than the future and is more about a great king’s fear of death than a vision of heaven on earth. However, the influence of pre-Judaic thought should not be immediately overlooked.

John J. Collins, in his work *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, convincingly demonstrates the importance of the pre-Christian basis of millenarianism in Judaism, and has argued that the Babylonian context of books such as Enoch and Daniel had a profound influence

² This approach sometimes overlooks the sense of nihilism that the word apocalypse now carries with it, and attempts to shut out secular ideas of social collapse or rejuvenation, creating an artificial distinction. At their roots, there is little difference between mystical and material dreams of demise: they originate from the same human desire to understand history and to codify cultural narratives. Stripped of the Second Coming or Ragnarök, the secular mind creates new ideas of the end and these faithless scenarios serve the same purpose as the religious: to structure the future.

upon the development of Judaic concepts of the messiah: “No one would argue that the Babylonian material provides a complete or sufficient matrix for the apocalyptic genre. It must, however, be seen as a significant contributing factor” (22). It is therefore necessary to understand millenarianism as arising during the historical moment of Hebrew slavery in Babylon and actually representing a mixture of cultural and religious ideas, as well as an expression of a master-slave relationship. Out of this cultural contact zone, Judaism develops the notion of the coming of a prophet or divine king, which in turn is used as the basis of Christianity’s worship of Jesus Christ as a divine figure.³

The concept of a messiah warrants a utopian future, which over time becomes a major facet of the Western conception of history; even secular concepts become imbued with a sense of teleological hope so that it becomes difficult, but perhaps not impossible, to distinguish scientific and religious views of utopia. The fact that non-Western societies also experience millenarian movements indicates that millenarianism has an expression beyond a specific faith and may represent a way in which humanity as a species conceives of the future. This is in part why it is important to understand millenarianism as arising from a mixture of Mesopotamian and Jewish cultural practices: millenarianism is not limited to a single religious tradition, but is transhistorical and transnational.

Understanding millenarianism as a broader cultural impulse makes it possible to interpret non-Christian millenarian movements in a variety of cultures and in various

³ Christianity is perhaps the most intensely millenarian of major faiths, and the very terminology of the millennium, especially the terms apocalypse and Armageddon, are taken from the Book of Revelation (*Apokalypsis* in the original Greek). The millenarianism of Judaeo-Christianity continues into Islam, creating a new series of eschatological beliefs about the future, so that each religious tradition that traces its origin to Abraham is millenarian.

historical moments: Zoastrianism and the Ghost Dance of 1890 are two possible points of reference for non-Christian and non-Western millenarian movements. It is likewise important to consider the extent to which secular or political modes of thought such as the American and French Revolutions or Marxism and Fascism can be understood as millenarian expressions of the future. Contemporary scholars from a variety of disciplines study millenarianism, and the enhanced media coverage of such events as the 1994 Branch Davidian crisis or the 1997 mass suicide of 39 members of the Heaven's Gate cult has made the public more aware of the variety and range of millenarian expression.

Unfortunately, a historical grounding of the term does not negate the problem of terminology that plagues contemporary scholarship. A significant complexity lies in the relationship between the terms millenarianism and millennialism. Their common use as synonyms overlooks the complexity of theological debates over whether or not the thousand years of good rule promised in Revelation 20 comes before or after the Second Coming. A pre-millenarian believes that the Revelation can only occur after the peace promised in the Second Coming, and it is humanity's responsibility to prepare the world for Christ's return. A post-millenarian believes exactly the opposite, that Christ's first incarnation marked the beginning of the millennium and so his return is imminent, sudden, and beyond human control. It is therefore more helpful to use the term "millenarian" to represent the broader expression of a radical, transcendental future which is not limited to a Christian, European, or even Western expression and reserve "millennialism" for Christian theology.

On the surface, this theological debate solely regards the way the apocalypse occurs in Christianity, but it can be used in a larger sense to represent how a millenarian individual or group understands the route to utopia. The critical difference between the two is how much emphasis is placed upon the role of revelation and a sudden or divine transformation of society. Michael St. Clair argues that the imminent belief is the most necessary one, “because of their reliance on apocalyptic literature, the *dominant belief* of millenarian groups involves the expectation of heaven on earth soon, with the consequent destruction of the present social order” (11). The concepts of pre- and post-millennium, though, allow for more nuance than the above allows for. Pre-millenarians see a role for humanity in shaping the new heaven on earth, while post-millenarians are more likely to await divine intervention. In such a model, Yeats is consistently post-millenarian, Eliot pre-millenarian, and Auden moves from a pre-millenarian position in the 1930s to a post-millenarian one after 1940. Such a range of expression helps to establish the most important metaphor for how we think about the future, that of a spectrum.

The Spectrum of the Future

Throughout this study, the metaphor of a spectrum will be used to highlight the range of thought that exists between millennium and catastrophe. Expressing our ideas of the future as a spectrum rather than as a binary allows for a wider range of ideas to be brought into play. At the centre of the spectrum is the notion of continuity—that the world will continue onwards, neither better nor worse. This position may be the result of confidence in the state of our current world situation, or a belief that the present is the best

of all possible worlds. At either pole of the spectrum, from left to right, we should place millennium and catastrophe. This image creates the range of expression necessary to describe how an individual, group, or society might think about the future.

The idea of millennium as a radical utopian transformation of society, whether it is the second coming of Christ or the arrival of species-being in Marx, is the most hopeful and positive projection of the future. The other extreme is genuine catastrophe and the sudden and violent end of our civilization. Whether the catastrophe simply annihilates humanity or the entire universe is not really the matter of debate, what matters is only that we suddenly and irrevocably cease to exist. Occasionally meditating on catastrophe can be a kind of intellectual exercise, like Alan Weisman's *The World without Us* and the television series *Life after People*,⁴ but usually takes the form of end-of-the-world stories like Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* or Nevil Shute's *On the Beach*. Unlike millennium, catastrophe is tied to a deep nihilism and represents the obliteration or negation of human thought, life, and joy.

The majority of terms associated with millenarianism can easily be placed along this spectrum. Utopia occupies the left side, dystopia the right (although how a specific idea of the future might play out in an individual's mind colours the degree to which the spectrum moves toward the ends). For example, the notion of progress is generally a hopeful idea and, while not quite millenarian, certain should be placed slightly to the left

⁴ These kinds of intellectual exercises are most often an attempt to argue for action against a catastrophic view of the future, although it is possible that some, like Weisman's, border on the anti-ecological. In some cases, like the reality television show *The Colony*, what might be a useful thought exercise or social protest simply becomes sensationalistic? Obviously, Shelley's and Shute's works are more complex than the texts mentioned before them.

of continuity. The geologists, economists, and writers who advocate the idea of Peak Oil (the moment global oil reserves reach maximum output and will afterwards yield diminishing volumes) do not see a completely nihilistic future, but are pessimistic and so belong to the right of continuity.⁵

The actual process by which the future is possible—scientific or divine, random or pre-ordained—is not a necessary part of this spectrum. Neither is violence a determining factor, as the human imagination can justify the means to an end. The responsibility for a better or worse future might be divine, as in the Second Coming and the Great Flood, or it can be entirely human: our inventiveness has the potential to lead to a better world or a nuclear winter. It is also possible for the future to be entirely random, as in a sudden atmospheric change correcting the effects of global warming or an asteroid slamming into the Earth; however, when humans create stories about these events, it is necessary to imagine ourselves as actors able to overcome the crisis or fate. These stories serve many social purposes—cathartic or alarming—and can express both sacred and secular languages of hope—when faced with arguments about Peak Oil it is equally hopeful to say “The divine made oil a limited resource, and will therefore provide a solution for us” or “Humanity is the most intelligent and advanced species on the planet; we’ll invent a solution, a new sustainable power source.” Both of these positions rely upon a network of assumptions and beliefs in order to maintain a belief in a hopeful future.

⁵ Perhaps an individual who despises cars, globalisation, overpopulation, and pollution might think of the catastrophic effects Peak Oil might bring as a kind of utopian return to smaller community-based lifestyles and “traditional” values, but for others this might be a dystopian world where humanity loses the great advantages of the late twentieth century. An example of this tension can be found in James Howard Kunstler’s post-Peak Oil novels *A World Made By Hand* and *The Witch of Hebron*. Two additional volumes are planned.

While there will be multiple ideas of the future at play within a culture at one time, it is possible to generalize about a period's overall sense of its future. For example, the mid-to-late nineteenth century is often seen as a period in which progress and optimism were central elements of its thought. This would place the post-Romantic decades as the right of continuity, but only a bit. "Mainstream" Victorian European and Gilded Age American society was not millenarian and was committed to the idea of a slightly better continual present. It is true that this periodization overlooks the rise of the Millerites, the Mormons, and the Salvation Army, but the overall tenor is not one of radical hope, especially in literature. It is therefore possible and useful to extrapolate broadly about a period.

To return to the ideas of pre- and post-millennial dispensations, the millennial end of the spectrum can be expanded on further. A pre-millenarian like T. S. Eliot, for example, will emphasize the ability of humanity to create a better society, while a post-millenarian like W. B. Yeats will attempt to discover a spiritual system that explains the progress of history and the creation of a utopian future. These terms can therefore be moved beyond the Christian dispensationalist debates and applied to reflect the way a millenarian understands their role in writing literature intended to announce utopia.

One additional term needs to be clarified: apocalypse. Originally carrying connotations of divine prophecy, apocalypse now serves as a generalized term denoting extreme disaster or a non-religious end-of-the-world scenario, such those exemplified by the "post-apocalyptic" genre of both film and literature. While the OED traces the word "apocalypse" to 1894, the sense of the term was clearly forming before the end of the

nineteenth century. Byron's poem "Darkness" (1816) and Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1822) are clear progenitors of the post-apocalyptic story. Thomas Malthus's *An Essay on the Principles of Population* published in multiple drafts from 1798 to 1826, stands as one of the earliest arguments regarding non-divine sources of social collapse and gave rise to the term Malthusian Catastrophe.⁶ His ideas were absorbed in the Victorian consciousness, at least enough for Thomas Hardy to describe Tess Durbeyfield as having "felt Malthusian vexation with her mother for thoughtlessly giving her so many little sisters and brothers" (37). Following the rise of the scientific method and its proliferation in the Enlightenment, the words we might traditionally associate with the Biblical end of the world—primarily apocalypse and Armageddon—began to be used more and more widely in a secular sense. Certainly the phrase "Nuclear Armageddon" or the idea of global climate change being an "apocalypse" are not uncommon or unlikely statements; more sensationally, the idea of a planetary impact by a meteor, or the rise of some kind of super-plague haunts our imagination as a constant, ever-present threat.

Our mass-media currently uses these terms and ideas liberally, stoking fear in order to gain ratings. From Glenn Beck's now cancelled "War Room" segments on Fox News and the Discovery Channel's "reality program" *The Colony*, to the conclusion of Brian K. Vaughn's comic book series *Y: The Last Man*, millenarian and catastrophic ideas permeate our expression of the future. There are grains of truth in popular apocalypticism—environmental pollution, disease, overpopulation, dwindling resources are not figurative ideas—and there is a sense that we are fascinated with imagining our

⁶ Malthus was religious, so it may be possible that he was influenced by Christian millennialism. This does not stop the idea of population collapse to remain a potent secular end-of-the-world scenario.

destruction. Many of these works suggest hope in some way—the small plant of 2008’s *Wall-E* is a way to assuage our growing fear of environmental catastrophe—and the most hopeful of these are millenarian, as in *The Matrix* films discussed below. In our narratives of destruction, one often finds that “hope springs eternal.”

It is difficult to draw a divide between the terms millenarianism and apocalypse. They are dependent on one another in the historical and theological sense, but during the period this study focuses upon, especially in the post-World War II decades, the two terms drift apart, becoming separate ideas in our contemporary discourse. However, to use apocalypse simply when one means total catastrophe denies the revelatory aspect of millennium. Visions of catastrophe are more and more disconnected from the vision of a golden age and become increasingly nihilistic. Nonetheless, catastrophe is equally as revealing as millennium, especially if, as a species, we are able to understand our role in our own extinction; therefore, it becomes necessary to use catastrophe as a marker of end-of-the-world scenarios and only one facet of a larger apocalyptic impulse. Both extreme ends of the spectrum of the future are apocalyptic because they are both revelatory.

Millenarianism is a term that denotes a powerful utopian impulse, originally found in religious and oracular expressions. As the avenues for explaining the universe have broadened, it has expanded into those areas as well. Because it is not limited to any one specific tradition and can be found in a variety of different cultures, millenarianism reflects a desire for a hopeful and radical transformation of society from a state of alienation, decay, and collapse, to a golden age of community, vitality, and stability. This way of imagining the future serves as a functional definition, but over the last fifty-plus

years the academic study of millenarianism has deepened and clarified our understanding of this pervasive and dogged aspect of human culture and expression.

The Academic Study of Millenarianism

The academic study of millenarianism focuses upon a series of important questions: why does millenarianism seem to be so important to our understanding of the future? How does it function? Does it follow a discernible pattern? What purpose does it provide? What is its role in society? In order to provide some sense of how scholars have attempted to answer these questions, it is best to provide a brief overview of the development of millenarian studies. In order to focus this discussion, particular attention will be paid to three major studies in different disciplines: Norman Cohn's landmark history *The Pursuit of the Millennium*; Kenelm Burridge's anthropological process from *New Heaven, New Earth*; and Michael Barkun's political perspective in his works *Disaster and the Millennium* and *Millennialism and Violence*.

In many ways, the chaotic terminology of millenarian studies reflects the artificial barriers drawn between fields of study; however, the fact that so many varied disciplines—history, anthropology, and psychology, political science, and literary studies—have taken up the study of millenarianism is a sign of its importance. While many of these projects are focused in their own ways by their discipline's methods, there is considerable nuance to be gained by adopting an interdisciplinary approach to the subject. Through dialogue with historians, anthropologists, and political scientists, the

wide relevance of millenarianism becomes more apparent, and connections can be made between the study of authors and the larger culture around them.

Prior to the 1950s, millenarianism was a subject of little concern for academics. It was a topic of discussion amongst Christian faithful, particularly due to the variety of pre- and post-millennial expressions found throughout Protestantism, and was of interest to theologians and a few noteworthy scholars, such as the anthropologist Ralph Linton or the sociologist Bernard Barber (Barkun, *Disaster* 3). Early sociological models—inspired by Marx—promoted what Douglas H. Shantz calls “the deprivation theory,” or “the idea that [millenarianism] was ‘a function of social frustration’ and therefore the ‘preserve of the peasant and the oppressed, or assorted cranks and crackpots’” (24-5). From this early period, millenarian studies inherit the key concept of the idea of deprivation as the source of action.

In addition to the deprivation hypothesis, early scholars also considered a madness hypothesis that can still be found in some contemporary discussion of millenarianism. For example, St. Clair introduces his 1992 work *Millenarian Movements in Historical Contexts* by writing “perhaps whatever pathology is present in millenarian groups and other cults is the handing over by individuals of their personal autonomy to some prophetic authority who leads their group” (8). The key word in St. Clair’s argument is “pathology.” To use a word that implies sickness also implies a medical, possibly contagious, and diagnosable wrongness of thought. This perspective underscores the way millenarians hold counter-cultural beliefs or do not fit into mainstream society. The madness hypothesis is closely

related to the deprivation hypothesis, as they both stress social alienation or assign a “pathological or deviant character [to] the millennial mind” (Sweet, qtd. in Shantz, 26).

Out of the early work of religion and sociology, a more complex field would emerge in the late 1950s. The broadening of the field is universally attributed to Norman Cohn’s 1957 work *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, a masterwork that has subsequently been revised twice (1961 and 1993), and which remains the only full-length study of Medieval and Renaissance millenarianism. *Pursuit of the Millennium* focuses on a number of events in Western history which are beyond the scope of this study, such as that of John of Leyden or the English Peasant’s revolt of 1381, but the arguments that proved most contentious occur in Cohn’s forewords and conclusions.

Cohn remains limited to a Christian and European dimension, which is not unexpected as that is Cohn’s area of specialty as a historian. He attributes the inheritance of a “tradition of prophecy” that flourished in the Middle Ages to the Judeo-Christian faiths (1957, xiii), but Cohn does show some awareness of other conceptions of the future. He touches upon Hinduism in his conclusion and then awkwardly switches to a discussion of a secular historiography stripped of notions of progress—“history...as an immensely complex process of change which has no predetermined course”—as a contrast to the idea of millenarianism (Cohn 1957, 307). In explaining the rhetorical shift of his conclusion towards broader millenarian themes, Cohn suggests that the historical moments he explores in his book may be connect to and able to explain some of the violence of the early twentieth century: “Such a view of history provides a very poor

climate for revolutionary chiliasm⁷: it is with good cause that Nazis and Communists alike have abominated all undogmatic, empirical meliorism and, whenever they could, have killed those who have upheld it by word or deed" (Cohn 1957, 307). Cohn argues that millenarian movements require a "black and white" world view (1957, 311) and a leader, usually a prophet or hero, to give the movement focus. For Cohn, the Manichean good versus evil of millenarianism is an aberrant activity, not in the sense "that hitherto sane individuals suddenly turn into downright paranoiacs," but that there are conditions which "can in fact deprive existence of its normality so effectively as to generate an outbreak of [millenarianism]." The deprivation hypothesis is firmly present in his analysis, a factor which is possibly due to Cohn's vehement opposition to Marxist or Communist ideas of the future.⁸

In subsequent editions, the body of *Pursuit of the Millennium* remains very much the same while Cohn rewrites his introduction and conclusion. These changes serve as indicators of how millenarian studies as a field develops over the following decades. The most important of these changes is the increasing clarity and complexity with which Cohn feels it necessary to define millenarianism (Cohn 1993, 13). Cohn also comes to recognize

⁷ Chiliasm is a term I have not touched upon. It is yet another synonym of millenarian, essentially the Greek word for apocalypse, but sometimes used to indicate a Gnostic conception of the word apocalypse.

⁸ One important context in the development of the study of millenarianism is the Cold War. During the late 1940s to the 1990s (even today, witness the rhetoric surrounding Iran and North Korea) the citizens of the world lived under the threat of nuclear war. This state of alarm gave rise to a potent secular apocalyptic mode, a mode which arguably dominates the word "apocalypse" itself. It was in this perpetual state of near-apocalypse that scholars began to study millenarianism. The Cold War, and the weapons that defined it, are, in a sense, the perfection of a centuries-long process of secularizing millenarianism. No longer do we need to imagine angels or dragons in order to dream of our end. The nuclear makes us our own gods, as Oppenheimer's borrowing of Vishnu's words, "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds," reminds us that our power is revealed in a self-made apocalypse. In a post-nuclear world, everyone but those who could give the command to fire the missiles or drop the bombs became disenfranchised from their future. Cohn's own rhetoric regarding Nazism and Communism (especially the latter) is so intensely negative it must reflect the Cold War to some extent.

the complex range of expression found in millenarian movements: millenarianism is not always present in political revolts and the millenarian most often looks beyond a political ideology to a more cosmological view of the world (281).

At the root of contemporary studies of millenarianism is a desire to understand why these groups become violent, and a secondary desire to understand how prophets legitimate their power. My concerns are less about upon those themes—this study is about poets, not prophets—although certainly Yeats' leadership in various organizations, from the Abbey Theatre to the Irish Senate, or Eliot's pronouncements on the decline of British society relate well to the idea of the prophet or Jeremiah-figure. The line that can be drawn between poet and prophet is fraught with risk, as the poet often serves as augur or visionary (William Blake or Yeats most readily displays this connection). If, as Norman Cohn suggests in the second edition of *Pursuit of the Millennium* "the story told in this book may have some relevance to the revolutionary upheavals of our own century" (12-13), it is useful to not only consider the historical rise of totalitarianism or the movements of small cults and sects, but to also consider the possibility that Modernism—the artistic response to the "revolutionary upheavals" of the twentieth century—is also a millenarian response. Just as the complex connection between politics, faith, and hope that make up the work of Yeats, Eliot, and Auden reflect their historical period, this study of literature needs to benefit from interdisciplinary approaches millenarianism. Unfortunately, the inconsistent terminology and various foci of other discipline means this is not an easy task. It becomes necessary to consider different interpretations of millenarian activity and the way the field

has changed over time before one can make a statement about the study of millenarianism in literature.

Following the publication of Cohn's study, millenarianism became a subject of much debate, particularly the idea that millennium or religion had anything to do with the supposedly secular totalitarian movements of the twentieth century. One of the best studies of millenarianism that was written in the 1960s was Kenelm Burridge's anthropological text, *New Heaven, New Earth*. Through his research, Burridge attempts to come to terms with the variety of millenarian movements, not only in Western Europe, but also among the indigenous populations of Polynesia, Melanesia, and North America. In the fashion of the day, there is a structuralist impulse to *New Heaven, New Earth*, which is reflected in a desire to systematize millenarian movements. Burridge achieves this first through an interrogation of how we apply the word religion to culture and by repeatedly using his case studies to demonstrate a common narrative thread, as will be elaborated on below.⁹ His renegotiation of "religion" is important as it resists simplifying religion, coming close to assigning it a role similar to Althusser's theory of ideology. The basis of his argument is that religion as "the belief in spiritual beings" is too reductive and holds no "sociological" value (4) (this definition might also hold little literary or biographical value). The depth to which authors may be influenced or inspired by religion and develop millenarian conceptions of the future—even if they are not themselves religious—or the extent to which a critic may be influenced by the same factors cannot simply be reconciled

⁹ I have previously used this narrative structure in my criticism, and find it quite useful in exploring the ways authors consciously or unconsciously map their stories along these lines (Brisbois, "Where the Shadow Lies: Nature, Modernity and the Audience of Middle-earth;" "Millennialism in Middle-earth").

as a product of a belief in deities and other supernatural constructs. In Burridge's view, it is necessary to adopt a wider view of religion, one that approaches faith from its role in cultural practice with an eye to its range of activity:

there is no human activity which cannot assume religious significance. When it does so it has overriding importance. It points to that which permeates and informs a whole way of life, and, more crucially, it indicates sources or principles of power which are regarded as particularly creative or destructive. (4-5)

The idea that religion comes to represent "a whole way of life" echoes not only the defining rhetoric of cultural studies but also Eliot's essays on society and culture. The activities and complexity of religion are something that comes to permeate a society—beliefs and rituals can continue long after the reasons for their invention has passed, whether those reasons were sacred or secular.

In the context of something like millenarianism, the origin of the millenarian narrative might lie in the belief that a deity will return to end the world and save the faithful, but the idea that the world will end and be reborn is hardly limited to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Once we acknowledge the complexity of religion's influence on culture, Burridge believes that we can use it to understand the power dynamics of societies:

Religions...are concerned with the systematic ordering of different kinds of power....This entails a specific framework of rules. But because religion is concerned with the truth of things, and reaches out to discover and identify those sorts of power...not wholly comprehended, its rules about the use and control of

different kinds of powers are grounded in an interplay between experience, working assumptions, and those more rooted assumptions we call faith. (5)

Burridge uses the above idea of a “specific framework of rules” to examine the way prophets and heroes are validated by the millenarian impulse and how these validations work along a pattern of redemption. This validation is a key element in empowering the powerless—like Cohn’s disenfranchised sectarians—which is still relevant in ideas of nationalism, like that of Yeats and Ireland, or in conversions stories, like those of Eliot or Auden.

Cohn and Burridge both consider the main source of millenarianism to be a dissatisfaction or alienation from the mainstream society, building support for the deprivation hypothesis. Burridge sees this most readily in contact situations like those of the “cargo cults,” or in attempts by oppressed minorities to seize control of their situation (76-83). Just as Cohn attempts to link moments of historical violence to the present, Burridge is interested in trying to create a “general pattern” that can be used to describe the process by which millenarian groups function (105). Burridge’s work holds considerable value for literary studies because it creates a narrative, a subject that will be discussed below.

While Burridge emphasizes millenarianism’s religious dimensions, Michael Barkun is an important figure in the political understanding of millennium. His first major work on the topic, *Disaster and the Millennium*, is a continuation of Cohn’s rather short assertion

that religious fanaticism and modern totalitarianism are linked.¹⁰ As a political scientist, Barkun's research focuses upon "those points at which millenarian movements have impinged upon the stability of the social and political order" (Barkun, *Disaster* 5). He also offers a short, but compelling description of why the study of millenarianism is so disparate:

The complexity of the work on millenarian movements is not the result of impenetrability of its vocabulary or methods. Rather, it simply results from the fact that the movements have been understood through the constructs of the people who have studied them: as predominantly Western by the European historian, as a reaction to culture-shock by the anthropologist, as instances of mental stress by the psychiatrist, as sects by the sociologist of religion, as revolutionary movements by the political scientist. Each has seen in the movements that which he has been trained to recognize. (Barkun, *Disaster*, 3)

This passage is both insightful and confounding. Barkun's argument is correct in admitting that scholars see what they are trained to see: psychologists see abnormal minds, anthropologists see cultures in transition, and likewise governments see millenarians as revolutionaries, dissidents, or terrorists because that is how they understand resistance to their programs. But it also implies that all of these interpretations may be in some small way correct. This is not a relativistic position, but one that acknowledges the need for interpreting millenarian literature through an interdisciplinary lens.

¹⁰ In turn, Cohn might have been influenced by Barkun when he adopts a focus on disaster in his conclusion to the 1993 edition of *Pursuit of the Millennium*.

The collection, *Millennialism and Violence* (1996), benefits from the research that has occurred between the 1970s and the 1990s. Barkun, whose work continues to advocate for the deprivation hypothesis, provides a few additional points of reference. Rather than seeing millenarian groups as a single response to a larger social sphere, he suggests we need to understand “millenarians [as] engaged in a continuing set of interactions with external forces. These relationships may involve other religious groups, secular interest groups, and/or government officials” (Barkun, “Understanding Millennialism” 4). Barkun considers this a useful model of “international perspective” because it allows us to consider how specific millenarians and their non-millenarian counterparts in society respond to one another.

When attempting to understand these relationships, Barkun considers two key points: “first, each side has an interpretive framework that gives meaning to the behaviour of the other. Second, this interpretive framework is marked by a dualistic view of the world” (5). He maintains his argument by emphasizing a multicultural perspective and highlighting the Manichean worldview of the millenarian. It is common to see less violent millenarians as different—sometimes bizarre or humorous—because their beliefs are out of sync with our own. Millenarians are committed to a different world view, “an all-encompassing set of ideas [that] often claim[s] to possess a special knowledge not vouchsafed to others, so that they alone have a correct and complete understanding of the world” (5). This “secret knowledge” is often the part of the leader’s or prophet’s source of charisma. Joseph Smith Jr.’s Golden Plates, Wovoka’s Ghost Dance, or even the automatic writing imparted to Yeats by his wife, represent these claims to secret knowledge. Slightly

less supernatural, the Amish's rejection of violence and technology goes hand-in-hand with their rejection of mainstream society. Groups like Earth First! or The Earth Liberation Front similarly reject conventional society because they claim to possess the true moral position on environmentalism.

The totalizing effect of the millenarian worldview allows those groups to identify who belongs to their future and who does not. In extreme examples, Barkun argues that such a view "allows millenarians to precisely identify those who are their enemies" (5), but it also allows some indication of how groups will behave under stress. One does not expect violence on the part of the Amish or Quakers because of their pacifism, but some millenarians may become violent based on the way they understand either their goals, or understand the behaviour of the state. As a literary example, Yeats struggles with the idea of violence in rebellion, as he was clearly pacifist and regrets the lives lost in the Irish struggle for rebellion. For political scientists, the relationship between state and millenarians is of key importance, in large part because it does cost lives: the intense "Manichean propensities of millenarians" creates a dichotomy in the mind of the faithful, with the millenarian occupying the "pure" side of the equation, which "eliminates gradation, nuance, and degree" and creates suicide bombers as readily as it does pacifists (6).¹¹

¹¹ For security organizations, brain-washing is often associated with millenarians, as is "fundamentalism." Barkun correctly points out (in 1996) that "the phrase 'Islamic fundamentalism' is often employed as a virtual synonym for terrorism" (6), a reality that continues today despite the academic awareness of important differences between political and millenarian groups. Barkun again seems prescient in writing:

to the extent that the other is demonized — to millenarians, the state is evil, and to the state, millenarians are crazed — there is little incentive to see the world from the others point of view. What is looked for instead is evidence that confirms the picture already held. To the extent that the two

As a final commentary on Barkun's political view, I would also include his observation that throughout the twentieth century, "one finds millenarian movements that do not emerge from a single, well-bound tradition...Such classification-defying cases [secular groups for example] are increasingly becoming the rule" (7). This imparts a sense of excitement, and the relevance of the above might seem too contemporary or non-literary in its view, but it is my contention here that Modernism can be considered part of these definition-challenging cases. In fact, it may have been one of the first, one of the most diffuse, and perhaps the largest example of a failed millenarian movement. Such statements are possible only by understanding millenarianism as "rooted in a perennial human concern—the desire to understand history, its unity, structure, and goal: 'a sense of belonging in time, as well as the need to understand the special significance of the present, is the...root of [millenarian] systems of thought'" (Shantz 30-31). The relationship between Modernism and history relates to a search for meaning, for the special significance of the internal. How else can we understand *The Waste Land* or *Four Quartets* if not through this lens of time, history, future, and the human desire for meaning?

Challenging the perception of millenarians as insane or brainwashed is a serious and necessary goal, and I hope this study might engage in a similar and worthwhile act—not to apply the standard literary lens to Modernism, but to look at it differently, perhaps even anew. If Modernism can be best understood as a millenarian expression of socio-cultural concerns for the future, rather than a technical definition based upon experiments in literature (defined by its cause rather than its effect) it might be more usefully

sides interact on the basis of these mirror-image scripts, each will selectively identify and interpret the evidence that fits into the appropriate script. (6)

periodized. The poetry and social theories of Yeats, Eliot, and Auden each reflect the “Manichean propensity” Barkun’s describes and these contrasts between us and they profoundly shape Modernism’s expression of alienation and fragmentation.

By the 1990s, the deprivation theory had been repeatedly attacked as “misguided” (Shantz 34). Millenarian groups could be seen arising in relatively stable countries or amongst the majority of a population. These same studies stressed an idea of a spectrum of expression, from asceticism to debauchery, sacred to secular, and pacifist to warmongering. Even more importantly is the idea that millenarianism was not exclusive to minorities or the disenfranchised. This research sought to overturn the conventional sense of the millenarian as oddity:

‘the language of [millenarianism]...has become foreign’ to the educated elite in our culture...for members of the educated elite...the apocalypse is decidedly not now, not for us, not really. It is a curiosity, a script idea, a marketing strategy, something to generate magazine theme issues...Members of the educated elite, even if they practice a mainline religion have little or no connection to the millenarian. (Shantz 35)

Millenarians (and to a degree, religion) became beyond the pale of common sense for scholars, a fact that is more of an assumption than a reality. Every individual functions with a conception of the future and the assumptions they hold are a major influence on the nexus of ideas that surround progress, secularization, and technology, ideas that modernity supposedly advocates. We all contain an idea of the future and oscillate along its spectrum in relationship with social pressures.

But even if such thinking is necessary and commonplace, the deprivation hypothesis is not so easily rejected. In most cases, the study of millenarianism either takes modernity for granted or does not engage fully with its alienating effects. Millenarianism is found among both the wealthy and the poor, as Cohn himself comments in his third edition to *The Pursuit of the Millennium*:

Unlike the leaders of the great [non-millenarian] popular uprisings, who were usually peasants or artisans, *prophetae* were seldom manual workers or even former manual workers. Sometimes they were petty nobles; sometimes they were simply imposters; but more usually they were intellectuals or half-intellectuals—the former priest turned freelance preacher was the commonest type of all. And what all these men shared was a familiarity with the world of apocalyptic and millenarian prophecy. (284)

Joachim of Fiore, John of Leyden, Wovoka, Vladimir Lenin, and Adolph Hitler all share this background and suggest that the idea of what constitutes a prophet or hero does not necessarily hinge upon being entirely marginal. Instead, it is more likely a hybrid figure: educated or wealthy individuals who find themselves, or their idea of the future, disconnected from the political process and who, in turn, become the great motivators of millenarianism.¹² To a great extent this general statement is reflected by the poets examined here and many other Modernists as well.

¹² The modern evangelical movement is a clear example: wealthy individuals who nonetheless felt excluded from the mainstream political culture of the late 1960s and 1970s have become a potent element in contemporary politics, particularly in the United States. This has been primarily due to the fundamentalist emphasis upon inerrancy and millennium. For a short overview from an insider's perspective, see Frank Schaeffer's *Crazy for God*.

In the disciplinary approaches outlined above, we see certain patterns arise: first, that millenarianism requires some sort of crisis, usually socio-cultural, but also possibly a disaster (a word that sounds too small to describe the First World War). This crisis results in a sense of disenfranchisement or alienation that leads millenarian action. Often the result of the crisis is alienated individuals creating or joining a group, movement, or tradition that gives voice to their feelings. These are valuable points for this study, as Yeats, Eliot, and Auden are each in their own turn made into figureheads for literary or social movements. I also believe that there is a further question here regarding the way the sense of alienation or disenfranchisement can be connected to modernity as a contributing factor, and I hope to take up this as a point of inquiry in the body of this work.

One of the most important scholarly changes in the last decade-and-a-half has been a growing awareness that we, as academics, must acknowledge the fact that representing millenarians as odd, bizarre, or insane is both dismissive and unproductive. In using millenarians as sources of humour or as scapegoats we miss the complexity and the widespread nature of millenarian thought. It is sometimes tempting to use words like "strange" or "naive" when it comes to some of the beliefs of millenarians because to an extent they appear beyond the pale of social consensus. The sceptical aspect of my own thought can find little other response to automatic writing, transubstantiation, or other mystical aspects of belief. And yet, that same commitment to scepticism demands open-mindedness; one cannot automatically assign failure to millenarian beliefs and expect to understand their importance in a subject's thought. Furthermore, the study of

millenarianism is fascinating in many ways, and perhaps nowhere more so than in its intense hope of imminent change.

Part of the problem with the study of millenarianism is, to quote Denis Donoghue on the critical heritage of T. S. Eliot, “the animus against Christianity is rampant and vicious in our profession” (39). To extrapolate this comment only slightly, religion is often overlooked or subsumed into broader conversations of power and ideology. Eugen Weber notes in his history *Apocalypses*: “To the extent that traditional eschatology no longer fits world views we now consider rational, it has been marginalized or swept under the carpet. Newton’s apocalypticism is best ignored; George Eliot’s views on class relations are relevant, but her views on relations with God less so” (234). This study cannot serve as a corrective model, but I do hope to treat my subjects with a degree of grace, if not sensitivity. It is necessary therefore to maintain a kind of strategic empathy with the subject’s beliefs while at the same time balancing this with a strategic objectivity, accepting the millenarian view of the future as a possibility while systematically exploring it from an external position.

B. Millenarian Narratives

From a literary perspective, it is possible to ask different questions of millenarianism than other disciplines. For example, we can ask how authors use millenarianism to construct metaphors or narratives and how readers interact with these stories. Similarly, we can consider how an author’s representation of millenarianism adds to a period’s or a society’s discussions about the future. The presence of millennial thought in literature is not

unexpected, as any cursory glance through the history of millenarianism will reinforce the fact that Western society (and a great many non-Western societies as well) are frequently engaged in some expression of apocalypticism, whether millenarian or catastrophic. The history of apocalypticism is a centuries-long list of prophets, psychics, scientists, writers, and scholars, each in their moment predict the Second Coming or another golden age without disease, war, or social divisions. Even if Europe and its cultural inheritors are infused with millenarianism, the Modern period is especially characterized by a tension between cultural movements towards equality and the pressures of an increasingly mechanized way of life. This contradiction strained Western society in ways that Modernism expresses in its radical, experimental art. The socio-cultural crisis that lies at the root of millenarianism also lies at the root of Modernism.

Examining millenarianism in Modernism is a way to both rearticulate the reasons for Modernism's break with realism and to connect the disparate expressions of utopian longing that underpin Yeats, Eliot, and Auden's verse. These three poets—Yeats, Eliot, and Auden—form a historical continuum of poetic thought, following each other generationally through the first half of the century. Each struggled with their religious and intellectual convictions in order to express utopian dreams and each was deeply millenarian. Yeats wrote numerous poems and essays regarding the rebirth of the world in thousand year cycles and rejected Christianity in favour of an occult mysticism; Eliot became a high-profile Anglo-Catholic millenarian following 1927; and Auden struggled throughout his career with the frustrations of modernity, eventually coming to dwell upon visions of utopia after he returned to Christianity.

One of the advantages of focusing upon canonical figures like Yeats, Eliot, or Auden, is that it is difficult to dispute their importance to their literary moments, and to dismiss their expression of millenarian as that of “bizarre, fantastic prophets and...apocalyptists [who are] unfit for the attention of sensible people” (Weber 232). The utopian impulse of these authors raises important questions for my research: Why have previous scholars characterized the religious influence upon these authors as what Jed Esty, when commenting on the critical view of Eliot’s late phase, has summarized as “either an unfortunate [political] retreat into traditionalism or an exhausted personal retreat into Christianity” (39)? How does the cultural or religious-orientation of the author influence their conception of a golden age? If conventional definitions of millenarianism “expend so much energy in trying to explain [its] appeal...based in conditions of social and economic class, in experience of calamity, or in psychological anomie” (O’Leary 11), why do these artists, each one accepted by the mainstream of their society and relatively privileged, express millenarianism? Do we valorize these poets because of, or in spite of, their millenarianism? Does the problem lie in our understanding of millenarianism, in an academic bias, or in a misreading of the poet’s literary practices? To what extent does the influence of millenarian thought on their political and social activities question the notion of a steadily secularizing society? These are important questions, relevant to both our moment and to the moment of the authors whom I will be discussing.

Millenarianism has been touched on by few literary critics, but those who have usually do so in order to discuss an end-time apocalypse, such as Frank Kermode’s *The Sense of an Ending*, or religion, as in Northrop Frye’s *Fearful Symmetry* and *The Great Code*.

Fredric Jameson's writing is underpinned not only by the Marxist recalibration of millennialism, but by a strong utopian desire itself: consider, for example, the "inverted millenarianism" (1) that begins *Postmodernism or, The Logic of Late Capitalism*, and his recent work on utopian science fiction, *Archaeologies of the Future*. In terms of literary periods, Romanticism has seen the most attention to millenarian themes. To a varying degree, millenarianism is present in any literary period of English literature, but Romanticism marks the most prominent moment of millenarian expression preceding Modernism. In particular, Morton D. Paley made a career-long study of Romanticism that forms a significant critical precursor to this study.

Paley published numerous monographs and articles on the Romantics, and his a career-long focus on visionary and apocalyptic themes culminated in his 1999 work, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry*. He successfully considers the role millenarianism played in the writing of Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, P. B. Shelley, and Keats. Although Paley's definition of the millennium is largely a theological one, it is appropriate to the period he is studying.¹³ He considers a number of sects or alternative sources of millenarianism, such as Swedenborgism and the French Revolution,

¹³ There are slight problems with Paley's conception of millenarianism that reflect the conflicting terminology used to discuss the utopian impulse. Paley begins by discussing pre- and post-millennialism, but then writes:

However, more useful for our discussion is the difference between millenarianism—the idea that the millennium will be dramatically inaugurated by the Second Coming of Christ—and millennialism—the belief 'that history, under divine guidance, will bring about the triumph of Christian principles, and that a holy utopia will come into being.' (3)

The problem with this distinction is Paley's use of millenarianism indicates the post-millennial position, while millennialism becomes a marker for pre-millennialism.

Paley is correct on many fronts, but here he errs. By choosing to associate millenarianism with post-millennialism, he conflates the *hypernym* with a *hyponym* of a *hyponym*. He uses the most general term (millenarianism) to signify a subordinate term (post-millennialism) of a term subordinate (millennialism) to the general term, or a confusion of two magnitudes. This creates a more confounding relationship than the relatively common error of synonym found elsewhere.

connecting those influences to the writings of Wordsworth and Coleridge, noting that Coleridge's infatuation with apocalyptic themes does not extend past the 1790s, rising and falling with his enthusiasm for a "political millennium" (Paley 151). The fact that Paley is able to link the majority of the "canonical" Romantic poets to millenarian themes speaks to the intensity of the period's hope for the future. Nonetheless, it is important to recall the idea of a spectrum of the future, and this is where it is possible to expand on Paley's work. Byron's poem "Darkness" marks a major moment in English poetry as a clear marker of a catastrophic future. When placed alongside the more catastrophic revelations of Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*, Romanticism also marks an early expression of the idea of a nihilistic future. Still, Paley is right in considering the overall tenor of the period as one in which millennium was hoped for and deemed to be imminent.

Paley's study of millenarianism inspired a 2002 collection of essays in his honour, *Romanticism and Millenarianism*, edited by Tom Fulford. These essays expand the discussion of the millenarian impulse in the Romantic period, by expanding the number of poets and the areas of inquiry. Fulford's volume regrettably sequesters the millenarian in the Romantic period, a position which he inherits from Paley's *Apocalypse and Millennium*. In his epilogue to that work, Paley states:

whether in recognition [of the difficulties of expressing millenarianism] or because of the abatement of the collective anxieties that had led to a wish for reassurances that millennium would follow apocalypse, the attempt would not be repeated later in nineteenth-century English poetry. For the most part such subject matter was

relegated to utopian and dystopian prose narratives, and then to science fiction...by the end of the Romantic period, the time for linking the two in a sequence that would secularize biblical paradigms was, as John of Patmos says of the millennium in Revelation 20:5, 'finished' (289).

If one strictly observes the Biblical idea of millenarianism, this might seem fitting, as indeed materialism became more prevalent as the nineteenth century, but the broader influence of millenarian thought is to be found in the Victorian interest in Arthurian legend (Arthur is, after all, the Once and Future King). The movement from Romantic to Victorian periods shifts from a millenarian position on the spectrum to a more central idea of the continual present. It is, however, important to note figures like William Morris, who would influence Yeats, as a millenarian within the general Victorian sense of continuity.

Even more broadly, the conflicts over evolution and religion are deeply engaged with the millenarian impulse, as Darwinism arguably destroys the eschatology of Christianity far more than it undermines the Book of Genesis. The issue of evolution combines with the idea of progress as a contrasting utopian impulse that attempts to offer itself as the "rational" alternative to "irrational" religious hope. But even amidst "the disenchantment of the world," visionary writing hardly diminished. The expression might have been channelled into other forms, but it did not vanish and poets did not fully abandon it in the nineteenth century. This study will build on Paley's idea of apocalyptic Romanticism to consider the influence that Romantic millenarianism had over Modernisms' own expressions. Despite Eliot's famous repudiation of Wordsworth's theory of poetic composition in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," he did not break

from Romanticism as dramatically as this single essay would suggest. For Yeats and Auden, the influence of Romantic millenarianism is even more important because they are deeply aware of their Romantic forbearers. I agree that the Victorian Christian had to—perhaps for the first time—struggle against competing utopian dreams, but apocalyptic futures hardly vanished from the world stage. What Paley may have referred to is the *fin de siècle*, a very recent development in European culture and isolated primarily to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Weber 1-26).

One key influence millenarianism has on literature is the way it functions as a narrative structure. This is not only a structure for works that deal directly with the Christian Book of Revelation (like the *Left Behind* series does), but serves as a larger mode for messianic or mythopoeic stories, like Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* or Herbert's *Dune*, to cite two successful examples.¹⁴ Despite obvious and important differences, these stories each make use of a recurring pattern, one best described as a millenarian narrative.

Burridge's Anthropological Model

The concept of a millenarian narrative I advocate owes its origin to Kenelm Burridge's three-phase model outlined in *New Heaven, New Earth* (115-116). The following summary is entirely indebted to the process he describes and the transposition of his anthropological model to literature is based on replacing "movement" in his original text with "narrative."

¹⁴ The focus here is upon three authors and their millenarianism; this study is intended to strengthen the role of literary scholarship in the broader field of millenarianism and to suggest there is considerable more work to be done in understanding the way authors as disparate as Tomson Highway (*Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*), Zadie Smith (*White Teeth*), or Tony Kushner (*Angels in America*) incorporate its themes into their writing. Sadly, these writers are beyond the scope of this study, but they offer a number of starting points for more consideration of twentieth-century and twenty-first century millenarianism.

Burridge's structure maps conveniently onto traditional narrative frameworks: exposition, rising action and dénouement.

In phase one of a millenarian [narrative], a group or individual will suffer "Disenfranchisement and severance" which leads to "discussion and intellectual or quasi-intellectual endeavours." In the early stages of this phase, individuals will "seek the basis of a common experience." Often the sense of powerlessness experienced will be based on "Qualitative measures," for example on a loss of prestige, economic productivity, intellectual/educational authority, or military power; however, it is possible for a group to experience severance because of "Quantitative measure[s such as] handling money."¹⁵ Burridge notes that phase one presents the opportunity for "political accommodation." This accommodation can be a treaty, a demarcation, or similar way of appeasing the group's concerns. Once a millenarian group progresses beyond this stage, politics are no longer a viable recourse. Essentially, millenarians either distrust the political system too deeply or else imagine a future that is incompatible with contemporary political rhetoric.

Phase two sees the millenarian [narrative] moving into action. The [narrative] first needs a prophet. If no prophet emerges, the millenarians will fall into "diffuse or inchoate activities." If a prophet does emerge, then the group will become organized and arrive at a process intended to transcend their immediate problems. The group's creed can be pacifist or violent, divine or state-based, and is not limited to a single religious tradition. This

¹⁵ Burridge sees the introduction of money into a society which previously did not use money as a quantitative source of millenarianism because it disrupts the culture's established prestige system. This is less of a factor in Modernism due to the rise of capitalism in prior centuries; See Burridge 41-46 and 114 for further commentary.

portion of the [narrative] functions as the rising action— characters begin to act and are met with opposition.

Phase three of Burridge's model outlines the three ways a millenarian [narrative] can conclude. The "aftermath" of the [narrative] will result in either: Complete victory, the formation of a sect, or return to phase one. Very few millenarian groups conclude victoriously in reality (but literature offers a broader imaginative space). Instead, the majority fall into a sect. Some groups, especially repressed minorities, may experience a reversion to phase one as the state uses force to destroy the millenarian [narrative]. This comprises the climax and conclusion of the [narrative] structure.

What we see in this model is a very general statement that out of the dissatisfaction of individuals a social conversation surfaces, generated by shared frustrations (phase one). This anxiety can then be accommodated through such means as treaty negotiations or legislative acknowledgements of distinctiveness. If this accommodation does not occur, two possibilities emerge: either the group or disenfranchised section of society will lack leadership and fragment into a number of smaller units, or a leader will arise—a prophet who galvanizes those around him. This prophet-figure, by virtue of the authority invested by his followers, begins to ordain heroes, organizes the activities of the group (be it protest, worship, or violence) which are intended to offer some transcendence of the problem (phase two). What is not immediately obvious in Burridge's model is that this transcendence reflects an idealized past and projects it into the future. This is a very important point to consider in the millenarian process: that the past combines with the

future. This concept underpins both Burridge's model and the literary processes of the Moderns, especially in the kinds of organic community sought by Yeats, Eliot, and Auden.

The general pattern described above works well as a narrative model. It can be applied to a wide variety of artistic genres—in particular the romance and its contemporary inheritors, fantasy and science fiction, especially those works referred to as “epics.” For example, the Wachowski Brothers recent trilogy of films *The Matrix*, *The Matrix Reloaded*, and *The Matrix Revolutions* use a millenarian narrative as their core structure. When we first meet the computer hacker Neo, he is a disaffected loner attempting to find some kind of relationship that would help him understand his deep unease. Through his contact with Morpheus, he is initiated into a millenarian movement. The awakened agents of the human enclave of Zion¹⁶ act as millenarian revolutionaries seeking to bring about freedom and ultimately enlightenment to all the humans trapped within the artificial reality of the Matrix.

One of the most adroit ideas in the *Matrix* trilogy is the fact that the golden age idealized by the Zionists is also used by the machines to control humanity's consciousness. The prelapsarian world of 1999 is ultimately revealed as illusion in the first film and Morpheus increasingly adopts the role of prophet, announcing the coming of the heroic messiah that is Neo. The first film essentially establishes phase one and begins phase two with Neo's climactic awakening. The next two films elaborate on the explosive results of the messiah's appearance. The final stages of the trilogy work towards the aftermath of the millenarian narrative. The Architect insinuates in *The Matrix Reloaded* that the machines

¹⁶ The name Zion is itself a clear marker of a reclaimed paradise and millenarian desire for a better future.

deliberately use millenarianism as a way to control humanity, suggesting that a human species stripped of a millenarian future is without value to the machines. The existence of the aberrant virus Agent Smith allows Neo to force the machines into a compromise: in exchange for Neo's aid in defeating Smith, the machines agree not follow their previous practices and allow the millenarian Zionists to live. The films themselves use a heady and perhaps too casual series of mythological references, but the most heavy-handed is the cross image that emerges glowing from Neo in his final living moments and serves as an obvious reference to the Second Coming.

Although Modernist poetry represents different generic conventions, Modernist poets do make use of the millenarian narrative at various times, often beginning, halting, faltering, and sometimes reconsidering their utopias the very moment they seem to accept them the most. This behaviour applies to Yeats, who tries several times to totalize his millenarian thoughts into a system; to Eliot, who first attempts to find solace in poetry—*The Waste Land* through to *Four Quartets*—and eventually turns to the essay as a clearer mode of expression; and to Auden, whose long poem *The Age of Anxiety* is a work that can be mapped directly onto the process of a millenarian narrative. Burrige's model also proves useful when considering the biographical information of these writers, especially in how they define their national identities and religious choices; the concept of using millenarian models of power, prestige, or "charisma" to trace social dynamics is important as way to understand how poets maintain their authority as intellectuals and artists.

Overview of this Study

While Yeats, Eliot, and Auden are important for their millenarian qualities, they also form a chronology throughout the Modernist period. This chronological nature lends itself to a narrative approach and to an awareness of the cultural and biographical contexts which influenced their millenarian desires. It is my hope that this approach permits a degree of intellectual sympathy that overcomes the problems of representation millenarians commonly face. I also wish to situate this style of argument in an attempt to humanize the poets, similar to Gabrielle McIntire's approach in her recent study of T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf, *Modernism, Memory, and Desire*. Whereas McIntire explores the sensual or erotic potential of Eliot and Woolf, I wish to explore the religious convictions and millenarian ideas of Yeats, Eliot, and Auden.

I also hope that a chronological approach will prevent the problems that occur when very canonical authors are distilled into short, totalizing statements of biography, like those found in essays and anthologies. These kinds of summaries create an artificial consistency to a writer's identity and produce numerous problems: they obscure irony, overlook or sensationalize unfashionable or unpalatable ideas, and create artificial and ideologically driven divisions in their careers. The secular and religious divisions sometimes made in the case of Eliot and Auden's careers are one example, while the controversy surrounding their changes in citizenship or a tendency to discount or obscure Yeats' occult practice are others. One way to ensure a balanced approach to these poets' verses and ideas is to pay particular attention to the way their prose essays inform our understanding of their poetry and this has been a key element of my methodology.

Chapter One covers the period of 1885 to 1900 and focuses primarily on Yeats' early memberships in groups like the London Theosophical Society and the Order of the Golden Dawn as well as his attraction to Celtic mythology and Irish cultural politics. Chapter Two introduces T. S. Eliot as it proceeds through the years 1900-1920. Over this twenty-year period, I will consider Yeats's movement from poet to politician and the formation of Eliot's artistic practice in relation to his religious ideas. Chapter Three focuses upon the period of High Modernism, 1921-1930. During this period, Eliot achieves his greatest fame and Yeats begins to publish more esoteric poetry and criticism. Chapter Four moves the study to the critical and climactic period of the 1930s, covering 1930-1936: Yeats publishes his *Vision* and, like Eliot and Auden, becomes involved in the complex politics of the 1930s; Auden becomes the poet of the moment, searching for a place amidst the pressures of Marxism and Fascism; and Eliot articulates his idea of utopia through his essays of the 1930s and 1940s. In Chapter Five, the period of the late 1930s and World War II causes a change in both Eliot and Auden's expression of pre-millenarianism, while Yeats's death provides an opportunity for the poets to dialogue on his legacy. The final chapter covers Eliot and Auden's post-war period from 1946 to Auden's death in 1973. Without a conception of the future, it is impossible to respond to any social development, whether it is cultural diversity, globalization, or the rise of totalitarianism. For all three poets, the growing nihilism and catastrophic potential of the twentieth century necessitated a movement towards millenarian thought in order to project a positive image of the future.

CHAPTER ONE: THE *FIN DE SIÈCLE*, 1885-1900

*Young man, lift up your russet brow,
And lift your tender eyelids, maid,
And brood on hopes and fear no more.*
—W. B. Yeats, “Who goes with Fergus?” 4-6

In literary and historical studies, the 1890s are often referred to as “decedent,” a term most relevant to French literature and generally understood as a transitional expression between Romanticism and Modernism (Weir 16). Another major perspective, represented by works like Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst’s reader *The Fin de Siècle*, focuses on the way the end of a calendar century defines the period’s philosophic and artistic expression. Terms like “decedent” and “*fin de siècle*” are difficult to use, as the former can be misinterpreted as pejorative and the latter places too great an emphasis upon the arbitrary division of time into calendars.

In his wide-ranging study *Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams calls the period of the 1880s and 90s an “interregnum” and suggests “it is almost true that there are no periods in thought” and that the two decades contain nothing “very new: a working-out, rather of unfinished lines; a tentative redirection” (165). In Williams’s view, it is not until the full rush of Modernism in the twentieth century that the *fin de siècle* stood out as an

incomplete artistic expression which contrasted with the mainstream of Victorian thought (165). Other critics have noted a recurring problem in trying to fashion a distinct period out of the *fin de siècle*, in large part because it does not work well with the “traditional historiography” of Romanticism, Victorianism, and Modernism (Ledger and McCracken 1).

This problem in historiography is likely due to the fact that the *fin de siècle* is a very recent creation of post-Enlightenment European culture. Eugen Weber argues in *Apocalypses* that

A mentality that takes calendars and centuries for granted develops in the seventeenth century and asserts itself in the eighteenth century, when it begins to associate temporal progress with senescence, decay, and decline. From this position, there's but a step to assimilating material and social progress with obsolescence, calendrical conclusions suggesting crisis even when they do *not* coincide with a crisis that they could serve to emphasize. So *fin de siècle* is an invention of the last *fin de siècle*, which is what it called itself. Its negative connotations are related to natural connotations, but also to a long millennial tradition. (25)

Weber's historical study of millenarianism was the result of a request that he lecture on the *fin de siècle*, and it was his preparation for the lectures that led him to realize that the “end-of-the-cycle” is only a post-Enlightenment idea and largely secular expression of millenarianism. The use of the calendar as a symbol to focus millenarian thought is not a unique phenomenon, but the *fin de siècle* is a relatively new form of traditional hopes and fears for the future. It is possible the term is attractive to academics because it is more

secular or stylized in a manner which minimizes its millennial qualities. The end of the 1900s served as a calendrical focus for millenarian and catastrophic ideas, but it was not truly distinct as a millenarian moment, or as Weber elegantly states, “It is not the *siècle*, but the *fin* that matters” (237).

More important to the 1880s and 1890s is Yeats’s later description of his artistic circle as “The Tragic Generation” (*Autobiographies* 219-266). His label is more applicable to their internal psychic world than to any experience of violence or catastrophe; Yeats uses such language to underscore his sense of fragmentation and alienation, a facet of his art and life that would continue and remain representative of a principle aspect of the art that we consider Modernist. His expression of a millenarian future would also continue well beyond the 1890s and therefore does not represent a generalized *fin de siècle* hysteria. Instead, the major themes of Yeats’s millenarianism were his personal religion, his aesthetic theory of poetic transcendence, and his relationship to his Romantic forbearers, all aspects of his work and life connected to his occult communities.

However, the possibility that Yeats and the Symbolist poets of the 1880s and ‘90s create a bridge between the Romantic and the Modern is important. Yeats’s expression of post-millenarianism has its roots in the apocalyptic vision of the Romantics, and the Romantics would also serve as major sources of inspiration and contrast for Eliot and Auden. In his autobiographical reflections on the period, Yeats stresses his sense of personal alienation, claiming that “a conviction that the world was now but a bundle of fragments possessed me without ceasing” throughout these decades (*Autobiographies* 163). This sense of alienation is a major and continuing source of Yeats’s attraction to utopian

ideas, most importantly for Yeats in the verse of Blake and Shelley. The connection Yeats makes between Romanticism and Modernism only emphasizes the millenarian qualities of both periods and allows him to begin to reject the Victorian notion of progress.

The final decades of Victorian England were a period of considerable social change. Suffragettes and workers' rights movements grew in traction and authority. Darwin's theory of evolution had sparked considerable religious and scientific debate, while the rise of mesmerism and the pseudo-scientific interest in psychic phenomena developed in a supposedly rational post-Enlightenment milieu. In his book *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination*, Peter Ackroyd suggests that the Victorian period is simultaneously "an entirely new metropolitan civilization" but "preoccupied with 'ancient times'" as an antidote to modernity, believing that "a fervent belief in progress should be accompanied by a deep need for revival" (250). The Victorian idea of revival was a minor note in the culture, and served nationalist ideologies more than it did the idea of a better future. Instead, the idea of progress pushed the spectrum of the future into the middle, emphasizing continuity more than utopia. Modernist thinkers like Yeats abandoned the idea of progress because it failed to offer a satisfying resolution to their personal and social problems. Instead, they would adopt a millenarian idea of the future.

The Occult Orders of W. B. Yeats

In 1886, Katherine Tynan took Yeats to a séance. Prior to Yeats's arrival the medium's results had been minor: "A drawer full of books had leaped out of the table when no one was touching it, a picture had moved upon the wall" (*Autobiographies* 106).

These small psychokinetic manifestations were nothing compared to what Yeats experienced at the meeting. He describes the group of a “half-dozen” participants beginning with opening ceremonies, after which “the medium fell asleep sitting upright in his chair.” As is common to séances, only firelight illuminated the room, adding darkness and obscurity to the proceedings. Yeats then began to feel a “twitch” in his shoulders and hands; he was both curious and alarmed. He entered a state of stillness “and then [his] whole body moved like a suddenly unrolled watch-spring, and...[he] was thrown backward on the wall.” Yeats returned to the table to suggestions that he himself was a medium and that “If [he] did not resist some wonderful thing would happen.” In trying to explain his experience, Yeats claims he turned not to religion in the moment, but art, recalling Balzac’s curiosity about opium and the French author’s related fear of losing control.

Once he had returned to the table, Yeats spontaneously “banged the knuckles of the women next to [him]” and, despite her laughter, the medium of the group began to speak “for the first time, and with difficulty, out of his mesmeric sleep,...‘Tell her there is great danger.’” Yeats best describes what follows:

[the medium] stood up and began walking round me making movements with his hands as though he were pushing something away. I was now struggling vainly with this force which compelled me to movements I had not willed, and my movements became so violent that the table was broken. I tried to pray, and because I could not remember a prayer, repeated in a loud voice—

‘Of Man’s first disobedience and the fruit

Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
 Brought death into the world, and all our woe...
 Sing, Heavenly Muse' (106)

Yeats's description of the event mixes his belief in mysticism with the power of art. In his version of the event, his recitation of the opening of *Paradise Lost* is counterpointed in the story by the Pasternoster and Ave Marias being uttered by Tynan from a corner of the room.

After the violence of the initial contact, Yeats then entered a new state of calmness: "I am now in a trance but I no longer have any desire to resist." In this mental state, Yeats believed he saw the shapes of spirits, but in his *Autobiographies* he portrays the event more sceptically: "they were only the spiritualists and my friend at her prayers. The medium said in a faint voice, 'We are through the bad spirits'. I said, 'Will they ever come again do you think?' and he said, 'No, never again, I think', and in my boyish vanity I thought it was I who had banished them" (107). Despite the desire of the older Yeats to sanitize some of his occult imaginings, he admits that at the time he believed in the banishment of evil spirits.

The recollection above marks the way literature entwined with Yeats's experience of the supernatural. The frightening experience of possession led him to avoid séances for some time, and he puzzled over the meaning of the event, in particular whether what had occurred was something from within him, or if "as it seemed," the possession had indeed "come from without" (107). Even if the violence of the séance lingered in his memory, it did not limit his occult interests (aside from abstaining from séances, a very popular event

at the time) and the synthesis of mystical and artistic experience presents in the story is a constant element of Yeats's millenarianism.

In his *Autobiographies*, Yeats describes his earliest memories as "fragmented and isolated and contemporaneous" (41). His reflections are structured around his family's transition from Ireland to England, and this movement from Sligo to London would become a pattern that Yeats would continue throughout his career. Isolated in England because he was Irish and isolated in Ireland because of his family's Protestantism, his sense of alienation fuelled his rejection of conventional religion in favor of a mystical and transcendental millenarianism.

Yeats's consistent rejection of Christianity in favour of aesthetic experience was based in part on his father's own philosophy. His father, John Butler Yeats, had turned away from Christianity following his readings of Charles Darwin and John Stuart Mill. It is important that Yeats and his father both chose to use aesthetics in an effort to compensate for their agnosticism, replacing a potential faith-based community with a community of artists (Holdeman 2). While still a boy, Yeats had read Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley and other writers in the nineteenth-century debate about science and religion; for a short time Yeats adopted a strident atheism, largely because "[he] had wanted...to argue with everybody" (*Autobiographies* 89). He soon rejected atheism because of his impulse towards mysticism: "I was unlike others of my generation in one thing only. I am very religious, and deprived by Huxley and Tyndall, whom I detested, of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, I...made a new religion" (*Autobiographies* 115).

In these early years, while Yeats was discovering his new religion and building his reputation as a poet, his perception of the world was defined by a postlapsarian anxiety; in his mind, Ireland and England were fallen places. The world was “fractured” and this was mirrored in his own “inner being” (Holdeman 1). This sense of discord and frustration was a major reason Yeats could not embrace his father’s agnosticism. He was unable to accept the idea that the world was improving or that secularization was a positive outcome of modernity. When compared to Burridge’s model of millenarian movements, Yeats’s early phase begins with “severance” from his family’s religious traditions, which in turn led him to begin, as Burridge describes it, “discussion and intellectual or quasi-intellectual endeavours;” he then begins to seek out “the basis of a common experience” (115). For Yeats, this basis would be mystical experience and the totalizing view of history offered by theosophy.

Yeats found the fellowship of other millenarians in occult orders: in 1885 he helped found the Dublin Hermetic Society (DHS); following a move back to London in 1887, he joined the London Theosophical Society; and in 1890, Yeats changed his allegiance to the Order of the Golden Dawn. These memberships reflect Yeats’s lifelong project of “psychical research and mystical philosophy” (*Autobiographies* 96), a practice that would shape his poetic identity. His initial mystical explorations allowed him to “[break] away from [his] father’s influence” whom Yeats had come to think of as misguided (*Autobiographies* 96). Turning from scientific rationalism made these occult orders into allies and friends, and Yeats describes his experiences as communal activities: “[We] were

reading Baron Reichenback on Odic Force¹⁷ and manuals published by the Theosophical society. We spent a good deal of time in the Kildare Street Museum passing our hands over the glass cases, feeling or believing we felt the Odic Force flowing from the big crystals" (*Autobiographies* 97).

Despite the fact that Yeats was elected president at its first meeting in June of 1885 (Coote 42), he would later try to minimize the role of the DHS in his career, as well as the influence of the book *Esoteric Buddhism*. He reflects in his *Autobiographies* that he "had stayed somewhere between the books," a phrase he means to suggest that he was unable to commit to this brand of mysticism, "perhaps [due to his] father's scepticism" (97). But even with his attempt to minimize external influences, it was this early period that laid the foundation for his psychical investigations. Throughout his career, Yeats's main goal was to fuse his artistic and religious practices: he believed that the society should take as its goal not only the study of theosophy, but also the study of literature (Coote 42). This approach was not what the membership had in mind, and Yeats's refusal to be dogmatic in his spirituality led him to find the DHS unsatisfying¹⁸; his consistent interest in art, and especially literature, as a transcendental vehicle to a utopian future is a key element of his millenarianism and he would forge relationships that furthered his artistic goals.

¹⁷ The Odic Force is one of the earliest pseudo-scientific theories of crystals.

¹⁸ Yeats's leadership of the DHS would end a year later, when the membership rejected Yeats's approaches in favour of "a charter signed by Sinnett himself for a newly reconstituted and renamed Dublin Theosophical Society" (Coote 43). It is possible that Yeats elides much of his arcane practice in this period because he considered it a failure. The only time he was drawn back to the Dublin branch of theosophy was to visit one of Blavatsky's teachers, the Brahmin Mohini Chatterjee (Coote 43). Yeats would later write a poem, "Mohini Chatterjee" for 1933's *The Winding Stair*, but that later poem is more of a declaration on how the late Yeats has surpassed theosophy in developing his own personal mythology, *A Vision*.

Beyond being able to discuss shared interests, an appeal of occult groups such as Hermetic or Theosophical orders is the way they work as elite communities. Secret knowledge is also special knowledge, and those that receive it become part of a specialized and exclusive group. This is a common enough religious practice, and the way shamans, magicians, and priests wield their secret knowledge was what led the sociologist Max Weber to develop his concept of magic as “charisma.” Yeats’s joining of occult orders begins “a pattern that was to characterize much of his spiritual and eventually his artistic and political life: his joining small, elite and more or less secret societies centred around ideas of transforming spiritual revelation” (Coote 42). This pattern is best understood as a way to meet other millenarians in order to explore his desire for revelation. Millenarians like Yeats privilege secret knowledge because it grants them authority that the mainstream culture cannot deny them, even if that behaviour is isolated and carries little authority beyond the sub-culture.

Yeats’s relationship with Madame Blavatsky and her Theosophical Society has recently been given considerable analysis by Ken Monteith’s *Yeats and Theosophy*. Monteith’s examination of Yeats’s early poetry in the light of theosophy—in particular his publication of “Crossways”—throws light on how strongly theosophy functioned as a philosophy for Yeats to both follow and resist. Theosophy was not so much out-of-the-mainstream as it was a popular cult of personality, and it offered a totalizing view of history in a time when several competing views of history were making their claims. One of the major tenets of Theosophy was its suggestion that the secret knowledge of history

revealed to Blavatsky overcame any apparent disjunction between theosophical and mainstream views of history.

This theosophical version of history was based upon mystical or worldly cycles, a belief Yeats would hold throughout his life. As Blavatsky describes in her opening to *Isis Unveiled*, the cycle of history would wax and humanity would become more aware “until [it] came to know ‘good and evil’ as well as the Elohim [antediluvian spirit-gods] themselves. Having reached its summit, the cycle began to go downward” (3).

Theosophical practice therefore serves as a way of encouraging the waxing of the humanity’s magical awareness, which in turn acts as a millenarian process of radical change and worldwide transformation. Blavatsky and her fellow Theosophists were keen to capitalize upon the growing fields of geology and evolution, arguing that, “The discoveries of modern science do not disagree with the oldest traditions, which claim an incredible antiquity for our race” (Blavatsky 4). This combination of current science with reassuring and hopeful rhetoric is quite convincing, and was highly influential in the public’s attitudes toward Theosophists.

Monteith is correct in his assessment that theosophy was attractive to Yeats because it offered him “community” and “suggested that the unseen world...could be controlled, just as the individual could learn to control himself” (4-5). The moral code of the London Theosophical Society (LTS) also appealed to the young poet because it was “all inclusive and seemingly democratic” (5) and Monteith suggests that the LTS also “validated Yeats’s political interests.” I would argue that at this stage in his career Yeats is quite naive about politics, and his Celtic projects of the 1880s and ‘90s are more the

product of a general cultural nationalism than any focused political activism. Certainly his idealization of his unrequited love Maud Gonne as spiritual marriage suggests an emphasis upon beauty and the occult as opposed to an actual political rebelliousness. Instead, the elitism and secretive nature of the LTS's workings appealed to the egos of its members and Yeats was likely attracted to that element of the society.

As a millenarian, Yeats profited greatly from his time with Blavatsky and her followers. Although Monteith wants to make Yeats seem less credulous and more calculating in his occult allegiances, he also points out that "many critics find it difficult rectifying Yeats the Irish poet of High Modernism with the poet who uses fairies, mediums, and astrology to create his own mythology, or even mythologies" (229). In this remark Monteith almost directly echoes John R. Harrison's 1995 comment that "there has often been a reluctance to take Yeats's thinking seriously and, partly as a consequence of this, a refusal to accept that he successfully expressed his beliefs in his poetry" (363). The problem Harrison presents is different from Monteith's: while Harrison wants to understand Yeats's beliefs, he does not want then to have anything to do with the occult. Instead, like Frank Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending*, Harrison wishes to focus upon a sceptical Yeats, who has more in common with Nietzsche than with his fellow occultists.

It is important to consider the possibility that any dissonance felt between the poet and the mystic is really a reflection of the critic's scepticism and his or her inability to assume an objective sympathy with the subject of analysis. Previous studies of Yeats's mysticism, such as George Mills Harper's *Yeats and the Occult* or Leon Surette's *The Birth of Modernism*, have moved us away from these academic prejudices, and Monteith is able to

analyze the occult dimension of Yeats's practice, although he does not fully realize the importance of millenarianism in Yeats's thinking. This is possibly due to the fact that Yeats uses the word "religion" almost universally when he mentions the occult and always conceived of his occult and aesthetic work as stemming from his religious impulse. But we must also remember that Blavatsky and her writings showed Yeats the possibility of creating a totalized history in order to re-inscribe the future.

While Yeats's attempts to prove whether or not Theosophical magic worked as claimed would lead to his expulsion from the LTS, he was influenced by a number of Blavatsky's ideas and techniques. The most immediate benefit the LTS provided Yeats was an exposure to Blavatsky's more subtle manipulative techniques (Monteith 6-7). These included Yeats's practice of "deferred authority" in which he "portrays himself as a student of the very ideals he advocates and has also partially created" (6). Yeats was already moving towards a synthesis of art, culture, and religion when he entered Blavatsky's inner circle and there he saw an example of how the synthesis could be performed. Beyond the practice of deferred authority, which allowed him to create a sympathetic and convincing "narrative persona," Yeats gained new respect for the idea of an inner circle as a member of the Esoteric Section (Monteith 6). Yeats was a "formidable committee man" even at his young age (Coote 42), and it is likely that Yeats's exposure to Blavatsky's control of the inner members of the LTS might have served as a model for strategies in managing later projects like the Abbey Theatre.

Yeats's membership in the LTS and his final occult order, The Order of the Golden Dawn, overlap slightly and it is possible his new membership with the more European

and more magically-oriented Golden Dawn was a concern to the LTS (Margaret Mills Harper 154). The Golden Dawn had been founded in 1888 as a secret society under the leadership of Samuel Liddell “MacGregor” Mathers, a person described by Margaret Mills Harper as “enigmatic and obsessive” (154). The Golden Dawn welcomed Yeats’s interest in active magical experimentation and his membership in order the Golden Dawn would last over three decades. Founded upon western hermetic traditions such as alchemy and Rosicrucianism, the Golden Dawn was less interested in talk and the speculation of its leader, and instead encouraged active research into occult powers. Members of the order benefited from a shared set of resources, in particular the Order’s library, and participation in an active social club with like-minded researchers.

The primary appeal of the Golden Dawn to Yeats was its symbolic system. Along with his work with Celtic folklore, the symbols of the Golden Dawn allowed him to create a tradition that was both individual and communal. A cursory glance at his poetry of the period will show Yeats relying upon a set of codified symbols, especially in the poetry of *The Rose* (1893) and *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899). These books of poetry are most notable for their attempted synthesis of Christian, Celtic, and Occult symbolism, creating an idealized system of aesthetic expression that Yeats used to further his millenarian impulse. Yeats’s early poetry is constructed tightly around these occult symbols and millenarian themes.¹⁹ The most prominent among these symbols were the rose and the

¹⁹ It is important to note that not all of the influences leading Yeats to devise his symbolism were hermetic; Yeats was very influential in his relationship with Arthur Symons, whose study *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* is dedicated to Yeats (xix-xx). There is considerable overlap in Yeats’s attempt to express his art and millenarianism symbolically and Symons’s readings of nineteenth-century French literature. As Block points out, “Yeats could not have written *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*...he anticipated it, helped to shape it,

cross. *The Rose* begins by invoking the “Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!” and then refers the “ancient ways” about which the poet claims to “sing” (1-2). This is followed by an invocation of the names of Cuchulain (3) and Fergus (5), linked through a “Druid, grey, wood-nurtured, quiet-eyed” (3-5), a figure of the visionary mystic. The poem’s title—“To the Rose upon the Rood of Time”—is a hermetic reference to a pin that was properly worn over the heart during Golden Dawn rituals (Coote 97).

Later in the collection, the rose symbol becomes linked with God and his angels in the trio of poems: “The Rose of the World,” “The Rose of Peace,” and “The Rose of Battle.” These poems lack the pastoral urge of “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” or the deft mythopoesis of “The Man who dreamed of Faeryland,” but they do help make the poems more consistent and allow for a more direct engagement with millenarian themes despite the obscurantism of their symbolism. As an example, “The Secret Rose” finds Yeats almost pleading for a millenarian transformation:

...I too await

The hour of thy great wind of love and hate.

When shall the stars be blown about the sky.

Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and die?

Surely thine hour has come, thy great wind blows,

Far off, most secret, and inviolate Rose? (27-32)

and was stimulated by it” (9). While Symon’s work would go on to influence T. S. Eliot and further a tenuous connection between Yeats’s early work and Eliot’s first verse, Yeats himself was not a “symbolist” by creed. For a similar and more detailed commentary on Yeats’s influence on Symon, see Rosen 479-481.

In these lines, the rose functions as a holy grail of sorts, a piece of knowledge that will announce a remade world, a heaven on earth.

Yeats also drew on his experience with occult orders in his composition of several short stories during this early period. The most important example of how his occultism shaped his art is the 1897 short story "Rosa Alchemica." Heavily influenced by the conventions of the Gothic genre, "Rosa Alchemica" is the story of an unnamed protagonist's near-fatal encounter with the world of spirits. Beyond its plot, however, the subject matter of the story reflects Yeats's personal philosophy and introduces one of his most important literary characters, Michael Robartes. Robartes acts as a foil to the protagonist of the story, an unnamed alchemist, who is close enough to Yeats that he can be thought of as a poetic voice for the author. Like Yeats, the alchemist seeks "the transmutation of life into art" (1) through alchemy and literature, but he is isolated at the beginning of the story. He prides himself upon the fact that he is surrounded by the beauty of literary expression—Shakespeare, Dante, Milton are each mentioned in turn—and how his occult life has filled him with "all a Christian's ecstasy without his slavery to rule and custom" (1). The alchemist thinks of himself as an author and as removed from the world—an observer not an actor.

This opening rumination reflects Yeats's desire to merge art and faith into a transcendent personal expression. The value of literature is found in its role as "doorkeepers of my world, shutting out all that was not of as affluent a beauty of their own," a value that is both elitist and heartbreaking as it reminds the alchemist of his own mortality (2). In the face of his mortality, the alchemist descends into a kind of melancholy

in which he awaits revelation: “my mortality grew heavy, and I cried out, as so many dreamers and men of letters in our age have cried, for the birth of that elaborate spiritual beauty which could alone uplift souls weighted with so many dreams” (2).

Into this depressed apocalyptic mood, Yeats introduces Michael Robartes, a man with “wild red hair, fierce eyes, sensitive tremulous lips and rough clothes” (3). It is revealed that the alchemist and Michael Robartes were former colleagues in the Order of the Alchemical Rose a decade ago. Robartes has come to overturn the alchemist’s isolation, arguing that it was a mistake to “shut away the world and [gather] gods about [him]” (3). The philosophy of magic offered by Robartes likewise focuses upon the role of literature, but rather than deify the author, Robartes stresses characters instead of authors—Roland, Hamlet, and Faust are his key figures (4). These literary characters are gods to Robartes who sees himself as an actor in a larger work, a participant not an observer.

The alchemist rejects Robartes, calling his ideas debased—“the illusions that creep like maggots into civilizations when they begin to decline, and into minds when they begin to decay” (5)—but there is a sudden series of supernatural voices and spiritual manifestations that persuade the alchemist to accept Robartes’s lead. The story then adopts Celtic overtones—Gaelic is spoken, Celtic gods such as the Dagda and Lug are mentioned, and the greatest of alchemists mentioned in the story are Celtic (6-8). The alchemist looks over Robartes’s library and singles out “The prophetic writings of William Blake” as important (7), a connection which mirrors Yeats’s own love of Blake. Robartes teaches the alchemist “an exceedingly antique dance” (Yeats would return to this motif with his 1921 collection *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*). The dance leads to a kind of

spirit communion that threatens to enervate, if not destroy, the alchemist. He collapses only to awaken some time later as townsfolk begin to break into the sanctum, and he only narrowly escapes being trapped inside with the mob (10-11).

Aesthetics play an important role in the story's discussion of spiritual development. The rose symbol of the story functions as it does throughout Yeats's poetry, reflecting his occult symbolism. The consistency of symbolism during this period allowed Yeats to represent his millenarian impulse in a way that was sophisticated and externalized, serving as a language through which he can enunciate the transformation of the individual and society. Of course, alchemy and other practices related to the Golden Dawn rely upon an idea of individual transformation. The rose symbol therefore extends the meaning of the story beyond the transformation of the individual to the transformation of the world.

It is less easy to ascertain the extent to which other figures of the Golden Dawn were millenarian. They most certainly were counter-cultural and had alternative notions of human consciousness and the world, but their projects appear to be largely self-serving. Like the LTS before it, Yeats's millenarian hopes for the Golden Dawn would become stymied by the lust and avarice of his fellow mystics²⁰ and he would leave eventually leave

²⁰ By 1896, Maud Gonne had become disillusioned with the inability of the Golden Dawn's rituals to produce any effect on her work in Ireland and withdrew her membership. Yeats, however, was more dedicated and continued his work with the order. This would prove a difficult and stressful decision, as the Golden Dawn was becoming increasingly torn between competing factions. The scholarly collegiality of the Order was transmuting into what is best described as a cult. Mathers was tightening his hold over the Order, demanding more power and appointing Officers who enforced his will from afar. Yeats would recall that "in later years [Mathers's mind] became unhinged, as Don Quixote's was unhinged" (*Autobiographies* 159). The Golden Dawn's activities, particularly in London, were become more sexual and new radical members had become favourites of Mathers, in particular a young magus whose sexual indiscretions were already running afoul of the law:

the Order and join a splinter organization, the Stella Matutina, with which he would maintain membership until the 1920s (Foster 245). Ultimately, Yeats's memberships in these organizations shaped his poetic technique and structured his conception of the future. They provided an outlet for his anxieties about progress and secularization. As a writer, Yeats's use of deferred authority was a critical facet of his prose writing, both fiction and non-fiction, and a radical, transcendental future utopia became his most important theme.

Aleister Crowley. Yeats—probably to his credit—never associated at any great length with Crowley and appears to have had a strong dislike of the man (Cootes 205-7).

Mathers's growing paranoia was fuelled in part by the idea of mystical retaliation—imaginary attacks by real foes that could not be easily dismissed without destabilizing Mathers's control over his organization and admitting the fallacy of his magic, possibly costing him the support of his wealthy patrons. Annie Horniman, a friend of Yeats and a major backer for the Order, became distraught over the increased immorality of the Golden Dawn and threatened to withhold her considerable funds in an attempt to force Mathers to take action against it (Coote 157). Mathers dismissed her from the Order instead. By 1901, the Order was in a tailspin and the membership became increasingly partisan. Yeats wrote a private essay to the Order "Is the Order of R.R. and A.C. to remain a Magical Order" which was unpublished until George Mills Harper's *Yeats's Golden Dawn* made it available (259-268). Yeats's main concern in the power struggle was the possibility of sub-groups fragmenting the Order; he proposes that the Order "neither encourage nor discourage" but instead "retain our right to [insist upon]...strict obedience to the laws and by-laws" and maintaining control of the examination process and degree granting authority (259). Yeats also wishes to "[restore] the oath taken upon the Cross on Corpus Christi Day, until recent years, by one of the seniors as a representative of the Third Order" (260). This gives some of the flavour of the occult group's discourse, and reflects Yeats's disappointment in the order and its movement away from the occult to self-aggrandizement and excess. In his impassioned letter, Yeats repeatedly appeals to a sense of harmony, and in the end, uses literature as a figure of both asceticism and support: "It was the surrender of freedom that taught Dante Alighieri to say 'Thy will is our peace'" (268). Sadly, the group was not sympathetic to Yeats's desire for harmony and was unmoved by his attempts to synthesize art and asceticism as model for good behaviour.

To make matters even worse, a criminal case badly damaged the reputation of occult orders, the Golden Dawn most of all. A pair of criminals "Theo" and "Madame Horos" had learnt a few rituals and stolen a number of papers from Mathers while in Paris. After arriving in London in late 1900, the couple proceeded to lure unsuspecting girls to their home through news advertisements promising "'spiritual advancement.'" Using the Order's rituals and terms, they would attempt to convince the girls that Theo Horos was a blessed spiritual being and they were to be his spiritual wife. If they resisted the act of sex, they would often be raped by the husband and wife. Fortunately, the couple, who were really the American couple Edith and Fran D. Jackson, were caught shortly after they began their depraved scheme, primarily due to the fact that they were wanted for a number of crimes in "the United States, Australia, France, [and] South Africa" (Coote 209). While the court case was ongoing, "the newspapers revelled in exposing the Order and its rituals" and this attack was magnified by the judge's denouncement of the Order in his judgement (Coote 209). The divisive internal squabbling and the threat of public scandal made Yeats a much more reluctant member of occult groups, and his growing fame as a poet was beginning to provide new opportunities. It would be sometime before he began to involve himself intensely in group-based occult activities again.

The Irish Poet

The late 1880s and early 1890s were a period of intense social and artistic activity for Yeats. In addition to his occult studies, he was considered one of the foremost Celtic folklorists and was a very active member of London's literary scene. Through his experience of the inner circles of both Oscar Wilde and William Morris, Yeats was able to experience the dynamics of coteries beyond Blavatsky's Esoteric Section. Morris was also a potent utopian influence on the young Yeats.

Morris's utopian realm in *News for Nowhere* is a classic millenarian dream of an idealized past brought forward to solve the crisis of the present.²¹ This is especially clear in the handcrafted and agrarian nature of the utopia, which was a reaction against techno-positivists like Edward Bellamy, the American author of the techno-utopian novel *Looking Backwards 2000 – 1887*. Yeats later praised Morris's *The Well at the Worlds End* in his collection *Ideas of Good and Evil* (*Early Essays* 43). In his essay "The Happiest of all the Poets," Yeats stresses Morris's themes of transformation and renewal through the past: "[Morris] may not have been, indeed he was not, among the very greatest of the poets, but he was the greatest of those who prepare the last reconciliation when the Cross shall blossom with roses" (*Early Essays* 50). This is a complex image of hermetic awakening, a moment when the symbol of the Cross shall be combined with the hermetic secret rose. Through this symbolism, Yeats appeals to a point in the future, perhaps the near future,

²¹ Morris's work, especially his translations of the Norse *Volsungasaga* and his proto-fantasy *The Well at the World's End*, would inspire another millenarian author, J. R. R. Tolkien.

when the disciples of the rose would bring out a change in the world, essentially a millenarian transformation of human consciousness.

Perhaps more importantly, the 1890s was also the peak of Yeats's interest in the Romantics (Bornstein, "Yeats and Romanticism" 24). Although Blake and Shelley's influence would wax and wane over Yeats's career, they offered him a model of visionary and millenarian poetry. Blake made heavy use of millenarian images throughout his career and longed to write an epic poem on the apocalypse (Paley 69). The millennium is a major part *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where Blake reveals his theme: "a new heaven is begun" (Plate 3). Blake saw the millennium as imminent and combines "a new heaven" with the simultaneous destruction of the earth (Paley 33). Morton Paley argues that many of Blake's poems shared the goals of liberation and utopia, in particular in his works *Vala, or The Four Zoas* and *Milton*. *Vala*, although incomplete, was Blake's most ambitious apocalyptic work and, as Paley describes it, "was always to end with the Last Judgement of Night the Ninth, in which an apocalyptic Last Judgement is accompanied by a millennial return to an earthly paradise" (70). Like Yeats, the millennium is Blake's great theme and he sought to find concordances between earthly conflict and the narrative of Revelations in order to announce the apocalypse. The inner struggles of the individual poet represented a movement towards unity in order to overcome a fallen state.

Blake's millenarianism was a clear influence upon Yeats's own. In the introduction to the three-volume *The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic and Critical* (1893), Yeats reflects that following his initial interest in Blake, he had "grown up, and become a student of mysticism" and that his "eye for symbolic systems" had improved.

This apparently means Yeats had mastered Blake, absorbing his millenarian and poetic ideas and that he was moving beyond Blake's insight. By adopting a form of scholarly objectivity in his introduction, Yeats is able to refer to himself in the third person as he summarizes Blake's importance:

here was a myth as well worth study as any that has been offered to the world...He saw, too, that it was no mere freak of an eccentric mind, but an eddy of that flood-tide of symbolism that had attained its tide-mark in the magic of the Middle Ages.

(Early Essays 75-76)

Yeats's style here defers identity to create authority through the insistent referral to himself as "he" or "the other editor," a practice which echoes both the practices of his occult teachers and of scholarly objectivity. The passage also reinforces the themes of an idealized past and organic community that Yeats's Celtic Twilight writings present: the "magic of the Middle Ages" Yeats describes allows him to circumvent the Renaissance, Enlightenment and Victorian periods simultaneously and align his poetry with the more believing, more wondrous minds of the Medieval period.

There is a profound dissonance in the essay's focus on "Nature" as a principle aspect of Blake's teaching, in large part because the Romantic representation of nature has little sympathy with the Medieval. Yeats is willing to overlook this antipathy, or perhaps does not recognize it, because his interpretation of Blake emphasizes his millenarian ideals: "Nature [Blake] tells us, is merely a name for one form of mental existence. Art is another and a higher form. But that art may rise to its true place, it must be set free from memory that binds it to Nature." (77). Through this argument, Yeats suggests that art can

be transcendental, not only in terms of enlightenment, but in terms of millennial transformation. The transformative quality afforded to the "Universal Mind" cannot be fully realized in our reality because of the fallen nature of the world.

Yeats is not entirely comfortable with Blake's Christianity (he consigns Christ to a "philosophic... [or] symbolic name" [78]) and prefers to abstract Blake's writing into a larger symbolism, akin to his hermetic teaching. The essay concludes with a very sincere and direct acknowledgement of millenarianism: "This is Blake's message. He uttered it with the zeal of a man, who saw with spiritual eyes the eternal importance of that which he proclaimed. For this he looked forward to the return of the Golden Age when 'all that was not inspiration should be cast off from poetry'" (78). Yeats appears fully capable of realizing the millenarianism of others, and his interest in both Blake and Shelley was motivated by his response to this dream of a radical transformation and a golden age.

Harold Bloom has argued that Yeats's commentaries on Blake reflect a process of defining his own personal aesthetic philosophy rather than an actual analysis of Blake's writings (69-71). In particular, he focuses on Yeats's use of "emotion" as a bridge between Nature and Imagination. It is possible that this connection reflects Yeats's desire to place artistic practice at the heart of his millenarianism, but Bloom asserts that Yeats's understanding of Blake is "a distortion." This is likely necessary due to Bloom's emphasis on antagonism between a poet and his influences, and Bloom portrays Yeats's relationship with Shelley as one of struggle. Indeed, Bloom's study of Yeats seems to serve as an early working through of his next book, *The Anxiety of Influence*. He therefore overlooks the

millenarian resonances of Yeats's commentary because of his own interest in oedipal patterns of influence.

Yeats's practice of collecting and publishing Irish folklore likewise reflects his millenarianism and his first collection of stories, 1888's *Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry*, was published a year before his first book of poetry, *The Wanderings of Oisín and Other Poems*. He would go on to complete other collections of Irish folk tales, most of them collected from the Sligo region he and his family visited almost yearly. These included *Representative Irish Tales* (1891), *Irish Fairy Tales* (1892), and *The Celtic Twilight* (1893). Yeats's work as an Irish folklorist was exclusive to his early career, but it would inform the popular opinion of his work, and the idea of a "Celtic Twilight" is one of his most enduring legacies. His work on folktales allowed him to engage with a mystical "subject matter that contrasted sharply...with the contemporary urban world" (Pethica 129). These stories can be seen as a major aspect of his desire to create a distinct Irish heritage and they most certainly are the first of his three major Irish nationalism projects (the Abbey Theatre and his service as a senator being the other two).

Despite the fact that Yeats's Celtic stories are more a result of his passion for Irish culture than serious research, it is worth discussing their role in his millenarianism. Authors like Yeats are attracted to the task of unifying or defining literary traditions because they seek to create a coherent narrative—an organic community from which modern culture had emerged—that resonates with present concerns and could be used to project a renewed future. The idea of an organic community as quasi-feudal appealed to Yeats's love of aristocracy, or as Harrison describes it, his "anguish at the disruption of the

order and cohesion, the homogeneity of the aristocratic society he so admired" (367).

Although his love of aristocracy was connected with his interest in utopia, Yeats was also attracted to an (imaginary) Irish organic community because it suggested that a unified aesthetic expression was possible and he going to be a part of the reunification through literature.

Yeats was convinced that "Ireland lacked a coherent literary tradition" (Pethica 130). It is true that throughout the nineteenth century Irish Gaelic had diminished as a spoken language and the emigration had left little cultural continuity for the Irish nation. Centuries of English colonial practices in Ireland, which had ebbed and flowed in their violence and intensity, also had the effect of influencing the Irish literary culture. Yeats's goal of creating a distinct Irish conversation was a way of resisting the effects of this colonization, although it should be noted that Yeats never learnt Irish Gaelic and that the majority of his work with the Irish folktale was published at a time when he lived most of the year in London—essentially returning to the centre to write about the margin.²²

However, underlying Yeats's interest in an Irish tradition was a keen idea of the future as utopia. His first collection of essays, *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1903), acts in a manner

²² It is important to situate Yeats's work on Irish folktales as part of a much larger international interest in folk culture that began in the late eighteenth century with the publication of Johann Gottfried von Herder's *Kulture des Volkes*. Herder's assertion that the folk tale "embodies a primal engagement with fundamental questions about humanity's place in the cosmos, and this revealed essential transhistorical truths about human experience" (Pethica 131) would certainly have appealed to Yeats's theosophical experience. Other scholar-writers, such as Hans Christen Andersen, the Brother's Grimm, and Charlotte Guest (who published a translation of the Welsh *Mabinogion* in various forms between 1838 and 1849) were engaged in projects similar to Yeats's, and had a similar influence upon their respective cultures. Yeats was familiar with the composite Finnish work, the *Kalevala*, and makes reference to it in his essays "The Celtic Element on Literature" and "The Autumn of the Body" (*Early Essays* 129-30, 132; 141). Indeed, projects like the above would continue throughout the twentieth-century, such as the practice of recording of African-American or Appalachian folk songs in the United States or the Nazi appeals to Germanic legends and romances.

very much like that of the symbolic system of his poetry, especially in their attempts to gather up the different threads of his life—the mystic, the folklorist, the nationalist, and the poet—and present them as a coherent argument about Ireland and the future. Yeats had kept his occult memberships secret from the public, so the collection’s third essay, “Magic,” became both his most widely read statement on the occult to date and a lens through which to analyze the rest of the collection. The essay places Yeats’s beliefs of the mystical and the transcendental directly at heart of the collection, beginning with the claim “I believe in the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic” (*Early Essays* 25). Of course, this statement performs the “deferred authority” Yeats had learnt from Madame Blavatsky: the appeal in the sentence to a “we” works to assimilate the reader into his position. The philosophy Yeats provides is clearly hermetic in nature and reflects his continued interest in the practices of the Golden Dawn. Comprised of three doctrines, this early statement on magic bears some discussion as it relates not only to Yeats’s occultism, but also to his millenarian goals for Ireland and his poetry.

The first of the doctrines reads, “the borders of our mind are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy” (*Early Essays* 25). The second doctrine relates to the nature of memory and understanding: “the borders of our memories are as shifting and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself” (*Early Essays* 25). The third doctrine builds on the prior notions of universal energy and memory to suggest that art is the most efficient mode of expression for magic: “That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbolism” (*Early Essays* 25). This symbolism ultimately allows the

magician and perhaps reader as well, to present a vision of the future. The interest in memory and experience described above are similar to the kind of subjectivity Virginia Woolf explores in *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*, and represents an early expression of the Modernist search for new forms of representation. Even more importantly, the doctrine of symbolism motivates Yeats's hopes for a national mythology for Ireland.

Through "a single energy" combining aesthetics and hermetic symbolism the past would combine with future to herald a golden age for Ireland. Yeats's desire for Irish unity can be best seen in the essay "Ireland and the Arts" in which he reflects the millenarian hope that Ireland could "begin to dig...the garden of the future" and undergo a transformation that would "come into the lives of all, rich and poor" and allow for a more perfect nation, making "the Irish race...a chosen race, one of the pillars that uphold the world" (*Early Essays* 154-55). Yeats's desire for an imminent transformation of the world is the foundation of his nationalism. The passage imagines a utopian future, but is not a real prescription for political change.

George Mills Harper has argued that Yeats's three prescriptions really amount to an aesthetic or poetic creed; however, limiting the prescriptions to a poetic creed fails to recognize the extent to which Yeats attempts to synthesize his activities into a single millenarian intention (*Early Essays* 100-101). Indeed, the first doctrine is echoed in Yeats's essays on Blake in the collection: "William Blake and the Imagination" and "William Blake and His Illustrations to *The Divine Comedy*." The millenarian ties between Blake and Yeats are present in Yeats's claims that Blake "loved the future like a mistress" and that his faith went beyond Christianity to comprehend "a moment when we understand more perfectly

than we understand again until all is finished" (*Early Essays* 84). Yeats is unwilling to acknowledge the Second Coming of Christ as an adequate model for a vision of the future, which is an essential element of Blake's personal mythology, but he is absolutely committed to the idea that Blake was a revelatory writer. To circumvent this problem, Yeats stresses Blake's interests in "Jacob Boehme and...old alchemist writers" in order to align Blake with his own mystical practices (*Early Essays* 85).²³ Such strategies remind us that Yeats was idiosyncratic in his approach to literary history, manipulating it to serve his millenarian aims.

In a similar vein, Yeats works to incorporate Shelley into his millenarian rhetoric. Shelley provides an external authority through which Yeats can assert the righteousness of his interest in Irish nationalism, primarily through citing Shelley's argument in *A Defence of Poetry* (*Early Essays* 52). For Yeats, Shelley's model of poetry was useful in two ways: first, it argues that imagination triumphs over reason: "Reason is to the imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance" (Shelley 516). By placing the reason into a subordinate position, Shelley is able to respond to the Enlightenment, and Yeats essentially uses it to similar effect, rejecting science in favour of the occult. Second, Yeats was attracted to the idea that poetry shapes the public's mind (Shelley 529). Before the Easter Rising of 1916, Yeats believed in a rather romantic, if not Romantic, ideal of social change: that it could be achieved through art and ideas. Yeats's Celtic Twilight verse and stories, along with his plays, sought to move Ireland towards

²³ For a reading of Blake's use of the second coming and the influence of Jacob Boehme, see Paley 54-55.

freedom and transformation, and it is likely that Shelley influenced at least some of his thinking on the subject of poetry and culture.

George Bornstein notes in his work *Yeats and Shelley* that Shelley represented an aesthetic model of what Yeats calls Intellectual Beauty (a term taken from Shelley's poem of the same name), a concept that "helped to sustain the young Yeats in his fight against materialism" (*Early Essays* 8). Beyond merely an aesthetic model, it is possible that Shelley's interest in apocalypse also aided in Yeats's rejection of Victorian models of progress. Morton Paley suggests that Shelley "had a virtually lifelong engagement with apocalypse and millennium" and, despite his atheism, Shelley's poetry is deeply indebted to a millenarian idea of the future (220). Shelley's millenarianism is found in his attempt to uphold the radicalism of the prior generation's revolutions through works like *Queen Mab* and *Prometheus Unbound* (Paley 225, 275). Interestingly, Paley connects Blake and Shelley's millenarianism to a shared set of symbols: "A garden and a city" (228). Yeats would not take up this imagery, preferring instead to try to make his own symbolism, but both Eliot and Auden would use the garden and the city in their verse. Unlike Blake, Shelley was interested in the idea of political insurrection as millenarian, or what Paley calls "Apocapoltics" (233). If a division was to be made between Blake and Shelley, it is likely that Blake was a post-millenarian transcendentalist, while Shelley was a pre-millenarian utopian.

Although Yeats is steadfastly post-millenarian, he nonetheless draws on Shelley as an example of poetic symbolism. His attempt to define a set of "ruling symbols" (*Early Essays* 60) is hardly surprising as it both echoes his work on Blake and also justifies his

synthesis of Irish mythology and hermetic magic. Yeats's use of magic as a form of symbolism, exemplified by his use of the rose symbol, was intended to give voice to the unified mind and spirit and access transcendence. In his argument, Yeats appeals to a special authority for those beset by the quickening pace of technology, urbanization, and bureaucracy. This is a clearly an expression of a sense of disenfranchisement that marks Yeats as a millenarian in search of idea of the future that would counter both modernity and progress.

In *Ideas of Good and Evil*, Yeats begins to don the mantle of prophet himself. After years of observing occultists who claimed visionary power, Yeats desires to be the centre of his own circle. There is a degree of vanity and ego in all of Yeats's projects, a hunger for fame that he sought to elide by describing his work as "half humble and half proud" and his repeated claim of "we" that defers his claims to a group (*Early Essays* 150). Yeats ultimately believes that his practice of magic has "set me all but unwilling among those lean and fierce minds who are at war with their time, who cannot accept the days as they pass, simply and gladly" (*Early Essays* 40). Once again, Yeats defers to an outside source, but only to elevate his status. The claim that he has "unwilling[ly]" been thrust into radical circles is false. Yeats had sought out radical groups throughout the preceding decades, as both his engagement with occult and literary circles attest. These groups and his writing each related to his desire for a millenarian change. He was always at war with his time.

The rest of *Ideas of Good and Evil* contains important images that resonate with Yeats's desire for organic community. He attacks modernity, arguing that poetry has never really given voice to the peasant and asserting that many of recent poets are "poets of a

predominate portion of the middle class, or people who have unlearned the unwritten tradition which binds the unlettered" (7). Yeats then uses his work on Celtic folklore as a way to recover the lost organic community that existed before modernity:

I soon learned to cast away one other illusion of 'popular poetry.' I learned from the people themselves, before I learned it from any book, that they cannot separate the idea of an art or a craft from the idea of a cult with ancient techniques and mysteries. They hardly separate mere learning from witchcraft, and are fond of words and verses that keep half their secret to themselves. (10)

Yeats's millenarianism combines with his desire for an Irish literary tradition that counters English tradition (5; 10-11). His rhetoric here is confused, as his dependence upon English authors like Blake and Shelley seems to countermand the Irish strain of the argument. This is a problem Yeats sought to overcome through the totalizing historical view of universal truth offered by theosophy, and he would later attempt to valorize Anglo-Irish writers like Jonathan Swift in the 1920s.

Yeats's insistence that poetry and music arose "out of the sounds the enchanters made to help their imaginations to enchant, to charm, to bind with spell" (35) reflects his conception of transcendent and aesthetic experiences as identical. Ultimately though, finding a vehicle through which to rewrite history and to re-inscribe the world with imagination is his goal in *Ideas of Good and Evil*. There is a fear of scepticism in his argument that "men who are imaginative writers to-day may well have preferred to influence the imagination of others more directly in past times" (35). Yeats claims that we might learn more about art and history by engaging imaginatively (and not factually) with

the past to tap into a hidden wellspring of creation — “the one mind, [the] foundation of all perfection” — instead of scholarly study (36). In such arguments, Yeats tries to resist the scepticism of the post-Enlightenment thinker out of a fear that such readers may reject his merging of art and magic.

If the millenarian impulse had faltered in English verse following the Romantics and was momentarily replaced by Victorian notions of the future based on the continuity of progress, Yeats dramatically returns millennium to the mainstream of Anglo-Irish poetry. The “*fin de siècle*” period of the 1880s and ‘90s creates a link with Romanticism that returns the subject of a millennial future to English poetry and Yeats is the most influential and potent practitioner of this new poetry. Yeats’s need to oppose fragmentation would be recognized by other authors and poets, including Eliot and Auden. Progress as a means to utopia becomes increasingly suspect to Modernism, while millenarianism grows in its influence; over the next four decades, apocalyptic thought encompasses more and more social and literary space.

CHAPTER TWO: PROGRESS TO CRISIS, 1900-1920

*We were the last romantics—chose for theme
 Tradition sanctity and loveliness
 — Yeats, “Coole and Ballylee” (41-2)*

The turn of the century brought with it a growth in travel and with it what is now generally recognized as Trans-Atlantic Anglo-American writing. Henry James, born American but who lived in England for forty years before naturalizing his citizenship in 1916, presented both a possible career trajectory for T. S. Eliot, and was an early figure in a much larger trend towards world travel among English-language writers. Over the period of 1890 to the 1950s, Modernists would move across the Atlantic in a pattern that helped to create the public image of Modernism. These travelers—Gertrude Stein, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Samuel Beckett—make up a compelling cast of literary figures who left their country of birth to find their voice during the early twentieth century.

These first decades also saw world literature make a deeper impression upon Anglo-American writers. Both Yeats and Pound would become deeply interested in Japanese dramatic traditions and Pound would incorporate the characters of Chinese writing into his *Cantos*. Such cosmopolitanism reflects the growing diversity of major cities. In England, cities continued to grow and urban populations in the United States of

America began to outnumber rural: in 1900, 39.8% of Americans lived in cities; by 1920 that number had risen to 51.2% (U. S. Census Bureau).

England had enjoyed a mostly peaceful century following the defeat of the French at Waterloo. There had been distant wars like the Crimean War or the American Civil War, but generally speaking, the nineteenth century had been a genial, diplomatic success for England. For the civilian, the British Isles were becoming safer and more secure. Amidst this relative stability, social issues like women's suffrage and workers' conditions became more prominent political concerns and some progress was made towards these goals during the twentieth century. This period of growth was not without its tensions and writers like E. M. Forster, particularly in *Howards End*, caught the competing strains of conservative alarm and liberal hope of the Edwardian decade.

Other writers, like H. G. Wells or Henry James (whom Pericles Lewis calls a "prophet" in his *Introduction to Modernism*) focused on the potential for radical social and technological change to define the development of humanity in the century to come (61). Whether or not James was truly prophetic, it is true that despite the power and size of the British Empire, the idea of continuity or progress was coming into question. Writers like Joseph Conrad and Rudyard Kipling had begun to doubt the Empire's value and its future (Lewis 57). Intellectually, the shape of Anglo-American thought would be influenced by the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud, both of whose works were becoming more widely circulated; their separate but connected interrogation of rationality was a major challenge to the ideas of moral, social, and scientific progress. Anthropology and archaeology also grew in reputation, in part due to the exploits of explorers like

Ernest Shackleton and Percy Fawcett and the growing capacity of mass communication to deliver stories of their adventures to a world-wide audience. But this period of early globalization and imperial growth was to face a serious challenge in the violence of World War I.

The Great War began both a terrible fulfillment and cruel dismantling of the Enlightenment's future, made in the image of science and reason. In the wake of the war, the value of technological progress would become suspect; the weapons potential of industrial technology would become fully realized and dehumanized, especially in the artillery shells and bombs of the war. The painful slowness with which the world adapted to this new reality would cost millions of lives. Over the last ninety plus years, scholars have written justifications, criticisms, and explanations of the diplomatic failures that led to the war, but it is suffice to say that the major powers of Europe knew a conflict was coming, and then found themselves dangerously out of their depth in their ability to manage the new warfare (a failing that France and Britain would repeat again in the late 1930s). If peace is the preparation for war, then the longer the peace, the less we are able to understand those preparations.

In the wake of the World War I, there arose an immense interest in patterns of decline and catastrophe. European society began to address catastrophic ideas of the future in a fashion rarely seen in previous centuries. Stripped of its utopian impulse, the phrase apocalypse began to assume a darker, more nihilistic tone. This shift along the spectrum of the future is marked in the verse of both Yeats and Eliot. Yeats's millenarianism begins to darken, and for the first time, he expresses hesitation or anxiety

about the process of transcendence. Eliot, on the other hand, will move away from a focus on social tensions towards an exploration of history and faith, preparing him for the religious journey he would undergo in the 1920s.

Yeats: Theatre, Politics, and Revolution

Yeats and several colleagues—including the actress Florence Farr, playwright Edward Martyn, and author George Moore—began plans in 1899 for a new theatre movement to be based out of Dublin. The city was a key element of their plans because they envisioned the new theatre as a locus of a Celtic Renaissance (Coote 191). Their goal was to create a unified Irish identity in the hopes of furthering the political ambitions of some of the members (Martyn would be the first President of the *Sinn Féin* from 1905-1908), but for Yeats the theatre allowed him to pursue his millenarianism in front of a wider audience. While Yeats had been writing drama for some time, his plays remained largely unperformed. The Irish National Theatre was to be a place where he could explore his ideas of drama and verse and see them realized by a company that he hoped one day would be entirely Irish.

Yeats expresses his ideas for a millenarian theatre in his 1900 essay “The Theatre.” He rejects the “common opinion...that the poetic drama has come to an end” and the idea that “modern poets have no dramatic power” (*Early Essays* 123). This polarized language is the result of Yeats’s desire for a lost organic community, represented by a loss of prestige and a common audience for theatrical arts. His desire for unity leads him to insist that “the arts are but one Art” an insight that allows him to unify not only dramatists from

different periods (Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Calderon), but also to deploy his work on Celtic folklore and William Blake to reinforce his position.

The theatre was a space that, according to David Holdeman, “appealed to the same fascination with ritual performance that drew [Yeats] to...the Golden Dawn” (37) and in “The Theatre” Yeats reinforces this link by suggesting that

in the first day, [theatre] is the art of the people; and in the second day...it is the preparation of a Priesthood. It may be, though the world is not old enough to show us any example, that this Priesthood will spread their Religion everywhere, and make their Art the Art of the people. (*Early Essays* 124)

Yeats makes an oblique reference to a prelapsarian state and suggests it is necessary to combine art with belief. The similarity between theatre and occult ritual led him to hope that by spreading the symbolism and utopian ideals to a wider audience, he might finally elevate Ireland—if not the world—toward a harmonic convergence of aesthetic appreciation and mystical revelation. Because drama “began in ritual,” it only needed to be combined with what Yeats believes is its “ancient sovereignty,” its prelapsarian purity, in order to “come to its greatness again” (*Early Essays* 125).

Yeats’s use of Blake in “The Theatre” allows him to advocate his millenarianism directly through his strategy of deferred authority: “Blake has said that all art is a labour to bring again the Golden Age, and all culture is certainly a labour to bring again the simplicity of the first ages, with knowledge of good and evil added to it” (*Early Essays* 125). The danger that drama, and therefore all art, faces is the loss of organic community—those simple “first ages”—and the growing urbanization of Ireland, which “destroy[s] the

emotions to which [the theatre] appeals" (*Early Essays* 124). Rhetorically, the rejection of modernity places theatre in position to prepare the world for the millennium. In order to achieve this desired social change, Yeats argues it will "take a generation, perhaps generations" because of the demands of preparing actors, public spaces to perform in, and the need to develop "a new tradition" (*Early Essays* 125-6). Whatever the political goals of the "Celtic Renaissance," Yeats understood the movement as a vehicle for reviving a lost prelapsarian Irish identity. Once this identity was restored through visionary experience and aesthetic expression, the millennium would occur.

Despite Yeats's hopes for radical transformation, his early plays met with resistance and protest. His first Irish National Theatre project, *The Countess Cathleen* (published in 1892), was approaching its first performance in 1899; the play was declared heretical by a priest, and in the resulting controversy, Martyn, who was both the principal backer and a member of a powerful Roman Catholic family, retreated from the production (Coote 193). For Yeats, the Catholic censure was disheartening and frightening; he was simply unprepared for such a response. Coote argues that Yeats had envisioned the play as a "battle between good and evil [that] was both a spiritual and political conflict" and one that highlighted the need for action despite the ideological divisions of faith (194). While he had his supporters, both among the elite and the public, Yeats disliked the partisan nature of Ireland's Catholic-Protestant divide. As I have argued, Yeats's own conception of religion was based on the idea of an aesthetic-religious synthesis, and over the following decades Yeats would become embittered and guarded about the national press's sometimes mocking treatment of his occultism (Holdeman 40).

Ignoring the negative opinion of the press, Yeats would go on to produce a number of plays and work towards his hopes of building a theatre company made up entirely of Irish actors and stagehands (Coote 216). He was also warming to the idea of making actual political statements through plays like *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (1902). He collaborated with Lady Gregory on a number of projects and brought in his Golden Dawn colleague Annie Horniman to support the formation of the Irish National Dramatic Society in 1902. This was the first of Yeats's self-centred coteries and Horniman's financial and personal support allowed him to worry less about Ireland's religious tensions.²⁴

Although public pressure led him to retreat from overtly occult writing like "Magic," Yeats maintained mystical and millenarian themes in his poetry. The song-like verses of "The Happy Townland" from *In the Seven Woods* (1904) relates a hallucinatory vision of a townland in which "Boughs have their fruit and blossom / At all times of the year;" (5-6). This utopian village is a landscape of fairy-tale quality, with rivers of beer, aging pipers, and womenfolk who are all "Queens, their eyes blue like ice" (11). It is a heaven where when the revellers "unhook their heavy swords / From golden and silver boughs;" (23-4) the dead rise up "Awakening to life again" (26) and in the final verse we are told that "Michael will unhook his trumpet/.../And blow a little noise" (41-2), a reference to the Apocalypse of John of Patmos.

At first, the poem is easy to dismiss as an example of what Michael A. Moir considers "utopian communities in which rural peasants and aristocrats mingle freely"

²⁴ Horniman was equally millenarian in her ideas and as a non-Christian was undeterred by clerical censure, (Coote 229-30). She would remain a committed member of Yeats's occult circle and his Dublin coterie until 1910, when she returned to England to manage theatres of her own.

(110), but an interloping fox seems to turn the poem's prophetic celebrations on end by asking in the refrain "*O what of the world's bane?*" (14). Despite the joy of the sun and moon a fox warns the reader:

*'O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane.'* (18-20)

"The Happy Townland" is a moment when Yeats seems almost cynical about vision and the possibility of radical transformation. This cynicism would return later, especially in the more catastrophic lines of "The Second Coming," and the excitement of 1899's *The Wind among the Reeds* has turned to doubt in 1904:

It is luck that their story
Is not known among men,
For I, the strong farmers
That would let the spade lie
Their hearts would be like a cup
That somebody had drunk dry (27-32)

Instead, the world is haunted by this image of "The Happy Townland." The poem presents utopia as just out of reach and marks Yeats's growing wariness about the possibility of real social change, implying that it might be for best that the millennium be kept from the farmers "whose heart[s] would break in two" (2) if they actually experienced it. The tone of the poem suggests the route to utopia is more dangerous for

Yeats in the early twentieth century and he begins to mix catastrophic ideas into his normally millenarian lines.

The growing sense of finality in Yeats's poetry was perhaps hastened by a sense his career was winding down. His writing had slowed and his place in Irish literary history was secured enough that an eight volume *Collected Works* was commissioned in 1908. In his study of Irish Modernism, *A Colder Eye*, Hugh Kenner points out in that despite the fact that Yeats would have "still thirty years to live and two-thirds of his poetry to write" the writing after 1909 has a "posthumous" air to it; Yeats's *Autobiographies*, begun in 1915, end in 1909 and the *Collected Works* of 1909 included little of the writing Yeats published since 1900 (Kenner 160-1). The sense of finality that Kenner attempts to invoke is artful: if Yeats had stopped writing at the time of his first *Collected Works*, he would still be remembered, perhaps as a late Romantic rather than a Modernist.

Millenarianism is still present in Yeats's poetry and prose, but is more muted because of his growing engagement with politics. Through his involvement in Ireland's independence movement, Yeats would discover that politics serve as a poor vehicle for millenarianism. Questioning the possibilities of ideology and politics, he would wonder how a person who has given over his mind and will to the demands of "party" can even experience art, never mind "stand like St. Michael with the trumpet that calls the body to holy resurrection?" (*Early Essays* 229). Yeats's argument is that in order to be ready for change one must be aware of the radical potential of art, the kind of radical art that he dreamed of making. Art, Yeats insists, is able to "re-create the world" if one lets it (*Early Essays* 231).

Although Yeats wanted a better future for Ireland, he was bewildered and uncomfortable with the more political activism of Maud Gonne or Lady Gregory and remained the artist who believed radical social change is dirtied by politics; however, he still did consider his work as a national project. The tone of his verse during this decade is one of rejection and pain, but at the end of the decade, Yeats is still millenarian enough to remain certain of the power of art. The course of the events to come would steer him towards a realization of what the difference between being a nationalist and being a politician really is. Prior to this realization, Yeats had been motivated by his ideals of artistic elitism—Yeats was not a man for whom egalitarianism came naturally—and his post-1916 transition from deferring to external authority and accepting a role in politics is a major shift in his thinking.

Home Rule had been approved by the British Parliament In 1914, but the implementation was suspended until after World War I. The Easter Rising occurred two years later, on Easter Monday 1916. Lasting a week, the rebellion served as the closing touchstone for the middle period of Irish nationalism, but was never really conceived as a true military campaign (Killeen 34). Instead, it was committed to a more romantic, even literary, idealization of rebellion (Killeen 54). Although later leaders of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, like Michael Collins, would adopt more contemporary and effective strategies of armed resistance to English authority, the leaders of the Easter Rising, especially Sean Mac Diarmada and Patrick Pearse, were committed to the ideals of nineteenth-century revolutions and carried out their plans as such.

Ill-fated as it was, the Easter Rising still managed to evoke exactly the kinds of patriotic sentiment that fuelled its organizers. In particular, Pearse's goals for the revolution drew upon powerful images in which:

myth and history had merged into a vision of the future... The nature of the republic envisaged was advanced and tolerant...men and women, Catholic and Protestant, would live side by side in an independent nation state which drew its moral vision from its history. (Coote 372)

The prophetic tone of the Rising can be found in the declaration *Poblacht Na H Eireann: The Provisional Government of the Irish Republic to the People of Ireland*, which Pearse read aloud to the Dublin crowd on the Easter Monday: "In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline, and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the destiny to which it is called." (qtd. in Killeen 42). The feeling of the moment was clearly utopian, and possibly millenarian: the use of past to recreate the future, the utopian element, and a growing definition of us-and-them, the dichotomy which motivates millenarian action.

The whole tenor of the Rising was intellectual, bohemian, and romantic, which might have appealed to Yeats's ideas of literary heroism. But for Yeats, the violence of the Easter Rising was abhorrent. Millenarian movements and sects often contain an element of violence, but Yeats's millenarianism was unable to understand physical violence. For Yeats, art and wisdom, not bullets and shells, were supposed to be the keys to Ireland's freedom. He had always idealized the notion of the aristocracy, believing like his father in the importance of "patrician bearing" (Coote 300). Moral living and cultural exemplarity

were important to Yeats and the reality of Maud Gonne or Lady Gregory's politics had tested, but never really destroyed such ideals. Before 1916, Yeats was still able to believe in a cultural transformation that would remain apolitical, but in the face of the violence of the Rising, the reality and influence of his artistic efforts, especially his plays, became clearer to him. The Rising lasted six days and destroyed more than 50,000 square meters of Dublin. 2500 civilians were wounded or killed in the fighting, while the British Army lost some 550 men and the rebels just under 200 (McNally 90). 170 men and one woman were arrested under the charge of treason. During court martial proceedings, "11 were acquitted and 160 convicted; of these 90...received the death penalty" (Foy and Barton 232). In the end, only 16 men were executed, including Pearse and Maud Gonne's husband John MacBride, but the trails and executions lasted until August third.

Yeats would return to the Easter Rising again and again in his writing. Often, as in his elegy "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory," Yeats reflects upon the eager, early days of the late 1890s and 1900s. The loss of those who dreamed of a better Ireland, even ones he disliked personally like Gregory, pained the poet. The poem works forward to name Ireland's dead, recalling Lionel Johnson, John Synge, and George Pollexfen, each lamented in turn. There is a trace of mysticism and hermetic ceremony in the poem's regard for "discovers of hidden truth" (6) and the "stern color and that delicate line / That are our secret discipline" (67-8), but these are not remembrances of the Golden Dawn. Instead, they are reflections upon the dreams and aspirations of Yeats's millenarian future:

I had thought, seeing how bitter is that wind
 That shakes the shutter, to have brought to mind
 All those that manhood tried, or childhood loved
 Or boyish intellect approved,
 With some commentary on each
 Until imagination brought
 A fitter welcome; but a thought
 Of that late death took all my heart for speech. (89-96)

The collapse of the lines here, especially the shrinkage of the metrical line, creates a sense of downcast summation, a conclusion that marks an end. Yeats's experiences with the Easter Rising has changed the tenor of his art and made the possible outcomes of his ideals more concrete to him: the intense Manichaeism of millenarian thought rarely finds its focus in political circles, which emphasize compromise, but political leaders can easily manipulate the rhetoric of utopia to serve their purposes.

Michael North, in his study *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot and Pound*, labels Yeats's Irish projects as "Cultural Nationalism," a term which fits well with Yeats's goals throughout his Celtic Twilight and Abbey Theatre periods. Even though North admits that "Yeats was never a sophisticated political thinker," he insists upon reading Yeats's work as political. Such an argument places the political into a place of total social primacy and obscures other details that might run counter to the suppositions guiding one's analysis. North does identify Yeats's growing appreciation of political reality: "Yeats's first explicitly political book of poems, *Responsibilities* (1916) defines its title by portraying an

aristocracy that is exemplary" (37), but a problem arises in considering Yeats a political poet both before 1916 and after 1925: Yeats was a millenarian first and a politician second. His service in the Senate would be a disaster for his utopianism and underscores the gulf between politics and utopianism. Yeats's millenarianism further distanced him from the political goals of The Rising. Despite the millenarian rhetoric, the independence movement was driven back to phase one in Burridge's model and eventually political compromises could be found. Following the end of World War I and the granting of Home Rule, the *Sinn Fein*, the political branch of the Irish Republicans, won a majority and set up parliament in Dublin, ratifying the declaration of the Republic the 1916 Rebels had imagined. This difference highlights the gap between political and millenarian social action.

It is true that there is a potent sense of new direction in Yeats's decisions throughout the period of World War I, as if he sought to live by the line "In dreams begin responsibilities" (*Poems* 100). He proposed marriage to and was rejected by Maud Gonne for the third and final time in 1917, and then, as if wildly looking for alternatives, proposed to Gonne's daughter Iseult, who also declined. Yeats's next choices were surprising: he married a fellow occultist, George Hyde-Lees, in 1917 and began to take a greater interest in politics. His next collection of poems, *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919) includes a wide range of poems and styles, suggesting Yeats's productivity had increased radically. The book also re-introduces Michael Robartes, a character last seen in 1899's "Rosa Alchemica." Robartes would become a major figure in Yeats's later phase, most

obviously in as the titular figure of *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), which included two of Yeats's most canonical poems: "Easter, 1916" and "The Second Coming."

It would have been very appropriate to use "Easter 1916" to discuss the Easter Rising, but discussing it in tandem with "The Second Coming" clarifies a change in Yeats's apocalypticism during this decade. Both poems rely heavily on metaphors of birth and violence to create their poetic force. Both poems make it clear that Yeats remains apocalyptic and does not embrace the new Irish politics as a way of creating utopia—he still believes in mystical methods of transcendence. However, the tone of these poems is hardly triumphant—no trumpets are to be blown in the 1920s as they were in the 1890s. Instead the major motif is a growing sense of catastrophe that runs counter to Yeats's usually hopeful millenarianism.

"Easter 1916" is a potent poem and Yeats delayed its publication precisely because it conveyed such emotion that he feared it might fan the flames of violence, and by delaying it, he is able to acknowledge the changes in his art and philosophy through the period. Beginning with a reflection upon Yeats's cultural project of the early 1900s, "Easter 1916" dismisses his "polite meaningless words" with a heavy sense of shock and dullness. The images of the "close of day" and "grey / Eighteenth century houses" contrast with the "vivid faces" that haunt the poet. Language seems to fail in the wake of Easter 1916, the "polite meaningless words" being compounded by

a mocking tale or a gibe

To please a companion

Around the fire at the club,

Being certain that they and I

But live where motley is worn (10-14)

The full implication of “motley” is not clear until the final stanza of the poem, where the poem refers to “Wherever green is worn” (78). The use of the colors suggests that the motley represents the multi-colored garments of a fool, but it might also represent a diverse Ireland, while the green reflects the fierce nationalism of the rebels. The whole poem is a reflection upon the lives lost in the Rising and the impact it has made upon the country and Yeats. It stands as one of the most widely known and anthologized of Yeats poems.

In 1983, Hugh Kenner exclaimed the success of “Easter 1916” as “what a distance from ‘Innisfree!’” (180). Indeed there is a great shift here, in part because of the tight rhythmic diction, but also because, as Kenner points out, “Easter 1916” is Yeats “first direct poetic response to a public event” since a failed attempt to eulogize Parnell in the 1890s (180). It is also a sudden exertion of the poet’s presence: the poem begins with “I” and in the concluding stanza, Yeats reminds us that “I write it out in a verse” (74) and this is Yeats “first assumption of such a role” (Kenner 181). Yeats not only creates a statement about the Easter Rising, he exerts his presence on a different scale. “Easter 1916” is Yeats’s first true political poem, and he is now aware of the potential risks of social change. The realization of both the death of the martyrs of the Rising and the nature of political violence is that the “terrible beauty...born” that changes everything for Yeats.

Despite the fact that the poem is explicitly political in subject matter, Yeats still makes use of occult formulas. Thomas Dilworth suggests that “Easter 1916” uses a

complex numerological pattern to structure its stanzas, equalling April 24, 1916, the Easter Monday of the Rising (237).²⁵ If there is a hidden numerological significance to the poem's structure, then it likely connected to the poem's argument for change. Yeats returns to the motif of a stone, as expressed to the lines "Too long a sacrifice / Can make a stone of the heart" (57-58). Although I cannot fully agree with his assertion that the stone Yeats refers to is in fact two stones, Neville F. Newman is correct to assert that:

The fundamental political changes represented by the Easter rebellion contain the potential for a political and moral petrification. The very act of change can result in entrenchment, establishing a position resistant to the idea of improvement. Out of such situations, hearts of stone are created. And so Yeats argues vehemently for a change of sorts, while warning that if change is to be justified, it must be viewed as the precondition for yet further change. Any change must be as mutable as that which it replaces. (146-147)

Yeats's desire for change is a palpable return to the apocalyptic in his later career. The major struggle of his poetry after 1916 and before *A Vision* is one between millenarian and catastrophic ends of the spectrum, as enacted by his poems "Easter 1916" and "The Second Coming."

²⁵ Dilworth uses the following to work out the date: "The four stanzas and the 16 or 24 lines in each mark the opening date of the event celebrated by the poem. The number 16 corresponds to and is colloquially short for the year 1916. Too high to indicate a month, the number 24 indicates the day of the month, leaving the number 4 to designate the fourth month in the year, April. This date, April 24, 1916, was Easter Monday, when Padraic Pearse as commandant-general and president of the provisional Irish Republican Government read aloud the proclamation of that government on the steps of the General Post Office in Dublin." (236-237)

In *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, “Easter 1916” is one of a series of poems, “Sixteen Dead Men,” about the sixteen executed rebels; “The Rose Tree,” which is a poetic debate between Pearse and Connolly; “On a Political Prisoner,” which focuses upon the sadness of a woman separated from her love (the “she” of the poem may be Ireland), and the suspicious “The Leaders of the Crowd,” a poem which is wary of the kinds of tools political leaders use to sway audiences. Taken together, these five political poems represent a major shift in Yeats’s subject matter, but the collection still contains a large amount of mythopoeic subject matter. Even though Yeats follows “The Leaders of the Crowd” with the more conventional lyric “Towards the Break of Day,” reading the collection through as a book causes the political poems to exchange meaning with the more fairy-tale-like qualities of the other poems. For example, the lines

I thought: ‘There is a waterfall
upon Ben Bulbin side
That all my childhood counted dear’ (5-7)

from “Towards the Break of Day” immediately recall these lines from “On a Political Prisoner:”

When long ago I saw her ride
under Ben Bulbin to meet,
The beauty of the country-side (12-14).

In both poems the speaker reflects on being in the company of a woman and the symbolism of the countryside resonates against one another, suggesting that Yeats still believes the country of Ireland has the potential for a better future.

The use of recurring symbols reflects Yeats's return to an aesthetic-occult poetic exploration of apocalypse. His methodology also informs the poems which follow "Towards the Break of Day": "Demon and Beast" and "The Second Coming." In "Demon and Beast," the speaker finds a moment of rest and escape:

For certain minutes at the least
 That crafty demon and that loud beast
 That plagued me day and night
 Ran out of my sight;
 Though I had long perned in the gyre,
 Between my hatred and desire,
 I saw my freedom won
 And all laugh in the sun. (1-8)

In contrast, "The Second Coming" begins

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world (1-4)

The key link between the two poems is the word "gyre," which Yeats uses throughout his later years, but the strange verb "perned" in "Demon and Beast" is a further connection. Initially assumed to indicate the kind of spinning motion of a bobbin, Geoffrey Walton has argued the verb indicates the circling, spiralling motion of birds. This seems a fitting interpretation, especially with the verb's proximity to gyre, another spiralling image; the

pern is also a name for a honey-buzzard which is described as “a large handsome bird with banded and mottled plumage, and of having ‘[a] majestic soaring flight, as it sweeps round in wide spirals’” (qtd. in Walton 257-8). The proximity of the two key images of gyres and the fact that both opening stanzas begin with bird images suggests that “Demon and Beast” and “The Second Coming” present mirror images, one from the view of the falcon (“Demon and Beast”) and the other the falconer (“The Second Coming”).

In the first poem, Yeats attempts a kind of natural sympathy with the falcon, like Shelley in “To a Skylark.” “Demon and Beast” becomes steadily more downcast, with the speaker reflecting upon the disorder of nature:

That every natural victory
 Belongs to beast or demon
 That never yet had freeman
 Right mastery of natural things, (35-38)

The tone here is a wrought one, with the poem ending “What had the Caesars but their thrones?” The “natural victor[ies]” of the of the bird make a mockery of the idea that humanity controls nature or has any really power over history, perhaps another Shelleyian allusion, this time to “Ozymandius.”

“The Second Coming,” however, is more distinctly its own work, despite the fact that its title is a clear allusion to the Christian book of Revelation. Widely known and strikingly apocalyptic, it is radically different than Yeats’s poems of the 1890s as it introduces a much more catastrophic vision of the future:

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity. (5-8)

This is a wild reversal upon Yeats part, a rejection of zeal and passion, perhaps in the face of the Easter Rising and the human toll of World War I. This change may reflect a growing awareness of the cost of millennium and the violence that might accompany a sudden transformation of the world.

Donald Weeks describes "The Second Coming" as related to three of Yeats's interests: The Great Memory, The Second Coming, and *Prometheus Unbound* (281). Weeks demonstrates Shelley's influence in the final lines of Yeats's first stanza—"the best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity" (7-8), which are quite similar to Shelley's lines from *Prometheus Unbound*:

The good want power, but to weep barren tears.
 The powerful goodness want; worse need for them.
 The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom;
 And all best things are thus confused to ill. (624-627)

Yeats's lines are much more catastrophic in tone. As Weeks points out, Yeats denies the reader the forgiveness that Shelley borrows from Jesus: "they know not what they do"²⁶

²⁶ Luke 23:24: Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

(289-90). Weeks is correct that Yeats returns to his earlier occult and poetic influences following the Rising, but the tenor is much less hopeful, less millenarian. For Modernism, the apocalypse as catastrophe had been introduced into the widening social conversation about the future. Eliot would find similar themes of lost revelation in his post-World War I verse. The hopeful, millenarian aspect of early Modernist poetry risks being overwhelmed by despair.

The next movement of the poem is an attempt to overcome that despair, demonstrating Yeats's ability with repetition and incantation:

Surely some revelation is at hand;

Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out

When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*

Troubles my sight... (9-13)

These excited lines are sermon-like, as if an ecstatic priest was beginning to receive a vision. But the direction of the poem is unexpected and alien:

...somewhere in sands of the desert

A shape with a lion body and the head of a man,

A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,

Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it

Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds. (13-17)

Here the image is of the sphinx coming to life, a harbinger who has hidden both under sand and later in plain sight. This scene is a bleak one, with the plumage of the birds

washed out into shadows; the implication of entwining the Second Coming with a pre-Christian image is both radical and intriguing, seeming to conflate the two into a secret, universal history.

This is a theosophical-like synthesis, and Yeats will attempt a similar combination of history, art, and millennium in *A Vision*, but for now he uses the process to rewrite the symbolism of the Second Coming. John Harrison finds these lines “intensely personal and explicitly anti-millenarian” (371). Harrison’s rhetoric stresses the anti-Christian symbolism of the poem, and this is correct, but when he considers the poem’s tone “Nietzschean,” it is possible he is really detecting the catastrophic—“the anti-millenarian”—and nihilistic future the poem presents. Ancient myth is marshalled to resist the present in an attempt to re-inscribe the future:

The darkness drops again; but now I know
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep
 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
 Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? (18-22)

Rather contrary to Weeks’s reading, Nathan A. Cervo has recently offered a reading of the poem in which the Bethlehem of the end is not the Bethlehem of the Bible, but the Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem, which was later known as Bedlam (95). Cervo links Yeats’s verse to Rossetti’s “The Burden of Ninevah” and outright rejects apocalyptic readings of the poem: “Yeats’s intent is neither prophetic nor eschatological: it is satiric” (94). His reading overlooks Yeats’s later incorporation of the poem in *A Vision*, which suggests that Yeats

saw the poem as part of his apocalyptic model. The poem does not represent the usually hopeful idea of apocalypse, but instead represents the idea of a catastrophic revelation.

Cervo is right then to argue that “the Second Coming grotesquely sketched in the poem is hardly the Christian Parousia,” but it is not a rejection of apocalypse itself. Instead, Yeats’s poem may have more in common with the bleak stories of H. P. Lovecraft, suggesting humanity has a tenuous command of reality. The warning suggested by these lines is clear: be careful what you wish for. The millennium may indeed come to pass, but the new world might not be one you imaged or dreamed of. Like the Caesars who are meaningless without “their thrones,” in “Demon and Beast,” the rocking cradle of history and time may make a creature unlike any the dreamer expected. Both “Demon and Beast” and “The Second Coming” share a common theme: the fate of civilization and humanity’s place in the grand scheme of time and the universe.

Robert Detweiler has argued that opening lines of “The Second Coming” foreshadows the violence of World War II and predicted the “de-centred world of the postmodern” (738). This is an intriguing idea, and I would agree to it, up to a point. Postmodernism is not quite a shift to a catastrophic view of the future, but rather a slow narrowing towards the middle of the spectrum of the future. Detweiler’s reading, however, assigns too much predictive power to Yeats’s lines, and while the verse does announce a catastrophic view of the future, it does not represent, as Detweiler later claims, “the ‘modernist mood’ [as]...a crisis of unbelief” (739-740). Modernism struggled with unbelief, but Yeats, Eliot, and Auden all attest to the value Modernism still placed upon faith.

Unlike the early Yeats, who was so indebted to Romanticism in the *fin de siècle* period, the Yeats of the late 1910s and early 1920s is more fiercely his own millenarian and in the immediate period following the Rising becomes more catastrophic. The shift in his expression marks not only his the shift towards the subjectivity, irony, and alienation that Modernism would use as its most common themes, but the process by which Yeats would eventually overturn his despair and return to a hopeful future. In both his nationalism and his mysticism, the Yeats of the 1920s is moving in different directions. While he would continue to experiment with his wife's automatic writing, Yeats would abandon occult organizations in favour of the Irish senate. This attempt to confront politics directly will be considered in the next chapter as it serves to define his experience of the 1920s.

T. S. Eliot: Tradition, History, and Faith

Despite the distance in time and homeland, Eliot's family shared many elements in common with Yeats's. Both came from families with long religious and cultural authority and both were relatively privileged in background. But whereas Yeats's father chose to sacrifice his legal career for his art, Eliot's parents set a different precedence, making their artistic interests secondary to their work. As a younger son, Eliot had more latitude in his choice of career and was directed towards a university career in part because of his mother's own sense of failure for not having pursued college or found success as a poet. Eliot himself was drawn to poetry, not only because his mother encouraged his literary interests, but because books were a place where his physical frailties did not confine him.

Like Yeats, Eliot was drawn to literature because of the world it represented, though more for its tradition than for its transcendence (Cooper, *Camb. Intro. Eliot* 2). David Rosen expands on the similarities between the two during this period:

...if we correct for differences in age and local color, we may perceive strong similarities between Eliot at twenty-two and Yeats at roughly the same time, 1900-1910, a decade of personal and professional crisis during which Yeats abandoned the symbolist premise that sustained his early career...Eliot shows a similar rejection of self and personal memory, implicit in the rejection of origins, that necessitates a reestablishment of poetic identity on new terms. (477-478)

But Eliot's rejection of his origins is not like Yeats's earlier embrace of his Irish heritage. Unlike the displaced and London-educated Yeats, Eliot would receive his education formally and among those whose wealth and power would secure them careers.

In 1906, Eliot entered Harvard, a school which served as both a social club and an academic testing ground (Cooper, *Camb. Intro. Eliot* 2-3). Recent critical studies such as David Chinitz's *T. S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (2005) and Gabrielle McIntire's *Modernism, Memory and Desire* (2008) have argued for a need to humanize Eliot, who seems to be an unsmiling face staring out from behind a desk in so many summaries. McIntire in particular describes the traditional view of Eliot as an "asexual, straight, conservative, rigidly Anglo-Catholic, white prudish 'High' modernist T. S. Eliot," as a simplification that later generations of scholars have come to "inherit" (7). McIntire's own commendable emphasis is upon a "sexy, dangerous, and crucially *uneven*" Eliot, and she addresses his sense of humour as a way to render Eliot less of a historical figure and more of a person.

At Harvard, Eliot was well known for his sense of style, manners, and his humour. His attraction to early comics, like George Herriman's Krazy Kat and Bud Fisher's Mutt and Jeff are well known. He was well-regarded and socialized widely, although he was known for the intensity of his work ethic and his commitment to studies. It was not until his Master's degree that Eliot began to retreat to privacy in order to work (although he did meet Conrad Aiken at the time and begin their friendship). Eliot's sense of humour could be quite bawdy, as attested by the Columbo and Bolo poems that he wrote between 1909 and 1929 for friends. These highly scatological and humorous poetry was written as private verse, but the simple fact that Eliot could be ironic, not to create pathos but simply to make a joke, is something often overshadowed by his reputation as the author of *The Waste Land*. Eliot also produced *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* in 1939, which while not commonly mentioned in summaries, is perhaps one of his most successful works given the success of Andrew Lloyd Webber's adaptation, *Cats*. These occasional and humorous poems remind us that even as Eliot's ideas change and his reputation grows, it is possible to miss those moments in which Eliot puts his tongue in his cheek.

Another facet of Eliot's personality most relevant to his millenarianism is his impulse toward faith. Conventional critical practice emphasizes a divide in Eliot's career: firstly, an American secular mode and, secondly, an English religious mode, using Eliot's Christian "conversion" and naturalization to Britain in 1927 as the dividing line. An example of this practice can be found in Susan E. Blalock's 1996 bibliography *Guide of The Secular Poetry of T. S. Eliot*, which claims that "the decision to include only secular poetry stems not from judgements about the poet's faith or lack of it prior to his conversion of

Anglo Catholicism" (ix). Nonetheless, judgements have to be made about what constitutes a "secular" poem. Blalock offers no justification or methodology, although she clearly does not use 1927, the date of his conversion, as an arbitrary cut-off-date for the end of Eliot's secular writing. John Xiros Cooper, in his study *T. S. Eliot and the Ideology of Four Quartets*, suggests that 1930 is a more important date, given that Ash-Wednesday appeared to be a "difficult and curious performance" to contemporary readers (1).

It is possible that a poem that does not refer to either a deity or make allusion to religious literature could be thought of as entirely secular, but "Prufrock" may fail to be secular because of its interest in the severed head of John the Baptist. Likewise "The Hollow Men" (1925), which is included in Blalock's entries, makes heavy use of religious iconography and expresses Eliot's longing for religious certainty. *The Waste Land*, the masterpiece of Eliot's early poetry, refers not only to the Judeo-Christian tradition but also to Indian religion, most obviously in the final line "Shantih, Shantih, Shantih" (433), although Eliot's footnote uses a Biblical phrase from Philippians 4:7 as a translation.²⁷ P. S. Sri has argued that Eliot's studies in Indic faith do not suddenly stop after his adoption of Anglo-Catholicism but instead continue to be an important vehicle for poetic metaphor and argument. This repeated reference to religion renders the idea of even trying to create a "secular" Eliot more than difficult. In many ways, the appeal to a secular Eliot is similar

²⁷ Eliot undertook the study of Sanskrit and Indian philosophy with considerable energy and the influence of this interest would come to pervade his poetry. For Eliot, Buddhism was highly attractive, primarily because of its movement towards absolute freedom from desire and the elimination of attachment (Ackroyd 47). Sri, in his 1987 study *T. S. Eliot, Vedanta and Buddhism* pointed out the way in which considerable numbers of critics have been "either broadly suggestive or uncompromisingly sceptical of [Eliot's] use of Indian philosophy" primarily because of a lack of familiarity on the critics part (2-3). Sri's contention is that critical prejudices or interests skew the synthesis in favour of the critic's faculty and therefore they may miss valuable ideas.

in intention to those critics who choose to overlook Yeats's occult practice: it avoids issues of which the critic might be sceptical of or be uncomfortable handling. The problem then develops that the critic is analyzing a partial object with selective data.

The notion of a secular Eliot is even less convincing considering the degree of effort he made in reading Indian scripture. A casual interest might lead one to read a work like the *Bhagavad-Gita* in translation and there were a number available to Eliot if he should have chosen that route. Instead, Eliot committed himself to the study of Sanskrit. Why would he do so if not intensely interested in the possibilities of Indian religious philosophies? It might be an aspect of Orientalism, or be seen as part of the twentieth-century impulse to new modes of thinking—in Eliot's case what is sometimes called “bookstore Buddhism”—but Eliot chose to attempt to read these works in their original language.

As a point of contrast, Yeats in all his zeal for Irish culture and nation never took up the study of Irish Gaelic. This is a major difference between these two poets: Eliot's passion for religion was personal and intense, whereas Yeats's mysticism was social and diffuse. Yeats sought out coterie and secret orders to share his ideas, while Eliot would often enter seclusion to find meaning in the world. Despite the vast differences in personality, temperament (although both men were prone to snobbishness), and training (Yeats, the crucible of aesthetics; Eliot, the crucible of the classroom), both nonetheless rejected their family faiths for similar reasons.

Just as Yeats found the religion of his family to be without passion, Eliot similarly found little to move him as a Unitarian in the United States. He described the sect as

“bland and insufficient” (Ackroyd 17). While he had been baptized as a child, he later came to believe that it had been improperly performed and was invalid. Unitarianism rejects the divinity of Christ, a point he later considered paramount to Christianity. Eliot considered his family’s religion “Puritanism drained of its theology” and further rejected it. Although he would later admit to only being able to achieve an “enlightened mystification” through his study of Hindu and Buddhist literature, his sincere attempt to understand the idea of *nirvana*, a still place beyond desire and concern, was nonetheless a major element of his poetry throughout his life.

In 1914, Europe went to war, and the violence would continue for the next thirty years. For Eliot, the focus of the summer of 1914 was a trip to Germany, after which he was to complete his doctoral work on F. H. Bradley at Merton College, Oxford. He had been fiddling with verse for several years—both “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and “Portrait of a Lady” (began in 1910) were near completion—but he published little and tinkered with schemes and symbolic structures. One example of this tinkering is the long religious poem “Descent from the Cross” which he did not finish. It served as a prototype for of *The Waste Land*, with a plan for “an insane section, a mystical section, a love song and a Fool-house sequence in which the protagonist goes to a masquerade ball dressed as St John of the Cross” (Ackroyd 54).

Another compelling example is a deleted section from “Prufrock,” called “Prufrock’s Pervigilium.” These lines first appeared in Christopher Rick’s edition of *The Inventions of the March Hare* and include a fevered dream section in which Prufrock imagines the night lashing out at him with tentacles. Nicholas B. Mayer notes in his

reading of Eliot's excised "Pervigilium" that both John Mayer and Lyndall Gordon connect the deleted lines to prophecy and apocalypse (182-183), and it is important that Eliot retreats from overt discussions of the future in the published poem. "Prufrock," as Mayer points out, is a poem more concerned with social and sexual problems (183). Even in his earliest stages of his writing—Eliot added and deleted the "Pervigilium" in 1912—he struggles with the more prophetic ideas of post-millenarianism. Eliot would instead focus upon a utopia of earthly actions which would make us worthy of the Second Coming. Both of these early projects serve as markers of how deeply Eliot was attracted to religious imagery, even in his earliest work and how wary he was of visionary poetics. It is difficult to imagine how his verse might have been different if the declaration of war in 1914 had not altered his plans and disrupted this embryonic verse.

It was after his abrupt flight from Germany that the trajectory of Eliot's life radically changed. While in London he would meet both Ezra Pound and Vivien Haigh-Wood. Pound would become one of Eliot's life-long friends and be an important artistic foil; Vivien would become his first wife. Their marriage would be marred by tense sexual politics, financial burdens, and Vivien's growing psychological problems. At this stage in his life, Eliot appears to be searching for stability, or even a new life in an uncertain world. His marriage was sudden and secretive, suggesting a heady, impulsive romance that began to deteriorate soon after the wedding vows had been made. Eliot's decision to marry without his family's approval or foreknowledge cost him financially as his father reduced his allowance and led him to take up unsatisfactory teaching posts and eventually to become a banker.

Eliot's personal decisions also affected his academic work, and he soon after decided not to complete his doctorate. While Eliot's poetry is considerably intellectual, it does occasionally lampoon university scholars, most notably in "Mr Eliot's Sunday Morning Service:"

Polyphiloprogenitive
 The sapient sulters of the Lord
 Drift across the window-panes
 In the beginning was the Word.

In the beginning was the Word.

Superfetation of τὸ ἐν

And at the mensual turn of time

Produce enervate Origen. (1-8)

Although these are hardly Eliot's most compelling lyrical lines, the poem conflates religious and academic language to produce humour. The poem is generally interpreted as a satire of a church service, but it is also possible that the use of scientific terms like "superfetation" (the division of one embryo into two) combined with "In the beginning was the Word" simultaneously satirizes both clerical and academic language. The poem is somewhat bawdy as well, with the final stanza's joke being the play on female fertility, "mensual [monthly] turn of time," being used to "Produce enervate Origen." Origen was an early Christian theologian and African who may have castrated himself, and therefore his production was enervating to life itself.

“Mr. Eliot’s Sunday Service” also reflects one of Eliot’s most important traits: his dislike of pander. In his religious and intellectual choices, Eliot was intensely hostile to both simplification and needless complexity. In many respects, his insistent desire to see things as they are or are not and what they could be informs all of his work. In Thomas F. Dillingham’s reading of the poem, the tension between the intellectual and the religious represents Eliot’s own struggle to accept the “leap of faith,” although Dillingham admits that the poem “remains tentative” on the idea of belief (48). Eliot’s focus on belief is the element that fuels his later conservative statements about culture and society, statements that occasionally run counter to other utopian modes of thought like Fascism and Marxism. Eliot is quite insistent about trying to perceive things as they are, and this demand from practicality also contributes to his pre-millenarian ideas of religion and utopia. Consistently, Eliot sees the problems of the present and insists that society should be doing something to make it better, whether that might be to attain peace, stability, or utopia.

While he was rejected for military service, Eliot’s greatest contributions to our understanding of World War I come from his poetic expression of the social effects of war. His first collection of poems had appeared mid-way through the war, his next book *Poems 1920*, reveal a much less humorous poet, opening not with a love song or satirizing clergymen, but with “Geroniton,” a meditation on the state of history:

Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
 Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.
 I was neither at the hot gates

Nor fought in the warm rain

Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,

Bitten by flies, fought. (1-7)

The speaker qualifies his ability to write about the War: he was not there, did not fight, and risks appropriating the soldier's voice and experience. After all, there is a danger whenever those who have not experienced a trial—be it violence, war, or inequality—choose to explain or study the experience. The world Eliot evokes is rundown, “a decayed house” where shopkeepers and animals seem on the verge of collapse and the fields consist of “Rocks, moss, stonecrop, iron, [and] merds” (7-16). Here is a place where belief runs wild, but there is terror and doubt in the values of God as well:

Signs are taken for wonders. “We would see a sign!”

The word within a word, unable to speak a word,

Swaddled in darkness. In the juvenescence of the year

Came Christ the tiger. (17-20)

It is possible that these lines may allude to Blake's “The Tyger” — “did he who made the Lamb make thee?” — but the majority of critics agree that Eliot refers to a sermon by Lancelot Andrewes, in which Andrewes claims “Christ is no wild-cat” (qtd. in Gish 242). “Gerontion” also marks the beginning of Eliot's use of spring imagery to reject renewing effects of the seasons and the wind as a sign of spiritual emptiness (Gish 239). The poem

also reflects an intense desire to understand expression, not so much language itself, but the possibilities it represents.²⁸

For Donald J. Childs, "Gerontion" is primarily a Christian poem that moves from the birth of Christ to his death (94). While it certainly uses Christian themes, Eliot deploys a system of symbols because it allows him to express millenarian ideas without fully committing to a Christian poetics. "Gerontion" sees the Christ-tiger as a consuming power: "The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours" and enters a much more catastrophic tone than any other verse, retreating from such language only when it approaches nihilism:

Think at last
 We have not reached conclusion, when I
 stiffened in a rented house" (49-51)

What leads Eliot to this near-catastrophe is the poem's meditation on history, which seems profoundly compromised here:

After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Think now
 History has many cunning passages, contrived corridors
 And issues, deceives with whispering ambitions,
 Guides us by vanities. (34-37)

The idea that history can somehow mislead us is important in seeing Eliot's continuing interests. Nancy K. Gish describes Gerontion as suffering from "physical and metaphysical blindness" (244). He is without guide or rudder and is unable to make history intelligible.

²⁸ Like "Mr Eliot's Sunday Service," "the word" is a Biblical reference to John 1.1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Eliot's inquiry into reality was only heightened by the war, but what begins to change is Gerontion's belief in solutions that rely upon wholly material circumstances. As Eliot's philosophy becomes even more receptive to spiritual thought, "Gerontion" begins his movement from the mystification of his earlier Buddhist studies and towards breaking the "wilderness of mirrors" that seeks to entrap him.

History stripped of narrative is incoherent to Eliot, just as it will be for Auden in the *Age of Anxiety*. Phillip L. Marcus has argued that "Gerontion's problem at bottom is one of scepticism" (78). To Marcus, it is possible that Eliot is searching for faith in the poem, seeking a way to overcome the scepticism that blocks him from embracing Christ. This reading is appealing, but ultimately history is much a larger concern than religion to Gerontion, because history represents what Gross has called an "almost mystical force driving Europe toward cultural dissolution and moral despair" (299). Without coherence, Eliot's idea of tradition cannot be supported, nor can the future be imagined.

The sense of destabilization that Gross finds in "Gerontion" reflects Eliot's concerns about tradition and unity. The organic community so necessary to the idea of the past is lost and Eliot uses Gerontion's "obsessive, debilitating belief in that decline" to reject the idea that historical study can solve the problems of the present (Gross 300). This argument is an early marker of Eliot's pre-millenarianism; Eliot's understanding is that the future is something we can control mirrors Gerontion's own knowledge that "salvation is not found in past or present" (Gross 303). It is only when we turn away from the challenge of the present that we become "Tenants of the house, / Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season" (75-6), a state induced by the ferocious shock of World War I. For Eliot, the war

was a transformational moment, when the world was given new meaning and could move in new directions. Gross's reading of the poem then is remarkably sound, but does not fully realize the way millenarianism and apocalypse try to find voice in the otherwise catastrophic view of Gerontion.

The period in which "Gerontion" was written was also a difficult time for Eliot. The growing tensions of his marriage and a rising psychological strain paralleled his rise to fame. In only a few years' time, Eliot would become the dominant poetic and critical voice in Anglo-American literature. James Reeve, when recalling his entrance to university in the late 1920s, likened the authority of Eliot to the authority of liturgy:

The stranger who enters an Anglican church at service time is handed two books, *Hymns Ancient and Modern* and *The Book of Common Prayer*...When I went up to Cambridge twenty years ago, I was handed as it were, in much the same spirit, two little books, the one in prose, the other in verse. They were *The Sacred Wood* and *Poems 1909-1925*" (qtd. in Menand, 154).

The Sacred Wood, published in 1920, includes several important longer essays of the role and function of a poet-critic, and a handful of shorter works on specific poets, such as Ben Johnson, Philip Massinger, and Algernon Charles Swinburne.

The great concern of *The Sacred Wood* is, of course, tradition. Eliot's most influential essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," as well as the only slightly less-well-known "Hamlet and His Problems" dominate his reputation and come from this very early volume. Even though the concept of tradition is a focus of the collection, it is constantly placed in relationship with that most Eliotian concern for honesty and truth. Eliot

demands clear sight and penetrating vision, a manifest demand for clarity that renders him an uncomfortable companion for both conservative and liberal literary critics.

While Eliot would later write with considerable appreciation for Yeats, their idea of tradition was remarkably different. There is a slight air of transcendentalism in the idea of seeing literature “beyond time” (VI) but Eliot resists the visionary or prophetic mode such a phrase suggests. While Yeats generally accepted traditional poetic forms and themes for much of his career, he chose to be unconventional in his religious choices; Eliot was willing to be innovative in verse form, but remained quite conventional in religious ideas. Nowhere is this difference more pronounced than in the two poets’ writings on Blake. As discussed in Chapter One, Yeats celebrates Blake’s visionary qualities and praised his ability to break away from general Christian religious belief.

In contrast with Yeats, Eliot only found power in Blake’s verse because of “merely a peculiar honesty, which, in a world too frightened to be honest, is peculiarly terrifying” (88). Eliot dismisses the idea that Blake was a supremely intuitive autodidact, pointing to Blake’s revisions as being essentially the same methods of composition that other poets use: “He has an idea (a feeling, an image), he develops it by accretion or expansion, alters his verse often, and hesitates often over the final choice” (89). Eliot’s need to strip away the magical properties of poetic composition is important. While Yeats was moving towards the idea of automatic writing, Eliot was leading a major reaction against it. Even more telling than the rejection of Blake as a visionary-poet are Eliot’s comments on what would have made Blake a stronger poet:

Blake was endowed with a capacity for considerable understanding of human nature, with a remarkable and original sense of language and the music of language, and a gift of hallucinated vision. Had these been controlled by a respect for impersonal reason, for common sense, for the objectivity of science, it would have been better for him. What his genius required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attention upon the problems of the poet. (92)

This passage rejects a post-millenarian rhetoric of transcendental vision, a theme Eliot will struggle with in his great poems of the 1920s. It also emphasizes Eliot's desire for a consistent tradition to draw upon—a kind of intellectual organic community. This created tradition also allowed him to reject his family's heritage in the United States; as Rosen describes it: "For Eliot, becoming modern meant renouncing his past" (494). In his late essays, Eliot argues that a society or culture requires a consistent dogma on which to base itself, and he places Dante in a superior position to Blake because Dante was a poet within a (supposedly) coherent society (92).

Through his valorization of Dante's medieval Italy, Eliot effectively creates a golden age for his poetry and millenarianism. In order to create a hopeful future, he seeks to castigate the previous century in favour of a golden age which never really existed. For the next twenty years, Eliot would make various statements on the nature of religion and culture, always trying to argue that stability and consistency are necessary. At this early stage, Eliot is still reacting to the First World War, and, like Gerontion, he tries to develop

a historiography that allows him to advocate the millenarian idea of art and society. To achieve this organic community, Eliot rejects the Romantics and reaches back to Dante. He sees Dante as a symbol of a coherent, homogenous society that afforded its artists a consistent set of symbols.

In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot argues that tradition is not as simple as mimicry. Tradition can neither rely upon repetition nor can it simply claim to be observed; instead it must be developed through a study of prior artists. This task creates a "historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together" (28). John Zilcosky suggests that this description blurs distinctions between temporality and time to a point where "historical sense makes [the poet] contemporary, makes him modern" (24-25). It is possible that the argument Eliot uses here is a form of response to Gerontion. This concept of the contemporary seems poised on the edge of a Buddhist assertion of being present in order to be without self, and Eliot furthers this line of rhetoric by suggesting that "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone" (28) and that "the progress of an artist is continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (30). But the argument does not suggest Nirvana, but appears to be a way of both insulating Eliot from biographical analysis and to support his criticism of the Romantic idea of poetry.

Eliot claims the Wordsworthian idea that "'emotion recollected in tranquility' is an inexact formula" (33) because Eliot prefers a model of synthesis: "The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles can unite to form a new compound are present

together" (31). Eliot chooses to reject Wordsworth's claims from "The Preface to Lyrical Ballads" precisely because he wishes to distance himself from recent poetic ideas of composition and reach back further to the medieval in order to define his current practice (no matter that Dante used his own life as a constant reference). Rosen suggests that "Eliot's attack on Wordsworth and turn to a poetry of consciousness were very much strategies of a young man uncomfortable with his background and eager to demonstrate his sophistication" (494). This is insightful, but it is also important to note that Eliot's attack on Romanticism in general is an attempt to repudiate the visionary or post-millenarian style of Romantic verse. As a writer with consistent pre-millenarian longings, Eliot distrusts the radical individuality of visionary poetry.

It should be noted that Eliot does not discount inspiration: the molecular metaphor, borrowed from chemistry, suggests that these multiple impressions can build up and produce something suddenly. Peter White has called his motif "the art-as-science analogy," which Eliot used several times in his early writing and lectures (365). Zilcosky is quite critical of the chemical metaphors Eliot uses, suggesting they comprise a "curious metaphorical slippage" as the acid Eliot mentions is damaging to paper and unstable in chemical form (30). This argument might be going too far, as Eliot is most likely seeking to acquire some of the cultural capital of the scientist for the poet (just as Shelley attempts to acquire the capital of the politician in *A Defense of Poetry*) and was not actually concerned with getting the science right.

A clearer tension in the essay is the claim that a poet needs to "surrender himself wholly to the work to be done" (33), a claim which is both impersonal and mystical. Eliot's

aesthetics are not entirely rational, despite his claim that “this depersonalization [of] art may be said to approach the condition of science” (30). It is entirely possible that Eliot used the image and language of science without real care for the meaning of the chemistry, just as he would use the images and language of the Tarot in *The Waste Land* without looking up the actual contents of a deck. These conflicting points—rational, scientific art and selfless, synthetic art—show Eliot trying to work through his desire for stability: a consistent structure of art, a tradition which he can draw upon, but a tradition of his own creation. This development of an individual tradition is important in the growth of his millenarianism. As he seeks answers to the crisis he feels faces Western culture, he first begins try to understand the role of art and the individual in this world. Over the next decade, his individual search would dominate his art and his writing, until he begins a movement towards the society around him.

Remarkably, despite the growing strains of catastrophe in both the work of Yeats and Eliot, both artists would be able to return to a more hopeful conception of the future. This suggests that Modernism, and Modernist poetry in particular, expresses alienation only to achieve escape and through this escape is able to envision a radical, utopian future. By rejecting the notion of progress, an idea related closely to a conception of the future as a continual present, Modernism embraces millenarianism as a core element of its subjectivity and radical experimentalism. But the violence of the World War I leads to considerations of a catastrophic future, in which either Western civilization declines into savagery, or humanity destroys itself through technology. These anxieties would increase,

but as we will see, Modernism returns to the idea of utopia in order to restore its sense of fragmentation and loss.

CHAPTER THREE: HIGH MODERNISM, 1921-1930

*Miss Nancy Ellicott smoked
And danced all the modern dances
And her aunts were not quite sure how they felt about it,
But they knew that it was modern
—Eliot, "Cousin Nancy" (7-10)*

Following the violence of World War I, the 1920s were a period in which Europe simultaneously tried to come to terms with the grief, destruction, and death as well as the prosperity, development, and social freedom resulting from the modern age's technical achievements. More than any other decade of the early twentieth century, the 1920s asks us to hold two images in our head: The first is the flapper, her hair and dress short, a cocktail in hand, dancing to jazz; the second is that of the veteran, a wounded, shell-shocked, constant reminder of the War. One image, the flapper, is progressive and energetic; the other, the veteran, is a catastrophic and enervating. Both are signposts of possible futures. The flapper is essentially an image of continuity, the idea that the present and its prosperity could go on indefinitely in an ecstatic attempt to constrict the full range of the future's possibilities into a continual present. The veteran suggests that humanity is violent and self-destructive, a fact which reminds us of the possibility of destruction and catastrophe.

Britain in the 1920s existed in the tension between these two states, and Virginia Woolf's 1925 novel *Mrs Dalloway* deliberately juxtaposes Clarissa Dalloway's nostalgia and emotional pain with the hysteria and suicide of the damaged war veteran Septimus Smith. Neither Clarissa Dalloway nor Septimus Smith are undamaged, but their expressions of the post-war period are different. While Clarissa is able to engage in social activity, Septimus is too injured by the war to function properly in English society. This crisis of the self extends throughout Modernism's use of subjectivity, but also relates to the process by which millenarianism becomes a potent social force in the 1920s through the rise of Fascism and Communism. At stake in the 1920s and at stake in Modernism is how we conceive the future. Modernism reacts against the catastrophic, nihilistic view of the future expressed in works like Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*. While the 1930s would be the true testing ground of the period's millenarian social movements, the poets of this study were already engaged with the idea of a hopeful future and both Yeats and Eliot would be keenly aware of the development of Fascism and Communism.

After the passing of Marcel Proust in November of 1922, the Anglo-American Moderns became the most prominent writers of self-reflexive, subjective, and experimental literature; in 1922, James Joyce would publish *Ulysses* and Eliot, *The Waste Land*. Michael North, in his insightful *Reading 1922*, argues that F. Scott Fitzgerald deliberately set his 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby* in 1922, in order to refer not only to *The Waste Land*, but to also acquire some of the mystique of that year, "a new social and cultural world" (4). The 1920s is conventionally seen as the high-water mark of

Modernism, with 1922 serving as the traditional apex of the period, although I will later argue that the 1930s may indeed be even more critical.

It is important to stress that while the Moderns were not widely read by the public, they did acquire great prestige. (The reading public responded more to Agatha Christie's mysteries or P. G. Wodehouse's comedies.) Eliot and Auden both commonly read detective fiction, especially later in life, preferring it to almost all else, a fact that suggests their elitism was at least a stance taken in public if not a product of academic attention. It is also true that the world had been experiencing modernity for decades, and writers like Henry James or Joseph Conrad can be seen as the forerunners to the 1920s; in *Reading 1922*, Michael North describes the problem of periodization as a juxtaposition of two modernisms: the first views the period as "constructed in temporal terms, as a genealogy, and is restricted to literature and perhaps philosophy," and the second, "as social fact, as part of the lived experience of the reader of *The Waste Land* or *Ulysses*" (6). As North argues, the technical innovations and historical developments of the 1920s are necessary to understanding the reality and the expression of Modernism.

The problem with periodizing Modernism may lie in the desire to compartmentalize literary history itself, a desire to make a logical scheme of an incoherent past in response to an unknowable future. Such a process acts as a framework, literary periods being placed in a sequence of improving teleological moments working towards the revelation of art. North agrees with the claim that defining Modernism through formal qualities is insufficient, primarily because "attempts to formulate a unified formalist definition of modernism have always run afoul of the fact that modernism ceaselessly

creates forms and in so doing confounds critical desires for formal consistency” (North *Reading 1922* 209). It is perhaps only possible then to claim that the 1920s were a remarkable moment for the expression of art best considered “modern,” but that Modernism itself transcends periodization. This is in part due to its millenarianism, which is also transhistorical. North asks his readers to accept Modernism and the 1920s as a paradox: while the aesthetics of the modern cannot be historicized, the decade that is the 1920s marks an important historical moment which can be considered Modern.

North focuses on the wide variety of experience available in the 1920s, and it is important to understand how the 1920s were a decade that began to imagine the future differently—politically, socially, and artistically. It was not only the decade of the first Fascist governments—1922 sees both the completion of *Ulysses* and the beginning of Mussolini’s regime—but it also marks the slow beginnings of post-coloniality in the self-determination granted to Egypt by the British Empire (North, *Reading 1922* 7). Egypt also held new discoveries: Tutankhamen’s tomb and its riches were a legend-making find in 1922 and sparked a vogue for pseudo-Egyptian fashion in England (North, *Reading 1922* 19, 22-4). Radio was linking the news media of the world now, and “broadcast” was a neologism in 1921 (North, *Reading 1922* 8). In this decade, the BBC came into being, airing its first official programs in 1927, and science fiction would develop into an independent literary tradition, primarily through the rise of the American pulp magazine.

Access to travel becomes more widespread in the 1920s and the kind of geographic movement that Eliot undertakes becomes a powerful feature of literature in this decade. In his essay “Language and the Avant-Garde,” Raymond Williams considers such mobility a

major element of Modernism: “It is a very striking feature of many Modernist and avant-garde movements that they were not only located in the great metropolitan centres but that so many of their members were immigrants into these centres, where in some new ways all were strangers” (77). To Williams this geographical movement and the international quality of large cities makes language the key element of the moment, “appear[ing] as a new kind of fact” simultaneously natural and alien (Williams 77), a fact which North argues allows Modernism to fluctuate between “local and global points of view” (*Reading* 1922 15), expressing the incoherence suggested by the wide-range of human endeavour and cultural expression; 1922 also saw the publication of Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's *The Andaman Islanders* completely overturning the kind of anthropology represented by Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which Eliot refers to in his endnotes to *The Waste Land*.

Terry Eagleton argues in *Exiles and Émigrés* that the growing prominence of English-language writers from outside of England suggested “central flaws and impoverishments in conventional English culture itself” during the early twentieth century (9). Eagleton points to “a sense of impending or actual collapse which informs the major work of Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Joyce, and Lawrence” as a major marker of their period and argues they, unlike native English authors, had “access to alternative cultures and traditions: broader frameworks against which, in a highly creative tension, the erosion of contemporary order could be situated and partially understood” (15). As a Marxist and a Christian critic, Eagleton is attracted to the sense of millenarianism in the work of the Moderns. What is most deeply at stake in the work of Modernism is the way the present

can be read as a signpost to the future, and whether or not humanity will succumb to catastrophe or if a better future is possible. The 1920s, unlike the 1930s, offers little in real action, but begins to pose serious questions in its poetry and in its politics.

Eliot's Trivium: *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men*, and *Ash Wednesday*

After the success of his first two poetry collections and *The Sacred Wood*, Eliot had become a literary star. I. A. Richards, who was also beginning his career, attempted to convince Eliot to return to academic work, a choice Eliot refused to entertain (Ackroyd 99). His life was now far from Harvard and the campus: he was entrenched in the London literary scene, vacationing with Wyndam Lewis (who introduced him to James Joyce in France in 1920) and taking lunch with Virginia Woolf. He had also begun work on a longer poem called "He Do the Police in Different Voices," the poem that would become *The Waste Land* and define his literary reputation.

Despite his success, Eliot was still extremely anxious about both his art and his future. Never as self-assured as his essays or public image suggested, Eliot was mystified by the confidence of other writers, especially Joyce. This anxiety was due in part to the fact that Eliot was playing a role he had invented for himself. He was remarkably insecure about his public appearance, and so constructed a composed and reserved persona, which could also come off as cold or impersonal. Part of his thinking about public impression was because, as Peter Ackroyd suggests:

Eliot had a clear understanding of the mechanics of making a literary reputation; he understood the importance of being mentioned regularly in the newspapers,

just as in his own criticism he was always aware of the need to make the right impression: hence his air of scholarship which was, in part, only assumed.

Certainly he had read much less than his admirers imagined, although at this stage in his career he did not attempt to disabuse them. (101)

The pressure to maintain his public persona resulted in a number of false starts to projects and a recurring cycle of writer's block and illness (Ackroyd 108). Eliot was still balancing a number of responsibilities: his day job at the bank, various writing assignments and editorial responsibilities, as well as working on the ambitious poem that was to become *The Waste Land*. His marriage to Vivien, however, was one of measured support at this time and he encouraged her to write her own fiction, even as she helped him with his correspondence.

The Waste Land was borne out of the anxiety and hope of an individual in a society wrestling with crisis and loss. Secular progress still held power as an idea of the future, as it does today, but the memory of the Somme granted it a catastrophic air, shifting the general sense of the future further toward the catastrophic end of the spectrum. *The Waste Land* marks the first step in Eliot's response to this sense of catastrophe and nihilism. Over the next decade, Eliot would write a series of poems that construct a poetic arc, a trilogy of poems that wrestle with the idea of millennium and its expression in religious faith. This poetic trivium of *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men*, and *Ash Wednesday* creates a grammar, logic, and rhetoric which in turn define Eliot's early millenarianism.

The Waste Land is the grammar of Eliot's search, the beginning of his personal millenarian journey. In Burridge's model, Eliot has experienced "phase one" of a

millenarian process for some time, searching for the basis of common experience by himself. Through *The Waste Land*, Eliot begins a more public process, essentially “externalizing [his] thought[s] and activities” in a manner fitting with Burridge’s “phase two” (Burridge 115-6). The poem ultimately seeks peace and understanding in a fraught world; its final line, “Shantih, shantih, shantih,” is as much a plea as a promise.

Furthermore, it seeks a peace that reflects a desire for solace and coherence not normally available in modernity.

By collating the scattered references in the poem and using his idea of literary tradition, Eliot performs poetically what most millenarian prophets do through argument: he takes the past and idealizes it, shaping it in a way that responds to the present. What Eliot lacks in *The Waste Land* is a conception of the future beyond the present, and it will not be until later that he is able to answer the challenge of the future. *The Waste Land* marks the development of his major themes and the major symbolic forms Eliot will use throughout the 1920s: the desert and the garden, the city and the wilderness, the emphasis upon duality and binary opposition.

Leon Surette has argued that Eliot was overtly drawn to the occult images of writers like Jessie Weston and it is true that at least one of the earliest reviews of *The Waste Land* described it as “a theosophical tract” (“A Personal Grouse” 2). The process of how Eliot arrived at this group of symbols is radically different from Yeats’s own methodology of using codified occult practices like the Golden Dawn. Yeats was committed to the correctness of his occult practice, but Eliot uses occult images primarily for their effect, not their meaning. In contrast, religious imagery is used for its tradition meaning. It is entirely

possible that Eliot would not have recognized the power of the images he created without Ezra Pound's help in editing "He Do the Police in Different Voices" into *The Waste Land*. This is not to say that Pound developed this set of symbols or is responsible for how Eliot uses them throughout the 1920s; it merely suggests how Eliot struggled to express the anxiety of a present whose future is difficult to conceptualize.

Surette is correct to argue that "the poem is a meditation on revelation or its lack" (12). His reading of the poem rejects every other proposed subject, overturning the idea of impotence, celibacy, and the state of Western civilization as the subject of the poem. I cannot fully endorse Surette's suggestion that the occult was a primary element of Eliot's thought, but he is correct that the poem works towards "expressing the author's inability to believe and equal in ability to disbelieve" (12). Eliot's yearning for revelation—Surette does not use the word "apocalypse," but certainly could have—is personal, although it does link to the broader crises around him. Ultimately, Surette's position might be extended by what Eliot wants in searching for belief, and the answer is a millenarian idea of the future.

The Waste Land appeals to the idea of an organic past in its interest in fertility myths and natural cycles and uses these motifs to express a loss of the future. The act of stirring "memory and desire" forms the basis of a search for meaning in the modern world. It introduces one of Eliot's key motifs: the desert. The "stony rubbish" and the "shadow[s] under this red rock" resonate passionately with the poem's threat to "show you fear in a handful of dust" (30). The desert of "What the Thunder Said" is a place without

...water but only rock

Rock and no water and the sandy road

The road winding above the mountains

Which are mountains of rock without water (331-334)

The parched land here is a major figure of all three poems in the trivium and the movement from desert to garden develops throughout the 1920s.

Eliot's attempt to restructure the past into an acceptable model of an organic community and his exaltation of Dante as a poet who wrote in a consistent cultural tradition echoes his own critical attempts to circumvent the Romantics and Victorians. Of all the contemporary prose Eliot wrote during this period, the work that best suggests Eliot's intellectual development in the early 1920s is "The Lesson of Baudelaire" in which Eliot argues "all first-rate poetry is occupied with morality" and "more than any poet of his time, Baudelaire was aware of what most mattered: the problem of good and evil" (144). (English poetry, he argues, evades this responsibility through the adoption of incoherent Romantic ideas of morality). He attacks Milton, dismissing his view of morality in a rather callous question: "Is anyone seriously interested in Milton's view of good and evil?" Eliot's repudiation of the last two centuries of English writing places him in a new relationship of influence, allowing him to reach *around* the Enlightenment to use the Middle Ages as a self-made tradition to empower his millenarianism (144).

"The Lessons of Baudelaire" also contains a throw-away reference to "the Last Judgement," but, unlike Yeats's use of such rhetoric, Eliot's use of apocalyptic language is less millenarian than it is humorous: "On the other hand, the poets who consider

themselves most opposed to Georgianism, and who know a little French, are mostly such as could imagine the Last Judgement only as a lavish display of Bengal Lights, Roman candles, Catherine-wheels, and inflammable fire-balloons. *Vous, hypocrite lecteur...* (145).

Eliot's closing reference to Baudelaire in the above quotation connects to the scene of lines 69-76 of *The Waste Land*,

"That corpse you planted last year in your garden

"Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?

"Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?

"Oh keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,

"Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!

"You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!"

This scene in the Unreal City relates to the haunting of history, the way past events live just under the soil and an indiscrete or incautious action can uncover the corpses in civilization's garden. The quote from Baudelaire suggests a connection between Eliot's ideas of morality and the subject matter of the poem, and the amoral quality of modernity weighs heavily on the poem. This link can be strengthened by regarding the discussion of corpses in the garden as reflecting Eliot's concern for the future of Europe, if not the world. Whether the corpses are figurative or literal does not matter in the poem so much as they must represent the hidden and the unspoken assumptions which may lead us toward catastrophe.

Eliot's prose of the 1920s was deeply committed to the need for an individual to be rooted in the reality the world and his millenarianism is neither as transcendental Yeats's

or as linguistic as Auden's. In *The Waste Land*, his expression of millennium is not fully formed, in part because Eliot is attempting to formulate a millenarianism rooted in reality as opposed to simply adopting the role of visionary poet. His pre-millenarianism finds some voice in what Harriet Davidson has called the poem's "desire for order" (131). Davidson's reading of the poem analyzes the tension between the proper and the improper, a subject that underscores the struggle between order and chaos in the poem. She uses a psychoanalytic approach to argue that "desire is both *caused by* the lack of absolutes in human life, the inevitable finitude and change, and *causes* change in its restless search for something to relieve this lack" (126). It is possible to extend this argument beyond the parameters of order and chaos: Death—the finitude of life—is also a closing of the future, a collapse of potential and, by reversing the synecdoche, the death of the individual suggests the death of the culture is possible as well. Eliot's desire in the poem is the desire for a future, not a future of decline or stability, but a future better than the one he can imagine.

With Eliot's conversion available to us in retrospect, it is possible to see *The Waste Land* as a religious poem. George Williamson suggests the poem "is concerned with both the development and the decline of religious feeling in modern man" (154), but at this point in Eliot's development as a poet and a millenarian, it is not necessarily certain he would pursue a religious path. It is fairly certain that Eliot would have been unlikely to become a spiritualist like Yeats—his abuse of the Tarot and the character of Madame Sosostris are too cutting—but it is possible he might have attempted to pursue a Communist or Fascist direction.

While *The Waste Land* was most certainly a poetic success, it failed to create the kind of peace Eliot imagined might be possible; he would later comment in 1959 that “I wasn’t even bothering whether I understood what I was saying” (qtd. in Rainey 38). Despite the apparent confusion on Eliot’s part, *The Waste Land* repeats many of Eliot’s major concerns: reality, perception, and enlightenment, but without concrete answers. Whatever fragments Eliot managed to shore up in the poem are an attempt to remake tradition, to remake the past in a way that can offer solace to the present. It reflects the millenarian impulse of Eliot’s work, and in the years following the writing of *The Waste Land*, Eliot would take up the grammar he had constructed and use it to motivate and express his attempts to find a tradition capable of underpinning his intellectual and utopian ambitions.

In 1925, the same year *The Hollow Men* was published, Eliot accepted a job as an editor and board member at Faber and Gwynn, later Faber and Faber (Cooper *Camb. Intro. Eliot* 12). This career change was a welcome one, and was as much a smart move on Faber’s part as anything else: Eliot brought considerable business experience, editorial skill, and a trendy influence on the younger artistic and academic audience Faber sought to attract (Ackroyd 151). Home life, however, was growing more and more difficult. As early as 1925, Eliot was discussing the possibility of separating from Vivien; her neurasthenic state was deteriorating and despite seeking advice from friends such as Leonard Woolf, Eliot found himself unable or unwilling to cope with the effort her care demanded (Ackroyd 149-150). Through 1926-27, the marriage essentially dissolved and

the Eliots entered a phase of growing isolation, cutting themselves off from public engagements and society.

It was in these two environments—increasing career success and failing personal life—that Eliot began to undergo a major transmutation in his millenarianism: over the period of 1924 to 1927, he rejected secular agnosticism in favour of Anglicanism. There is a sense of confusion and awkwardness in his transition from agnostic American to penitent Englishman, in particular because he kept his conversion relatively secret for a time (Virginia Woolf only found out six months after the fact) (Ackroyd 172). Part of Eliot's secrecy might have related to an anxiety over the response he would receive. Some of his friends, notably Wyndam Lewis and Ezra Pound felt that conversion and naturalization was really motivated by social ambition and was a decision of convenience and posture.

Eliot's conversion to Anglo-Catholicism reflects a transition from his early pattern of internalized millenarianism. In comparison to Burridge's model of millenarian activity Eliot emerges from Phase 1 in the mid-1920s. Eliot faced a number of pressures: Viven's deteriorating mental state, financial shortfalls, and an inability to complete *Sweeney Agonistes* serve as both qualitative and quantitative measures of loss of integrity. Although his role as editor and reviewer maintain his presence in the literary community, his poetic output had collapsed after the publication of *The Waste Land*. It is also possible he was becoming uncomfortable with the public image he had created for himself and was seeking a way of giving voice to his religious yearnings and his more populist taste in literature (Eliot would review twenty four detective novels between January and June of 1927 [Ackroyd 167]).

Unlike Yeats, Eliot's earliest phase as a millenarian was very isolated. Yeats maintained his relationships with other millenarians, likely because of the sub-cultural connotations of the occult. Eliot's period of discussion and intellectual activity was a conversation with an anonymous public, not necessarily with his peers. Perhaps it was fear of being thought of as less intellectual because of his religious searching, perhaps a fear of rejection motivated the secrecy with which he became Christian and British. It is because of the tensions within Eliot's personality that his poetry of the mid-1920's, especially *The Hollow Men*, builds toward his religious transformation incrementally.

In the previous year, smaller poems had appeared in *Commerce* and *Chapbook* which Eliot used to create *The Hollow Men* (Grant 22). Early reviewers called the finished poem "gnomically disarticulate" (Rickword 129) and "an elaborate expression of disgust" (Squire 140). Leonard Woolf unkindly declared *The Hollow Men* an example of Eliot's single theme, the "sordidness of reality" (132). In these first reviews, the common reading of the poem as despairing and alienated is readily present. For Edmund Wilson, *The Hollow Men* was simply a "more advanced stage of...demoralization already given expression in *The Waste Land*" ("Stravinsky and Others" 142), while Allen Tate wrote that the poem was the end of "at least a phase" and might indicate that Eliot "has nothing more to say in poetry" (144-5). Certainly Eliot was not exhausted poetically, and the idea that *The Hollow Men* marks Eliot's transition from an early to a later phase has become an attractive position; the argument put forward here that the poem serves as the middle of a three-part development seems to support such a notion, but it is important to reemphasize that Eliot does not become millenarian during this development, he simply finds direction

for it and settles upon a manner in which he can begin to express his desires to himself and others.

While *The Waste Land* established the language and style of Eliot's exploration of meaning, tradition, and millennium, *The Hollow Men* functions as a logic in which Eliot uses the language and the symbols of his earlier poem to analyze the problem he confronts. This problem of *The Hollow Men* has been read as multiple things: modernity, a loss of faith, or even a loss of sexual appetite, but these all merge into the desire for peace and security which *The Waste Land* was so concerned with. *The Hollow Men* places the most extreme of these outcomes: total failure and despair at one end and hope and peace at the other, and works toward destroying a world-view defined by simple duality.²⁹ During and after his conversion, Eliot remains just as ardently committed to discussing the reality of the present as he is in being committed to discussing how the future should be. By working through the achievement and failure of revelation, *The Hollow Men* destroys the distance that seems to divide hope and despair. In the development of Eliot's

²⁹ Despite a general consensus that *The Hollow Men* is a bleak, hopeless poem a few dissenters have seen the poem as hopeful. The earliest argument began in 1958 with an essay by Strothmann and Ryan that sparked a brief debate in *PMLA*, leading to a second essay in 1960 by Gillis who argues against Strothmann and Ryan, with a responds in the same issue. Strothmann and Ryan's hopeful argument depends largely upon reading the third stanza of part IV through the use of the word "empty" and the symbolism of the multifoliate rose:

Our contention is that...the words "The hope only/ Of empty men" ought to be taken in a sense that makes emptiness a condition of hope...the multifoliate rose [is] a symbol of maximum fulfillment, accessible only to those who are no longer hollow...but empty in some laudable, positive sense of the term. Emptiness, then, becomes something desirable—within the framework of the poem, something to be prayed for. (426)

While the debate is interesting because it opens up the possibility of new readings of *The Hollow Men*, it does not dwell enough on the poem as a whole (and neither for that matter does Gillis' counter-suit). Since this brief debate in *PMLA*, there have been two other attempts to see the poem as hopeful: Jones, whose 1964 reading is vague and generally falls into the trap of considering allusions rather than the poetic language of the poem; and Freeman's excellent 1988 reading in the *Yeats Eliot Review*. Her reading has considerable sympathy with the one put forward here, and she too notices what both Freeman and I have decided to term "dualities" in the poem.

millenarianism, *The Hollow Men* represents a narrowing or tightening of Eliot's intertextual references; his next major poem, *Ash Wednesday*, will only draw from three principle sources: the Bible, liturgical material, and Dante. Although *The Waste Land* is a greater poem, and *Ash Wednesday* completes this particular trilogy, *The Hollow Men* serves as the hinge of the poetic arc and it requires careful attention as it a major example of Eliot's millenarian development.

Growing out of the poetic grammar Eliot lays out in *The Waste Land*, *The Hollow Men* creates a "logic" of contrasting ideas, essentially testing binary opposites in order to achieve unity. This is evident even in the use of two epigraphs, one literary "Mistah Kurtz—he dead" and one cultural: "A penny for the Old Guy." The first is clearly reportage, and intended to raise the problem of understanding truth through language. The second is a question asked by children celebrating Guy Fawkes Day. The Old Guy is the straw man burned during the evening's bonfires and the children collect the pennies to buy their own fireworks and wood. Considerable work has been done exploring the issues of failed revolution hinted at in this reference to Guy Fawkes, as well as contextual studies of the lines relevance to Eliot's biography and political context.³⁰ But the poem presents the phrase as a statement, not a point of inquiry. Read in the context of the poem, "A penny for the Old Guy" becomes an offering and if the spirit of Guy Fawkes is to be raised, it is meant to direct us toward the argument of the poem, not toward Guy Fawkes.

³⁰ The most complete analysis of the Guy Fawkes reference and Eliot's personal context is Rossel's "Guy Fawkes Day and the Versailles Peace in 'The Hollow Men.'" While interesting and a plausible influence on the poem, Rossel's short essay is a good example of scholarship that considers little of the poem's language in favour of context and allusion.

The opening lines of *The Hollow Men* present a chorus-like image of leaning scarecrows:

We are the hollow men

We are the stuffed men

Leaning together

Headpiece filled with straw. Alas! (1-4)

The repetitive quality of the diction suggests both music and deterioration, but Eliot's use of enjambment creates a moment of indecision that makes the change of tone in the second sentence greater. Here the straw men are shown in collusion, whispering in "dried voices," which are meaningless in this desolate land suffering from drought and whose wine cellars are empty and destroyed, home only to vermin.

The stanza form of the poem then undergoes a brilliant feat of craftsmanship: the sentence continues, but the stanza compresses: "Shape without form, shade without colour, / Paralyzed force, gesture without motion" (11-12). Eliot presents two lines rather than four and this compression creates a sense of urgency, a need to be understood. It is as if, once they have our attention, these hollow men need to explain themselves. They lose composure, the words come too fast and they are unable to clearly describe what it is that haunts them. The sentence continues:

Those who have crossed

With direct eyes, to death's other kingdom

Remember us—if at all—not as lost

Violent souls, but only

As the hollow men

The stuffed men. (13-18)

The poem is unclear about who or what these figures “who have crossed/ With direct eyes, to death's other kingdom” truly are. Just as the allusion to Kurtz's death is reportage, the hollow men rely upon half-visions and incomplete understandings of their reality. The visionary quality of the direct eyes which see beyond life announces the poem's major theme: revelation. This theme connects the poem to the idea of apocalypse, and through this connection, the poem is placed between the ideas of hope and catastrophe even before reaching its celebrated end: “*This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but a whimper*” (97-98).

Before the poem can turn towards the apocalypse, it must move through a series of stages. Part I begins in a social sphere—the hollow men's anxiety is a shared one—while Part II is individual—the “we” of Part I becomes an “I”. The change from social to individual creates a binary between the hollow men and the inner voice (“the poet”). The creation of this binary is important as the poem argues against the illusionary quality of binary relationships. Robert Crawford suggests a possible link between the poem's religious themes, or what he calls the poem's “denigration of ritual” (161), a series of anxieties which reflect “Eliot's fears about the barrenness of his own life and about losing his creativity” (157). But the poem is not as he claims “Eliot's most blasphemous poem” (154), it is an attempt to unify ideas through a testing of logics.

The poem does not necessarily lead towards faith, but it does lead towards revelation. Although Eliot's final end point in *Ash Wednesday* is faith, the logic of *The*

Hollow Men is not heretical, but questioning—it moves towards decision, but does not make a choice. The apocalyptic theme is far more important a consideration; While David Rudrum has argued the poem is essentially “an anti-apocalypse” (the millennium of the poem is, after all, a whimper) (65). Rudrum’s claim does not consider the way *The Hollow Men* is linked to Eliot’s other major poems of the 1920s, but he is correct in suggesting the poem demands attention to revelation and the future.

After providing a sketch of the problem of the individual and the social in parts I and II, *The Hollow Men* changes its scenery, moving us away from the human self and toward the natural landscape: “This is the dead land/ This is cactus land” (39-40). At first glance, this landscape seems barren, desert-like, and perhaps the ultimate result of the dry winds blowing over the grass of Part I, but this assumption is incorrect. The dead land is a place of worship:

Here the stone images
 Are raised, here they receive
 The supplication of a dead man's hand
 Under the twinkle of a fading star. (41-44)

The supplication of a dead man's hand is a reference to the death/rebirth cycle of mythic visionaries (Horus's dismemberment and reformation, Odin on the World Tree), and likely signifies Jesus Christ specifically because of the connotations of the “fading star,” which is possibly a reference to the Star of Bethlehem. The “dead land” then is not *The Waste Land*, but the Holy Land. The focus upon cactus and stone emphasizes the starkness of the landscape and bring to mind the early Christian hermits of the Middle East. The transition

of the desert of *The Waste Land* to the Holy Land of *The Hollow Men* is an important one, and a fairly commonplace use of the desert as religious symbol. Mark Shepard notes in his landmark study of place and humanity, *Man in the Landscape*, that the desert is a place of spiritual retreat:

Silence and emptiness convey divine immanence by their lack of prosaic forms. The desert is the environment of revelation, genetically and physiologically alien, sensorily austere, esthetically abstract, historically inimical. It is always described as boundless and empty, but the human experience there is never merely existential. Its solitude is a not-empty void, a not-quiet silence...The constancy of sensory experience in the desert...is in effect sensory deprivation. This is the saturation of solitude, the ultimate draft of emptiness, needing courage and sanity to face. It brings introversion, contemplation, hallucination. Space and time and silence are metaphors of the eternal and infinite. To the desert go prophets and hermits; through deserts go pilgrims and exiles. Here the leaders of the great religions have sought the therapeutic and spiritual values of retreat, not to escape but to find reality (43-44)

It is this spiritual quality of the desert that Eliot hopes to invoke here in *The Hollow Men*, the expansive space and the retreat of the hermit. Shepard's observations about nature, time and space resonates with Eliot's later meditation of the theme of time and nature in *Four Quartets* and such a convergence of metaphors stresses the continuity of Eliot's millenarian thinking. This meditation on time is a marker of Modernism's millenarianism: The Christian tradition of desert hermitages also parallel's Yeats's fascination with

spiritualism and provided Eliot with a similar space in which to develop his millenarian thought.

It is possible to limit the poem's debate to Eliot's conversion to Christianity, especially given its biographical timing, but to limit the poem to a conversion story misses understanding the importance of millenarianism in Eliot's writing, in part because such a simplification avoids seeing Part III as paired with Part IV. It is true that the voice speaking in Part III is fraught with indecision about religion and the transcendental understanding it claims to offer, but the next sentence of the poem:

In death's other kingdom
 Waking alone
 At the hour when we are
 Trembling with tenderness
 Lips that would kiss
 Form prayers to broken stone. (46-51)

suggests a serious questioning of the value of asceticism. Awakening in the afterlife is a scene of fear and emotional excitement. It is a moment in which love overwhelms one to "trembling" but all one can do is "form prayers to broken stone." These lines not only suggest a powerful image of Agape overwhelming Eros, but also one that makes a link between the two expressions of love, that the unselfish love of God is the same as the erotic love of the physical form.

As *The Hollow Men* moves from Part III to Part IV, the landscape changes again: "In this valley of dying stars/ In this hollow valley/ This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms (54-

56). Here the poem tentatively moves into an urban setting; the dying stars are the lights in the urban towers, the reach of multi-story buildings creating a landscape akin to the valley. The suggestion of urban space allows Eliot to respond to the Unreal City of *The Waste Land* in a new manner. The city is not a place of supplication; certainly “the broken jaw” image suggests pain and suffering, and violence through its allusion to Samson’s weapon. The city becomes a place where one can hide from the fearsome visionary eyes: “The eyes are not here/ There are no eyes here” (53-4). But there is a growing pessimism in the voice, fear is replaced with resigned blindness:

In this last of meeting places

We grope together

And avoid speech

Gathered on this beach of the tumid river (57-60)

This pessimism borders on cynicism and the first strain of the catastrophic tone *The Hollow Men* begins to show “in this last of meeting places.” Many critics consider the scene as based on the third canto of Dante’s *Inferno*: the river is Acheron and the figures on the beach as trapped in a choice between good and evil (Gillis 464). The images of groping, unspeaking valley-dwellers also invokes the image and alienation of city life “gathered on this beach of the tumid river,” and suggest London and the Thames. As enticing as such a biographical turn is, few cities are built away from major waterways, and the urban setting of Part IV is not necessarily London, but it is necessarily *urban*. It must be so in order to contrast with the wilderness that came before. *The Hollow Men* presents wilderness as ascetic and millenarian, while urban civilization is numb to faith and revelation. It is easy

to connect the poem's portrayal of urban civilization to modernity and to a monotonous continuation of the present in the future.

The poems' conflation of a catastrophic future with a modern present creates another binary in the poem's argument: revelation and destruction. At this point, the poem now has several operating binaries:

- society and the individual (we: Part I and IV; I: Part II and III)
- dream-life and afterlife (dream-life; Parts II and IV; afterlife (Part I and III)
- fear of and desire for transcendence (throughout)
- wilderness and civilization (Parts III and IV)
- millennium and catastrophe (Parts IV and V)

The point of piling up all of these binary relationships becomes apparent in Part V, but before moving on to final part of the poem, there is a major section of the Part IV to consider first.

The closing of Part IV is the basis of more hopeful readings of the poem, in reference to the Christian symbol of the rose which allows a possible expression of heaven in the poem:

Sightless, unless

The eyes reappear

As the perpetual star

Mutlifoliate rose

Of death's twilight kingdom

The hope only

Of empty men. (61-67)

There is indeed a suggestion of hope in the possibility of “the eyes reappear[ing]” and the rise of a “perpetual star,” all of which is a sudden reversal of the poem’s fear of the “eyes” and vision of a “fading” star. This section may refer to the Second Coming, but it also collapses of one of the binaries laid out earlier in the poem: the “twilight kingdom” that closes Part II is not the realm of dreaming, but the afterlife, and so the poem now suggests dreaming and the afterlife are not exclusive to each other and the poem’s binaries are not oppositional, but dualities.

Jewel Spears Brooker and William Charron have discussed a “Theory of Opposites” that Eliot worked on during his studies at Harvard. They argue that this theory, which emerges in a critique of Kant, is suggestive of *The Hollow Men*: “Eliot’s philosophic papers on Kant are directly helpful here, for they emphasize the illusionary nature of binary thinking in which the idea and the reality are seen as contradictory or contrary terms” (60). This is insightful, but Brooker and Charron wisely admit that it is “incautious to claim that Kant is the single or even the predominant influence” on Eliot’s use of binaries in the poem (61). Similarly, Louis Menand has argued that the use of Eliot’s graduate school material, while certainly of interest, cannot be used as an effective analytic tool as it is too distant from the actual writing of the poetry (31). Nonetheless, it is important to note that the relationships laid out in *The Hollow Men* are ones of dependence and exchange and are dualities. One cannot exist without the other; they are not hierarchies and *The Hollow Men* does not prioritize hope over despair, or vice versa. It presents both as necessary qualities in order to reach the transcendence the author both

fears and desires. *The Hollow Men* is not a poem about hope or despair, but a poem about the revelation that might allow one to move beyond those states. The perpetual star that can guide one to enlightenment is at work in both the afterlife and the dreamworld; neither realm has an exclusive claim to wisdom.

The whole concept of a hope or despair-based reading of the poem stresses the millenarian and catastrophic poles explored in the verse. More than any other mid-career poem, *The Hollow Men* reflects Eliot's millenarian desire for revelation and apocalypse, but does not fully achieve a satisfactory resolution to the problem. Just as the fullness of the poetic argument is realized, the poem breaks into song:

Here we go round the prickly pear

Prickly pear prickly pear

Here we go round the prickly pear

At five o'clock in the morning. (68-71)

It is not unfair to expect a poem of five parts, especially one based on dualities, to present its argument in Parts I-VI and then resolve them in Part V, but Eliot's structure evades resolution. If anything, Part V appears at first glance anarchic and desultory, but is in fact a final attempt to clarify the logic of Eliot's grammar. The actual words of the song suggest circling a problem and contribute to the sentiment of a dark night of the soul (circling a "prickly" problem "[a]t five o'clock in the morning.") A prickly pear is also a kind of cactus, so the lines might return us to the Holy Land of Part III. Again, one might see this purely as an internal religious debate, but the song's lines contain a homophonic reference

to the dualities emphasized above: “pear” and “pair.”³¹ The sudden lyricism of the lines then do relate to the above lines, circling toward resolution: Here we go round the prickly pair, prickly pair, prickly pair.

As the poem circles the problems of duality and revelation, *The Hollow Men* rapidly feeds us more and more pairings: “the idea/ And the reality” (72-3), “the motion/ and the act” (74-5) and onward: conception/creation (78-9), emotion/response (80-1), desire/spasm (84-5), potency/existence (86-7), essence/decent (88-9). The short lines of these verses and the repetitive use of “between” and “and” builds towards a momentous and insistent force. The poem tells us between each of these dualities “Falls the shadow” (76, 82, and 90). This shadow is not the fear of millennium, for apocalypse is the goal of this logic. Duality cannot enshrine the rational in the way a binary between mind and body can. The hesitation is the source of the city dwellers' blindness and the poet's fear and trembling.

The poem's range of voice increases sharply, allowing for more contrast. The first new voice is that of the child's song and the second is a subject-less voice that responds in the whirling stanzas of dualities. “I” and “We” vanish at this stage of the revelation and a new dualistic position arises to argue with the italicized voice. The structure of the argument mirrors the practice of priest-congregation call-and-response during a service and continues the poem's use of religious motifs—though *The Hollow Men* is as wary of religiosity as it is of modernity. In analysis, the italicized voice mocks the poem's argument through the “*prickly pear*” song, a sudden dismissal of the poem's problem.

³¹ This play on words has also been noted by Brooker and Charron. Their reading is related more to the subject matter of Eliot's undergraduate essays rather than *The Hollow Men* itself, but one will note that duality is a common theme in Eliot's writings, especially in *Four Quartets*.

To this new voice, the dual-voice replies with a counter-argument that uses both dualities and an implied threat of darkness:

Between the idea
 And the reality
 Between the motion
 And the act
 Falls the Shadow

In response to this argument, the italicized voice simply says “*For Thine is the kingdom*” (77). Taken from the concluding line of the Lord's Prayer (For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory), this single line response to a very complex sentence suggests a dogmatic approach to argument.

If modernity robs us of sight, then religion gives us vision at the expense of thought. It simply creates a binary that privileges the irrational over the rational. The dual-voice responds with more dualities and the voice changes tactics slightly—“*Life is very long*” (83)—suggesting that it can either outlast the dual-voice or that life is wearying without the kind of security faith can provide. The dual-voice counters with further dualities, and it is important to note the connection of mind and body in its choice of words—concept and creation, desire and orgasm—in its argument. All the dual-voice's attempts at dialogue are in vain, for the italicized voice simply ignores the argument, insisting once again “*For Thine is the kingdom*” (91).

The dual-voice appears overwhelmed by the dogma of the italicized voice, or at least begins to try on its language in the lines:

For thine is

Life is

For thine is the (92-94)

but the dual-voice is unable to complete the lines because they only present one side of the argument. This is failure of dialogue on both sides, and now the dual-voice mocks the italicized voice here, demonstrating the hollowness or one-sidedness of its arguments. In this reading, the much-quoted end of *The Hollow Men* becomes a retreating threat of the italicized voice, a taunting reminder of its promise of revelation. The end of the world—millennium or catastrophe—taken in full (and literal) meaning as *revelation*: a sudden actualization of reality in which the past can be judged on its own merits because there is no present or future to contrast with it. In this revelation of the end, all binaries collapse into duality and the folly of hierarchy is made real.

This is not a lamenting passage, but a return to fear and anxiety, the fear that there will never be revelation, that modernity is already the end, and that sightlessness will become so commonplace that no one will hunger for the vision of “[t]hose who have crossed/ With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom” (13-4). *The Hollow Men* explores the tension between a despair of and hope for revelation; it is not a simply exaltation of one or the other, but a complex breaking down of the range of apocalyptic meaning. This is the logic Eliot presents in *The Hollow Men*: a logic of revelation and apocalypse which finds the individual incapable of transcendence. This logic echoes the idea of tradition Eliot previously expounded and suggests Eliot’s thought would move towards community and society, which indeed are stronger themes in 1930’s *Ash Wednesday*.

In the years following the publication of *The Hollow Men*, Eliot's poetry began to use a more direct Christian context. The "Ariel" poems that Eliot published between *The Hollow Men* and *Ash Wednesday* are smaller works that use the grammar of *The Waste Land* sparingly. For Eliot as a millenarian, the conservative tradition of Anglo-Catholicism allowed him to circumvent the Reformation and Enlightenment. The idea of a Church was an idea of a specific community within which continuity and tradition could be used to develop his conception of a utopian future.

Before Eliot was able to complete the last poem of his trivium—*Ash Wednesday*—he published *For Lancelot Andrewes* in 1928. As a collection of essays, *For Lancelot Andrewes* is memorable more for its preface than its contents *per se*. Eliot's preface gives some indication of his current ambitions, which is "to indicate certain lines of development, and to disassociate myself from certain conclusions which have been drawn from my volume of essays, *The Sacred Wood*" (ix). He claims that the "general point of view" that he wishes to underscore is "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion" (ix). The perspective Eliot offers here, as Lawrence Rainey has noted, is "deliberately provocative" and over time "it has often been quoted as if it is sufficient to characterize the whole of Eliot's work and life" (36). Rainey's point that the statement is intended to provoke reaction should not be underestimated. Eliot, as noted above, was very aware of the need to craft and maintain a public image and occasionally shocking one's audience is a longstanding way of maintaining celebrity. His claims also read as attempts to destabilize his public influence, especially in the preface's attempt to reject *The Sacred Wood*.

Another facet of the preface which undermines the veracity of Eliot's claim to be classicist, royalist, and Anglo-Catholic is its mention of three projects Eliot announces: "*The School of Donne; The Outline of Royalism; and The Principles of Modern Heresy*" (x). None of which were ever published, with the possible exception of the last title, something of which remains in Eliot's 1934 book *After Strange Gods: A Primer on Modern Heresy*. While none of these proposed works were ever published, *For Lancelot Andrewes* does demonstrate, in Peter Ackroyd's words, how effectively Eliot was able to "[set] the context and principles for the description and critical evaluation of his own work" (177), a trend that would continue well into the twenty-first century as anthology biographies rely heavily on the terms Eliot lays out in this preface.

Ash Wednesday, on the other hand, focuses more upon poetic argument and relies less upon sound-bite-like assertions of allegiance. Jewel Spears Brooker notes that the poem's attempt to resolve dualities prefigures Eliot's later verse:

The Waste Land also deals with the destructive effects of knowledge, with the splitting apart of knowledge and values, of thought and feeling, of mind and body.

In *Ash-Wednesday*, Eliot explores the possibilities for transcendence through negative mysticism. The attempt to escape dualistic categories through discipline and mastery is, in fact, at the heart of his later verse, especially *Four Quartets*.

("Transcendence and Return" 69-70)

Building on the grammar and logic of *The Waste Land* and *The Hollow Men*, *Ash Wednesday* is able to begin immediately, almost mid-stride and certainly mid-thought:

Because I do not hope to turn again

Because I do not hope

Because I do not hope to turn

Desiring this man's gift and that man's scope

I no longer strive towards such things (1-5)

John Xiros Cooper has described this repetition of phrases as a kind of stammer that reflects insecurity in the poet's "poise" (*Ideology* 15), but it is also a cycle which repeats the act of turning. The repetition of language implies movement, but not necessarily confusion: Eliot is clear that he is no longer concerned with this and that man's being, only his own, and he seeks something beyond normal concerns, what he describes as "The vanished power of the usual reign?" (8).

The image of turning is possibly an allusion to the eleventh poem of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*: "The man who searches deeply for the truth, and wishes to avoid being deceived by false leads, must turn the light of his inner vision upon himself" (61). And the poem's desire to prevent another turn avoids "false leads" and makes a final rhetorical stand in the face of the grammar and logic Eliot previously composed. However, the argument of *Ash Wednesday* is not transcendentalist; the poem's speaker is not willing and perhaps not able, to enter fully the territory which Yeats finds so appealing:

Because I do not hope to know again

The infirm glory of the positive hour

Because I do not think

Because I know I shall not know

The one veritable transitory power

Because I cannot drink

There, where trees flower, and springs flow, for there is nothing again (9-15)

Eliot rejects “the positive hour” and the power of movement, which might indicate an ecstatic or transcendental power, and reasserts a contrast between the act of drinking and landscape, only this time the bountiful land is the subject of crisis, not the desert. Eliot has entered the desert of *The Hollow Men* more fully here, seeking not vision, but perception of self and reality, moving away from logic to decision:

Because I know that time is always time

And place is always and only place

And what is actual is actual only for one time

And only for one place

I rejoice that things are as they are and

I renounce the blessed face (16-20)

Eliot’s position here is that acceptance of impermanence creates permanence, which is essentially the Buddha’s enlightenment through the full appreciation that everything changes. The Buddhism of these lines is echoed later in the first section of the poem:

Teach us to care and not to care

Teach us to sit still. (38-9)

The second section of the poem owes much to Dante, as well as the prophets Elijah and Ezekiel, both major prophets of the Old Testament, and introduces several important images, including the Lady and the garden, both of which serve as important contrasts

with the desert setting Eliot has so effectively used in his earlier long poems (Williamson 173-5). The section meditates upon death, cycling over ideas from *The Hollow Men* and introducing a symbol of the body, bones: "Let the whiteness of the bones atone to forgetfulness. / There is no life in them" (59-60). The possible elimination of form here is only momentary, as the bones themselves sing, "scattered and shining":

This is the land which ye

Shall divide by lot. And neither division nor unity

Matters. This is the land. We have our inheritance. (93-95)

The enjambment here stresses the fissure between what is said and what is really present. By separating a phrase like "And neither division nor unity matters" Eliot emphasizes how much both concepts do still matter at this point in the poem. It is not as extreme a separation as placing the break between "division" and "unity," and this movement links the rhetoric of the poem towards a more complete statement of the future.

The possibility of movement takes on more meaning in Part III, where Eliot uses the image of a stairway, the ascension of which forces one to dwell upon "The deceitful face of hope and of despair" (101). As he did in *The Hollow Men*, Eliot again begins to strain binaries, but rather than trying to collapse them towards the end of the poem, Eliot places their collapse in the centre, allowing the poem to descend and then rise in order beyond dualism and Manichaeism to a state of Augustinian resolve: "Lord, I am not worthy / but speak the word only" (117-19). These closing lines of Part III might at first seem abject, but instead connect to the ideas of unity Eliot has advocated in his collapsing of binaries: the word, a very loaded term that Eliot smartly resists capitalizing here, relates to the idea of

the Word of God and that language is the firmament of God's reality. It radically reaffirms the notion of poetry and allows the poem to merge desert and garden: "Who then made strong the fountains and made fresh the springs / Made cool the dry rock and made firm the sand" (127-8). The merging of garden and desert allows the poem to move towards one of the most important passages of revelation and millennium in all of Eliot's writing:

White light folded, sheathed about here, folded.

The new years walk, restoring

Through a bright cloud of tears, the years, restoring

With a new verse the ancient rhyme. Redeem

The time. Redeem

The unread vision in the higher dream

While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse. (134-140)

The combination of images, from folklore and mythology, are conflated with a scene in which new knowledge is revealed but still inexperienced, a promise of things to come; the critical image is that of redeeming time itself.

Paul S. Fiddes, in his study of eschatology in theology and literature *The Promised End*, argues that the theme of penitence suggested by the title *Ash Wednesday* relates to a conception of time itself: "In penitence we bring confession for the past and resolve to live a holy life in the future: penitence should then link the three modes of line into one" (111). Fiddes also argues that the poem seeks to overcome the problem of time and eschatology in order to deal with way in which "the almost unbearable sense of what *was* troubles the present and prevents hope for the future" (112). In Fiddes's interpretation then, although

he does not use the exact word, Eliot was a millenarian attempting to express a hopeful future through his verse.

In *Ash Wednesday*, Eliot gives a new voice to one of his most meaningful experiences of millenarianism, the idea that the

Word is unspoken, unheard;

Still is the unspoken word, the Word unheard

The Word without a word, the Word within

The world and for the world. (151-55)

The grounding Eliot seeks for his millenarianism is the argument that the Word is “within / The World and for the world.” Eliot seeks the place in reality where the word can be found and tries to reconcile the mundane quality of life with the mystical qualities of faith. The poem reflects Eliot’s pre-millenarianism, a facet of his work marks him as different from Yeats and Auden. For Eliot, the world is concrete and the experience of it is intense. It is quite likely that Eliot was not a Platonic Christian, even though he acknowledged the existence of Hell. For Eliot, life had to be led bodily and utopia had to be created materially. In order for the Second Coming to be actualized, humanity had to improve itself. The way *Ash Wednesday* needs to turn over its phrases is due in part to the fact that Eliot resists a visionary or mystical expression of utopia in poetry.

The difficulty Eliot experiences in writing his millenarian verse is an interesting commentary on the way poetry and millenarianism find interplay with one another: the more visionary or transcendental quality of post-millenarianism appears easier to express in poetry, but the pre-millenarian need for social action makes it a more difficult subject.

Eliot still attempts to work towards millennium, trying to advocate a reality which is more utopian, but not necessarily revelatory:

In the last desert between the last blue rocks

The desert in the garden the garden in the desert

Of drought, spitting from the mouth the withered apple-seed. (181-183)

The idea of spitting out the seeds of the fruit of knowledge is a key piece here, as it suggests the power for moral choice lies in the individual and, as later Eliot will argue in prose, society at large. Eliot sees the power for change as part of the world, as a way to a utopian future. The millenarian movement towards Christianity Eliot charts in his major poems of the 1920s defines his pre-millenarian position that utopia is created through the actions of a society, and Eliot is beginning to envision a society made perfect not by science or modern technology, but by a set of religious principles.

The sixth and final part of *Ash Wednesday* returns to the opening line, restating the problem—“Although I do not hope to turn again”—while altering the tenor: “although” is a radical change in wording from the “because” of Part I, rejecting a word which suggests argument, in favour of words better suited to explanation, indicating decisions have been made and action is about to take place. In his conclusion, Eliot returns to many of the grammars and symbols of early parts of the poem, working them into a final rhetoric

This reconciliation of Eliot’s faith and idea of literary tradition suggests a need to reconcile differences in gender and experience with differences of body and mind. George Williamson notes that *Ash Wednesday* “describes stages of despair, self-abnegation, moral recovery, resurgent faith, need of grace, and renewal of will toward both world and God”

(184). The poem's need to be integrated into a culture or society—"suffer me not to be separated"—emphasizes Eliot's desire for a millenarian community and marks his full entrance into a more active stage of millenarian desire.

The process of Eliot's conversion is not so much a change in his thinking as it is him finding a voice through which to express his major themes. The multifarious voices of *The Waste Land* and the failed catastrophic apocalypse at the end of *The Hollow Men* were ways of trying to find hope, not rejecting it. Of course Eliot's conversion was to a very tradition source of millenarian desire, and his friends and followers did not always understand his decision; Ezra Pound express his displeasure in a couplet: "In any case, let us lament the psychosis / Of all those who abandon the Muses for Moses" (qtd. in Ackroyd 172). But the deeper matter is that Eliot was seeking to overcome his sense of lost perfection and he felt consolation might be found in the traditions of the Anglo-Catholic ceremony. His friends did not fully grasp the private nature of Eliot's faith and his struggle to balance revelation against improving society. Eliot's conversion was hardly a radical change in his views, but a way to express his radicalism. Ackroyd notes that "it is at least clear that Eliot's instincts and preoccupations had not changed, only the context in which he placed them. He remained a Calvinist or perhaps even a Gnostic in Anglican clothing" (169).

Millenarians do not have to function on the outskirts of society. Yeats was certainly a prominent public figure, although his occult beliefs were far afield from the mainstream of either Ireland or Britain. Eliot chose a distinctly different direction, attempting to use the most conservative, most traditional forms of religion to express his utopianism, despite

their waning influence on English life (Ackroyd 169-70). As he advocates for his faith in the early 1930s, he embarks upon a very different direction of millenarian expression, nearly forsaking poetry entirely for a more direct, prose-based argument.

Yeats's Byzantium

Like Eliot's, Yeats's millenarianism was sorely tested by World War I, but Yeats's apocalypticism was more established and rooted in decades of belief and expression. His poetic energies had been reinvigorated following the Easter Rising, but Yeats's hopes for the future would be complicated by Ireland's civil war and his new role as a senator. The growing catastrophic tone of Yeats's apocalypticism noted early in "The Second Coming" would be countered by a return to a more active and personal occult practice. In 1918, as part of his reassertion of his literary presence, Yeats published *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, a major example of his occult-aesthetic millenarianism.

As an elaboration of Yeats's occult-aesthetic theories, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* is more a meditation than a system of belief. In the essay, Yeats returns to many old themes, such as the illusory quality of human ethics—good and evil are called "crude allegories"—and his argument rests heavily on the difference between the external mask of the outer world and the hidden self of the inner world. He is still quite utopian throughout the essay, and the aesthetic vehicle of transcendence is still found in the image of being able to "eternally solace ourselves in the excellent beautiful flourishing of all manner of flowers and forms, both trees and plants, and all kinds of fruit" (11-12). His religiosity is most marked in his appeal to "not make a false faith" (23) and the core argument, which sees art

as striving against fate and the universe, struggling with a realism that “obscures the cleavage by the record of the eyes” (15). Old influences, such as William Morris, are praised as examples of transcendental writers (16) and Blavatsky, who had almost entirely faded from view, returns in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, although only as a measure of Yeats’s experience and accomplishment (66).³²

In the essay, Yeats remains ardently transcendentalist—“there are two realities, the terrestrial and the condition of fire”—and his ideas are beginning to approach the kind of elaboration that marks his later work *A Vision*:

All power is from the terrestrial condition, for there all opposites meet and there only is the extreme of choice possible, full freedom. And there the heterogeneous is, and evil, for evil is the strain one upon another of opposites; but in the condition of fire is all music and all rest. Between is the condition of air where images have but a borrowed life, that of memory or that reflected upon them when they symbolise colours and intensities of fire. (70)

The goal in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* is to move past the state of illusion—air—and balance the terrestrial and ethereal (fire) poles of life. Once this is achieved, an individual can awaken to a higher consciousness. Despite the decades that lie between him and his earliest writings, Yeats’s methodology has not changed much, if any. He relies upon

³² Yeats is at his most confident in regards to expressing his occult theory of the future, and in many respects his return to Morris and Blavatsky is made primarily to acknowledge his debts and to suggest that his thinking has now moved beyond them, just as Yeats’s wisdom and argument claims to eclipse other famous mystics like Swedenborg (69). Yeats is now more than comfortable in his arcane expertise and uses far less of his earlier strategy of deferred authority. It reveals a confidence that Yeats had lacked previously, as if he is no longer self-conscious about the public opinion of his occultism and is beginning to take measures to ensure his millenarianism is manifestly apparent in his work.

literary examples, albeit from a wider range of material—Japanese drama and Balzac, among others—but his essential rhetoric is unchanged. Art is the way we can break the shackles of our world, and it is only through a mixture of faith and art that the millennium is possible. The energy of *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* marks a refreshed vigour in Yeats's writing, which was acknowledged in the poetry of *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*. What Yeats now had were new avenues of power through which to bring about his millennium.

The steps Yeats was taking to make his occult future clear were cautious, but definite. While on a short lecture tour of the United States and Canada, Yeats's wife, George, whose automatic writing had always fascinated Yeats began to experience "sleeps." Yeats describes the process: "My wife, who had been asleep for some minutes, began to talk in her sleep, and from that on almost all communication came in that way" (Yeats, *A Vision* 9-10). These "sleeps," or periods of automatic writing, were to form the basis of Yeats's writing of *A Vision*, because he believed his masters communicated through George.³³

In 1920, Yeats completed the first part of *A Vision*, the epilogue poem "All Souls' Night" in which he invokes the names of Florence Farr and MacGregor Mathers, two of his closest occult colleagues. In the poem there is both reflection and affection for both:

On Florence Emery I call the next
 Who finding first the wrinkles on a face
 Admired and beautiful...

³³ There was a curious co-dependence between George and Yeats, and there is some evidence that George used the automatic writing experiments as a way of directing their marriage and soothing her much older husband's anxieties about sex and fatherhood.

...

And I call up MacGregor from the grave,
 For in my first hard spring-time we were friends,
 Although of late estranged. (41-3; 61-3)

Yeats's use of humour in his summoning of MacGregor Mathers, especially in the last clause of the sentence, shows wryness in his recollections. While his commitment to the occult had waned and waxed since he and Mathers fell out in the early 1900s, Yeats appears sentimental when he adds "friendship never ends" to his recollection (65). The poem serves as a memoir of sorts, an occult reverie upon the influence of the poets' past upon his present and reasserts his search for the same meaning that he sought with Farr and Mathers thirty years earlier. As a marker of Yeats's millenarianism, the poem stands as a prelude to a time when ideas of past and future would concretize for Yeats, enabling him to write *A Vision*.

While Yeats traveled and began working on *A Vision*, the political situation of Ireland only worsened and in late 1920, the British government had begun to recruit the military force that would become the feared Black and Tans. Yeats and his friends tried to use their positions in public discourse to decry the escalating violence, even writing to the former Prime Minister H. H. Asquith to arrange an interview. Asquith, whom Yeats had had cordial relations with when in office, did in fact visit the poet, who managed to make an impression upon him regarding Dominion status for Ireland.

In the months to come, Yeats would become more and more embroiled in Irish politics and the outbreak of the Irish Civil War in June of 1922 was an intense catalyst for

his writing. Much too old and too much of a pacifist to be of real import to the Republican movement, Yeats divided his time between meetings in Dublin and writing in his tower in Galway, Thoor Ballylee. Yeats would write a sequence of poems “Meditations in a Time of Civil War” that attempt to marshal some of his traditional millenarian imagery, in particular, the rose:

An ancient bridge, and a more ancient tower,
 A farmhouse that is sheltered by its wall,
 An acre of stony ground,
 Where the symbolic rose can break in flower. (“II. My House” 1-4)

But in the tumult of all this violence—World War I and the Irish Civil War—Yeats's millenarianism grew more tinged with catastrophic tones and more fixated upon an imminent and violent apocalypse. Yeats was attracted to the work of Mussolini, in part because of the millenarian, utopian future Italian Fascism used as rhetoric—the past come back to the present to create a new Roman Empire, a new age of prosperity.

In 1924, Yeats visited Italy for three months and was moved by what he believed to be the solution to the violence that Ireland was experiencing (Coote 484-5). Stephen Coote notes that

To Yeats as a man who believed he had seen the collapse of civilization into a witches's sabbath of barbarism and crude violence, and who was, besides, a poet convinced by his own occult philosophy that the primary and democratic gyre was bringing about the destruction from which would arise something altogether more

elite and magnificent, Mussolini produced a focus of hope and a proof that the Second Coming was indeed at hand. (463)

Yeats's flirtation with far-right politics meshed well with his idealization of the aristocrat and the simple reality that he was a conservative in politics by default. This is a strange image, the millenarian conservative, and it is one that Eliot will come to represent as well. He was nominated to the Irish senate in 1922 and he was able to enter into public office and take up real political work for the first time in his career.

Yeats was committed to his new role in politics and believed that the intrigue of the Senate would allow him "to get some old projects into action" (qtd. in Coote 464). These old projects were the millenarian ideals that defined his cultural nationalism and his belief in a utopian future, a goal he was increasingly referring to as a Unity of Being and a Unity of Culture. For Yeats, the nation-building of Ireland was a model for a better world, a way for his millenarianism to take root and then spread, just as his poetry would enlighten the reader through a profound experience of the aesthetic sublime that announced a better world.

Yeats's conviction that the violence of the world was building towards an apocalyptic threshold motivated his writing of *A Vision* and the poetry of the 1920s, perhaps even more dramatically than ever before. There is far more violence in his work now, as "Leda and the Swan" demonstrates:

A sudden blow: the great winds beating still
 Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
 By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,

He holds her helpless breast upon his breast. (1-4)

The poem is a far cry from the kind of sudden realization of "The Secret Rose" or even the trumpets of "The Happy Townland." The story of Leda suggests violence in the heart of history and structures events so that an age can be brought to an end:

A shudder in the loins engenders there

The broken wall, the burning roof and tower

And Agamemnon dead. (9-11)

Yeats is beginning to conceive history as a process of violence and uses Leda's rape, the birth of Helen of Sparta, the resulting Trojan War and the betrayal of Agamemnon to emphasize the violent process of history. The violence is tinged with a sense of catastrophe and Yeats would attempt to overcome the nihilism growing in his work by creating a figure of a new golden age for his work: Byzantium.

While *The Celtic Twilight* had served as an effective mythology for his early millenarianism, when Yeats was confronted with the reality of Ireland's political situation he moves away from Irish lineages to a more removed golden age. The movement towards Byzantium was due to the fact that Yeats's understanding of politics was naive and he had little experience and ability as a senator. By 1926, his political reputation was in shambles: he was thought of as reactionary, elitists, and eccentric. No one could doubt his abilities with words and oratory, but he became increasingly histrionic, such as in his defence of the Protestant minority:

We against whom you have done this thing are no petty people. We are one of the great stocks of Europe. We are the people of Burke; we are the people of Grattan;

we have are the people of Swift, the people of Emmet, the people of Parnell. We have created the most of the modern literature of this country. We have created the best of its political intelligence. (qtd. in Jeffares, 222)

The reality is that parliamentary politics is a field better suited to lawyers than poets and Yeats was increasingly marginalized by his fellow senators (Coote 490). In 1929, Yeats resigned from the senate, disgusted with the world of politics and with his millenarian hopes for Ireland as a nation unfulfilled.

But the failure of political action did not silence Yeats's millenarian urge, it only redirected it. The revisions to *A Vision* were still well underway, with George's automatic speech leading the way and more than any other metaphor or symbol, Byzantium is the most important millenarian motif of the Yeats's later period. Byzantium appears in *A Vision* as a model of "Unity of Culture," a term Yeats uses to indicate the completeness of mind and body that exists in ideal societies:

I think that in early Byzantium, and maybe never before or since in recorded history, religious, aesthetic and practical life were one, that architect and artificers—though not, it may be poets, for language had been the instrument of controversy and must have grown abstract—spoke to the multitude and the few alike. The painter and the mosaic worker, the worker in gold and silver, the illuminator of Sacred Books, were almost impersonal, almost perhaps without the consciousness of individual design, absorbed in their subject-matter and that the vision of a whole people. (279-80)

In Yeats's Byzantium there is no dissociation of sensibility and this allows it to serve as an organic community for his later millenarianism. This idealized unity creates a coherent culture in which a poet can work and is similar to Eliot's arguments regarding Dante as the great poet of the vernacular. Both Yeats and Eliot, due to their millenarianism, attempt to find a kind of orthodox organic community to legitimate their authority. For Eliot this orthodoxy became traditional English culture, whereas for Yeats, it is a self-made golden age of aesthetic harmony.

In this fashion Yeats returned to theosophical ideas of a hidden past that can only be revealed by the mystic. He is able to overcome the growing nihilism brought on by the political reality of Ireland by recreating a golden age and returning to a more private poetic and religious life. This is not to say Yeats retreats from Irish public life: despite failing health, he would once again find himself defending the theatre, in this case publishing in the *Irish Times* against those who had protested against Sean O'Casey's play *The Plough and the Stars* (Coote 494), but such moments were become fewer and further between.

The millenarian is often a great motivating figure, but they often find themselves underwhelmed by politics. Jon Krakauer, in his study of Mormonism, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, says of Brigham Young "diverted onto a different track—had his ambitions been less millennial and more secular—it is easy to imagine him in the White House" (232), but Young, like Yeats, would have been failed by the political system. For Yeats, politics were anathema to the real progress toward utopia. Post-millenarians, even more than pre-millenarians, are stifled by the grinding bureaucracy of the state. Yeats's poetry of this

period acquires such potency and power because it is a reassertion of his apocalyptic future. His completion of his *Vision* would enable him to overcome the growing catastrophic nature of his apocalypse and return to themes of hope and celebration.

In every respect, Yeats's commitment to his beliefs is extraordinary and would be reinforced in the 1930s, when his interest in radical change was further excited by the struggle between Communism and Fascism. In the years to come, his millenarianism would be reaffirmed, no matter how much his experience as senator might have shaken it. Part of his appeal to the image of Byzantium was its harmonization of east and west, a binding of two continents into a unified whole. The appeal to craftsmanship unifies aesthetics and labour in an identical fashion to how Yeats had always sought to unify art and the occult. Through the image, Yeats is able to rekindle the ashes of hope that the prior decade almost smothered.

Eliot also uses the 1920s as a way to overcome a catastrophic future and is able to use poetry and faith as a bulwark against the decline of civilization. While his millenarianism is different from Yeats, both poets would still exert considerable sway over the coming decade; at the same time though, new writers would become fashionable and their ideas of the future would take hold in new ways. In particular, W. H. Auden was to become a figurehead of the British experience of the 1930s, just as new political expressions of millenarianism—Fascism and Communism—would become the dominate spectrum of social concerns.

CHAPTER FOUR: UTOPIAN IDEOLOGIES, 1931-1937

*Here in death's dream kingdom
The golden vision reappears
I see the eyes but not the tears
This is my affliction
—Eliot "Eyes that Last I Saw in Tears" (3-7)*

If the 1920s offered some sense of renewal following World War I, the 1930s quickly countered it. The 1929 stock market crash led to the Depression, and Europe faced the growing shadow of war throughout the decade. Many writers greeted the remilitarization of Europe with anxiety and fear. J. B. Priestley's 1937 play *Time and the Conways*, for example, uses the coming war as a hinge upon which to examine the repercussions of individual choice and action. Eugen Weber describes the period between 1914 and 1945 as a "Thirty Years War" and there is considerable value in thinking about the period in such a fashion (237). The events that culminated in World War II have their origin in the First World War, but it is also important to note that the millenarian movements of Fascism and Communism make the nature of World War II decidedly different in tone. World War I was a war fought by imperial powers to decide who should control the continuity of the present; World War II was fought to decide who would control the future.

Elton Edward Smith, in his book *The Angry Young Men of the Thirties*, suggests that the 1930s are an era best compared with two other moments in European and British history: the periods of the French Revolution and the post-war challenge to class of 1950s theatre (Smith's title is a direct nod to the Angry Young Men movement in British Theatre of the mid-to-late 1950s). Smith links the French Revolution's rhetoric of Reason and conception of a utopian future (134-5) to the Angry Young Men of the 1950s, in particular their rejection of upper-class hypocrisy and Labour party promises (148). What needs to be stressed in this comparison is that these historical moments—the 1790s, the 1930s, and the 1950s—produced art with a commitment towards equality. The emphasis on social reform leads, in Smith's words, to a "shift from the ideal to the actual" (139), but such an assertion seems countered by the fact that so many of the poets of the 1930s became more and more interested in utopian ideas and new political models.

Whatever shift towards reality found in 1930s verse is more a movement from the internal to the external world; idealism never really vanishes from the picture and the notion of an *imminent* utopia is strongest in this decade. Smith does acknowledge Cecil Day-Lewis's "Utopian vision of world peace and brotherhood" (a idealism which is matched by Auden), and in *The Auden Generation*, Samuel Hynes argues that Auden and his colleagues are best understood not as ironic or emotional, but serious, intellectual responses to the crises of the decade: "a kind of writing that would be affective, immediate and concerned with ideas, moral not aesthetic in its central intention, organized by that intention rather than its correspondence to the observed world" (12-13). The poets of the

1930s suggest alternatives to a real crisis, and the actuality of their desires is expressed in their engagement with utopian ideals.

For the poets of this study, the 1930s represents a growing focus for their utopianism. Yeats would throw off the catastrophic sentiment of “The Second Coming” and embrace his post-millennial idea of history in his book *A Vision*. Eliot turns away from a poetics of faith and revelation to a prose which allowed him to directly attack what he perceived to be the irreligious malaise of modernity. Auden enters the period as a “poet for the times,” but his attempts to engage in a pre-millenarian socialism leaves him unfulfilled.

Yeats’s Vision

The final decade of Yeats’s life was dominated by a final attempt to express his millenarian ideas. If there had been any doubt of his poetic powers, *The Tower* (1928) put them to rest and he was recognized in *The Criterion* as “what we moderns mean by a great poet” (Fletcher 132). Although he was reduced to writing in bed, Yeats managed to maintain a strong poetic output throughout the 1930s, publishing *The Winding Stair* in 1933 and *New Poems* in 1938. Despite his waning health, he was broadly optimistic about his work and his future during these years and resumed active work in Irish public life.

His admiration for Mussolini was still strong and, for a short period, Yeats became enamoured with the Irish Blueshirt Fascists. He composed a few short songs for them, but quickly found the gap between his ideas of the future and those of the Blueshirts too great to overcome. During one meeting, he tried to explain the millenarian future of *A Vision* to

the Fascists, but the lecture fell flat and Yeats left disillusioned. His dissatisfaction was because his ideas of Fascism were vague and he was uninterested in action. Instead, Yeats wanted intellectual debate and to “prepare...by study to act without hesitation should the crisis arise” (qtd. in Coote 533). After the violence of the 1916 Rising, Yeats’s hesitation might be seen as a kind of millenarian stalling tactic. Like many millenarians, Yeats hoped that the moment of transcendence was imminent. After the first few opportunities of revelation pass with no transformation, millenarians are left with little to do but either to abandon their beliefs, enter a period of disconfirmation, or hinge their faith on a new interpretation of the date. Yeats was somewhat remarkable, though hardly alone, in his ability to remain ready for the moment when the new age would begin despite the fact that his hopes were repeatedly dashed.

Yeats did not live to see the final fate of the contemporary Fascist movement, and it is difficult and perhaps ahistorical to surmise what he might have thought of World War II. Certainly Yeats’s short involvement with the Blueshirts indicates he was searching for a new outlet for his millenarianism, but he was also unwilling to risk real political involvement. For example (and rather distastefully), Yeats refused to help the imprisoned German writer Carl von Ossietzky secure a Nobel Peace prize. Yeats’s friend, Ethel Mannin, recalled him explaining to the German poet Ernest Toller that ““He never meddled in political matters...he never had...He was a poet, and Irish, and had no interest in European political squabbles. His interest was Ireland, and Ireland had nothing to do

with Europe politically; it was outside, apart. He was sorry, but this had always been his attitude''' (Mannin 273).³⁴

Yeats was essentially apolitical, but not asocial. Although it might seem rhetorically useful to insist that an apolitical stance amounts to a political position nonetheless, such an argument marginalizes millenarian ideas in favour of a more conventional or acceptable term. While such rhetoric can radicalize a discourse, such maneuvers also effectively marginalizing other perspectives, and, in fact, limit discussions of radical reformations of society. It is important when considering the millenarian to ensure that politics remains external to the utopianism of the believer, just as it is inevitable that the millenarian sees government as the barrier to be overcome or subverted.

Along with his rejection of politics, part of Yeats's process for remaining stalwartly millenarian was to denigrate empiricism. The philosopher Bertrand Russell was a major foil for Yeats's beliefs during this period due to Russell's commitment to rationalism and science. Yeats took great care in his occult and aesthetic systems and at least once lamented his inability to devise systems in a way that empiricists might be able to grasp— "I know Bertrand Russell must, seeing that he is such a feather-head, be wrong about everything but as I have no mathematics I cannot prove it" (qtd. in Coote 521). When

³⁴ Yeats would later try to explain to Mannin that he simply could not become involved politically:

'I am not callous', he wrote, 'every nerve trembles with horror at what is happening in Europe....Do not try to make a politician of me...even in Ireland I shall never I think be that again—as my sense of reality deepens, and I think it does with age, my horror at the cruelty of governments grows greater, and if I did what you want, I would seem to hold one form of government more responsible than any other, and that would betray my convictions. Communist, Fascist, nationalist, clerical, anti-clerical, are all responsible according to the number of their victims.' (qtd. in Coote 544)

Russell categorically rejected the idea of “‘higher’ way[s] of knowing,” Yeats understood it to be a condemnation of the mystical and religious world that he believed in. One of Yeats’s responses to Russell’s empiricism can be found in a comment he made to Sturgeon Moore “I go back to Calderon. Not only things, but dreams themselves are a dream” (qtd. in Coote 516). Such rhetoric, of course, is a deployment of deferred authority and the golden past. Yeats’s commitment to his aesthetic-occult utopia resisted materialism and empiricism throughout his career and came to its fullest fruition in the final, revised draft of *A Vision* of 1937.

A Vision is not an easy work to read or to position in Yeats’s *oeuvre*. It is simultaneously a kind of astrology, a pathway to enlightenment, a model of history, and a mythopoetics for Yeats’s writing. Generally critics have responded to *A Vision* in one of four ways: first, to overlook it entirely; second, to make it the focus of understanding Yeats’s occultism; third, to use *A Vision* as a kind of skeleton key to systematize Yeats’s writing; and four, to choose to see *A Vision* as a kind of fiction and to analyze it as such. Such a wide range of reactions is due to the problem *A Vision* presents. Unlike Yeats’s shorter essays discussed earlier — “Magic” and *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* — *A Vision* is such a time-consuming task on Yeats’s part that it forces his beliefs directly into the main view of his career, forcing the book into a position which Northrop Frye described as “what *De Doctrina Christiana* is to the student of Milton: a nuisance that he can’t pretend doesn’t exist” (“The Rising of the Moon” 252-3).

How is one to interpret a book whose author claims that it was begun under the auspices of his wife’s writing and speech recorded while she was in a trance: Do we accept

Yeats's claim that there were "masters," who communicated a complete and true understanding of the cycles of life and the universe? If we accept this at face value, is it occult or religious? Quackery or fancy? Perhaps it is only a frame story used to set up a work of fantasy. How we answer these questions moves our understanding of Yeats in various directions. George Mills Harper and Katherine Raine have seen *A Vision* as a major example of Yeats's occultism, as do many studies that rely upon biographical approaches. Other scholars, like Helen Vendler in *Yeats's Vision and his Later Plays*, have overcome the strangeness of *A Vision* by making it an aesthetic tool to understand his plays and poems. Hazard Adams uses a different tact in his *The Book of Yeats's Vision*, arguing that "In all its eccentricity, Yeats's book...is not finally the expression of an occult doctrine. Nor is it simply the setting forth of a system designed to deliver Yeats's poems to a reader" (3-4). Instead, Adams argues that the book can be understood as a kind of fiction, the fourth possible response.

The variety of responses to *A Vision* points to the clash between the rational and the irrational. Such terminology immediately makes implicit value judgements, as rationality is often privileged in contemporary thought, and this problem places us squarely within the debate over how it is we can understand and write about millenarians. Is it best to simply praise Yeats's poetry and overlook the core of *A Vision*, or do we accept the idea, as Yeats suggests, that we are reborn into a new stage of existence and can slowly approach enlightenment through twenty-eight stages of development? Such an idea might strain the credibility of the critic, although that is not the only possible response. It also forces a point of concern about the academic portrayal of millenarians: how we respond to Yeats's

Vision has as much to do with protecting our notions of the world and marginalizing discourses of the future which do not fit into our ideology. All of this commentary is somewhat premature—there has been no examination of Yeats’s work yet—but it is important to hold such ideas in mind when discussing *A Vision*.

Yeats uses many of the rhetorical strategies he learnt in the occult orders of the 1890s: The idea of “masters” is deployed in a manner nearly identical to Madame Blavatsky, and he uses a fictional story featuring Michael Robartes as a gateway into the text. This opening section, “Stories of Michael Robartes and his Friends: An extract from a record made by his pupils,” presents the discovery of ancient lore, which reveals the working of the world and features several recurring images that are more representative of Yeats’s later work, especially the gyre (40). The gyre is now the key image in the complex and diagrammatic system which Yeats uses to represent the parts of the human being—Will, Mask, Creative Mind, and Body of Fate—terms which indicate the possible influence of Hermetic Qabalah. He also continues the aesthetic part of his ideology, mingling discussions of Jonathan Swift and Greek Lyric poems with historical and literary figures like Harun Al-Rashid (50-1).³⁵

With so much in common with his earliest writing, it is easy to see how one might come to believe *A Vision* to be the sum of Yeats’s poetic ideas. But too much of *A Vision* appears to be built upon new reading, and it is more likely that any attempt to align Yeats’s oeuvre with *A Vision* reflects a deductive urge to make the verse conform to the later idea, rather than an inductive argument in which *A Vision* is a late attempt to express

³⁵ Harun Al-Rashid (c.766-809 AD) was a caliph of Badhdad and is featured prominently in *The Thousand and One Nights*.

a recurring and elemental theme in the poet's work. The reality is that the occult-aesthetic of Yeats's verse and faith are motifs through which he is able to express his millenarianism and counter the nihilism he encounters in modernity.

Yeats was not a diligent researcher and was more inclined to let his interests casually steer his work. This presents both an admission of misunderstanding and a dogmatism on Yeats's part, such as when he writes "I had never read Hegel, but my mind had been full of Blake from boyhood up and I saw the world as a conflict" (72). He makes another return to Blake because of his desire to again align himself with prophetic poetry and the idea of transcendentalism as reality. Throughout *A Vision*, Yeats uses literature as his primary form of rhetoric, even in his assignment of individual authors to the "twenty-eight incarnations" through which we can be reborn. This methodology establishes *A Vision's* continuity with Yeats's earlier millenarianism and demonstrates how this facet of his thought defined his expression throughout his life and career.

While the bulk of *A Vision* is spent upon the twenty-eight incarnations and justifying their relationship to an individual's development, Yeats does address social transformation as well. For this discussion, the most important sections are the closing sections, parts IV and V, "The Great Year of the Ancients" and "Dove or Swan." The central idea of time in the work is a cycle of eras that total a 26,000 years. These eras are not necessarily consistent in terms of time, ranging from 1000 years to 4000 years in length, but they are intended to provide a map of time, which can be used to predict some of the coming phases. He uses a number of terms to express the state of the individual and of civilization, the most important of which are *primary* and *antithetical*; both terms are

usually italicized and are variations upon the dialectic of Hegel, but also have similarities with Vico's poetic logic and Locke's "primary qualities of experience [in terms of] object/subject" (Adams 169-71). East and West are situated as poles in civilization that become *primary* and *antithetical* in opposition with one another (*A Vision* 256-7). Such a structure can be mapped out against the cones of the gyres to present a model of history, the phases and eschatology of which create a complex diagrammatic sense of historical order (see fig. 1).

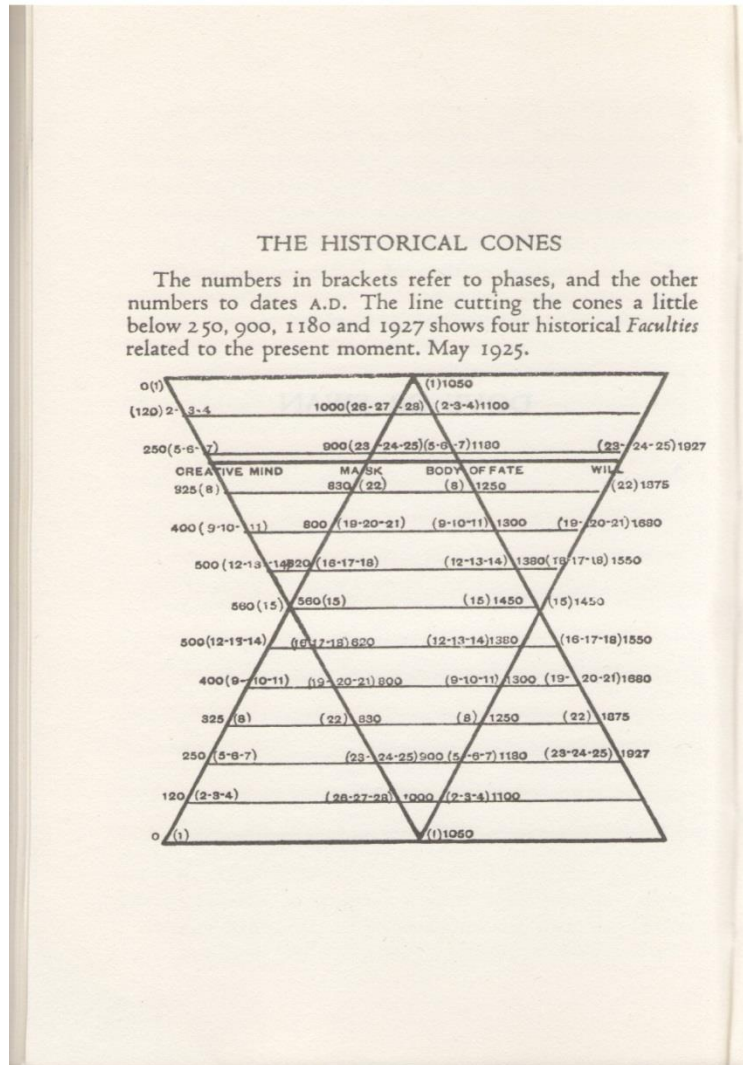


Fig. 1: The Historical Cones of Yeats's *A Vision*

Yeats makes an attempt to link his work with other contemporary analyses of history, especially Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West*, which Yeats claimed held "a correspondence too great for coincidence" (261). It is likely the way Spengler presents mathematics as metaphor to explore the development and decline of civilization that attracted Yeats's imagination; the use of metaphor as system would have mirrored Yeats's own desires for a more figurative historiography. The idea of decline is important to Yeats because he prefigures the end of the Christian period to be during the twentieth century. Historical periods wax and wane through a cycle and Yeats's millenarianism sees the imminence of the coming of a new age as the key to personal and cultural unity. In Yeats's system, Christianity obscures the reality of reincarnation and externalizes the concept of god (273-4). One important element of his argument is the cyclical nature of the apocalypse, and *A Vision* works towards fulfilling a utopian destiny, akin to Hegel's model of history. While not typically apocalyptic in a linear sense, Yeats's millenarianism has clear endpoints which rely upon revelation and utopia, so the unorthodox variance in his occultism is not enough to dismiss Yeats as a millenarian.

The earlier version of *A Vision* is an almost entirely different text, so much so that most critics choose to overlook it in favour of the 1937 version. Despite its idiosyncrasies and the fact that Yeats almost immediately began to replace the first work, one important reason for Yeats's re-contextualization of his earlier *Vision* is his prediction that 1927 would see the rise of a new period of history. In the 1925 text, Yeats predicts that the transition to the 11th gyre "will be concrete in expression, establish itself by immediate experience, seek no general agreement, make little of God or any exterior unity, and it will

call that good which a man can contemplate himself as doing always and no other doing at all" (177). The "concrete" transition of 1927 would be the arrival of Yeats's millenarian utopia. This new reality would overturn the influence of Christianity and allow us to find the divine in all humanity. Yeats claims that some have already turned away from Christianity in the current gyre, a rhetorical move that clearly attempts to reaffirm his interest in the occult while incorporating secularism to his side. Of course, the date of 1927 came to pass with little sign of "the new era" (176) and so Yeats entered a period of disconfirmation.

Yeats's response to disconfirmation was to remove the prediction from the 1937 *A Vision*, although close attention to the diagrams and discussion suggests that 1927 is still a crucial date. For example, the historical cones seen in Figure 1 still mark the end of the cycle in 1927. He also includes a brief addendum to the chapters on history, "The End of the Cycle," in which he reflects upon the idea of prophecy and the passing of his years as a millenarian, but there are no actual prophetic statements:

But nothing comes—though this moment was to reward me for all my toil. Perhaps I am too old. Surely something would have come when I meditated under the direction of the Cabalists. What discords will drive Europe to that artificial unity—only dry or drying sticks can be tied into a bundle—which is the decadence of every civilization?...I have already said all that can be said. The particulars are the work of the *Thirteenth Cone* or cycle which is in every man and called by every man his freedom. Doubtless, for it can do all things and knows all things, it knows what it will do with its own freedom but has kept the secret. (301-2)

Such a meditation on disconfirmation is both saddening in its dashed hopes and perplexing in its apparent admission that the system Yeats outlines simply does not work. Adams has suggested that it is necessary for *A Vision* to end with a question, in the same fashion that "The Second Coming" ends with a question: the future remains unknown, even as the "curve of history implies a new antithetical age" (148). Harold Bloom comments upon this passage, claiming its discussion of symbol and human freedom are "the greatest and most humanistic of his insights, more definitively expressed for being an open question" (291). *A Vision* stands in a strange relationship to Yeats's work, at once the dominant expression of Yeats's mythopoetics, but also an obscure, unnecessary work. In contrast with Eliot and Auden, whose utopias are much more conventional and more firmly rooted in the mainstream history and religion of western civilization, the idea of historical cones working antithetically to create millennium is strange and possibly eccentric. But, and it cannot be understated, *A Vision* does provide a rare opportunity to consider how a non-Christian millenarian and poet chose to express the future. It should not be discounted as a way to understand Yeats's poetry and his desire for a better world. Eliot, however, would not maintain a focus on poetry in the 1930s, but would take up the essay as the primary vehicle for utopia.

Eliot and the Heresy of Heterodoxy

Despite the negative reaction of many of his friends to his new conservative Christian image, Eliot still maintained considerable authority and power in literary circles, especially through his journal *The Criterion*. His role as an editor at Faber permitted him to

further the publishing careers of a number of poets, in particular Auden. Despite this authority, Eliot lacked the coterie atmosphere that Yeats or Virginia Woolf enjoyed (Ackroyd 183). His post-conversion life had given him access to a new Church community, although he was uncomfortable with some of the attention paid to him by bishops and lords, which he feared was due to his literary reputation rather than his religious faith (180-1).

Eliot's millenarianism made him unappreciative of any faith that seemed to come too easily. Strongly committed to the idea of Hell, his puritanical streak became more apparent in his prose of the early 1930s. While he was always an active member of his local church, serving as Warden from 1934-1959, some Christians disliked Eliot's professed faith; the American critic and Christian apologist Paul Elmer Moore called Eliot's god "an abortion sprung out of the unholy coupling of the Aristotelian Absolute and the Phoenician Moloch" (qtd. in Ackroyd 182). That is to say, not a Christian god at all. Eliot's own writings in this period become increasingly Manichean, slowly changing from an internal struggle of against sin and faithlessness to an external struggle against society's moral decay.

Eliot's essay *Thoughts on Lambeth*, published in 1931, is the earliest indication of his shift from the individual to the social, as well as the most openly millenarian work of his career. While Eliot would later couch his utopian ideas in careful terms, he is direct and spontaneous in *Thoughts on Lambeth*, seizing immediately upon a theme of social decay: children are in moral decline and exposed to little more than "popular drivel" and

“journalistic hyperbole,” a state which renders them intellectually stunted and unfit for “the real conflict” of the moment (7-9).

The conflict Eliot perceives is “not between one set of moral prejudices and another, but between the theistic and the atheistic faith; and it is all for the best that the division should be sharply drawn” (9). His argument refuses to accept any claims about moral education that are not rooted in faith (10) and he is hostile to English atheists even while insisting upon a rigorous religiosity: “There is no good in making Christianity easy and pleasant” (16). This opening attack upon liberal society and atheism expresses the Manichean world-view common to millenarians. Eliot’s argument divides his readers into two categories: the faithful and the anathema. There must be order in the ranks, not just “phantom unity” (22-3), and the remainder of the essay argues for an intensification of Anglican identity in English society. England, he argues, is defined by a unity of church and state, and that this is reflected in the “right balance between individual liberty and discipline...between individual responsibility and obedience” (19).

Eliot clearly feels the Church of England is threatened and he appeals to Christians of all denominations to join together to resist the growth of secular society. In order to achieve this resistance, he argues that “what matters is not so much uniformity of liturgy as fixity of dogma” and such dogma will be useful to Christians in the coming conflict with secularists. Eliot ends the essay with his most clearly millenarian argument, one that will define the rest of his career:

This advance is of no small importance in a world which will obviously divide itself more and more sharply into Christians and non-Christians. The Universal

Church is to-day, it seems to me, more definitely set against the World than at any time since pagan Rome. I do not mean that our times are particularly corrupt; all times are corrupt. I mean that Christianity, in spite of certain local appearances, is not, cannot be within measurable time, 'official'. The World is trying the experiment of attempting to form a civilized but non-Christian mentality. The experiment will fail; but we must be very patient in awaiting its collapse; meanwhile redeeming the time: so that the Faith may be preserved alive through the dark ages before us; to renew and rebuild civilization, and save the World from suicide. (32)

Here Eliot announces an imminent millennium and revelation. There is nuance in his rhetoric—all of Eliot's millenarian prose is careful not to fall into histrionics as it might have if he had not carefully insisted that "all times are corrupt"—but there are clear indications of the direction his work will take: the notion of "redeeming time" so important to *Ash Wednesday* and later, *Four Quartets* (Kramer 113-4) and the idea of building a civilization in Christianity's image. Perhaps what is most striking in the passage above is that it verges on a post-millenarian annunciation of apocalypse and salvation. In the prose works which follow, Eliot moves away from this rhetoric, embracing a pre-millenarian emphasis upon building a society worthy of Christ.

Eliot's position in the early 1930s is a rather oxymoronic one. On the one hand he is accepted by a new Christian community and his millenarianism finds new outlets, but his sense of personal exhaustion and alienation seems to deepen. There is an inverse relationship between his power and his happiness: Eliot may have been more enfranchised

in society at this point, but he still felt a sense of powerlessness. This unease reflects the kind of dissatisfaction millenarians can experience in a partial compromise with the society around them. Eliot's Anglo-Catholicism is, in effect, an attempt to accommodate his millenarianism with an accepted social institution.

His search for faith had provided the energy for his earlier poems, and having given himself over to Christianity, Eliot's verse loses some of its verve; perhaps poetry is better served by prophetic goals. The potency of Blake, Shelley, and Yeats resides in the intensity of their longing for transcendence. When Eliot adopts the position of pre-millenarianism activist, he finds prose and drama more effective vehicles to explore his idea of the future, in large part because of their orientation to the social realm. It would take Eliot nearly a decade to integrate his emotional and intellectual longings for utopia into a form of poetry serviceable to him, but before then, the 1930s would see further prose attempts by Eliot, and the rise of other millenarian poets, most importantly W. H. Auden.

Auden in England

Nineteen years Eliot's junior and forty-two years younger than Yeats, Auden was a child of the industrial twentieth century. Fascinated by cars and the increasing pace of modernity, he was encouraged to appreciate machinery and science through a rather remarkable family tradition of visiting factories and other working places just as often as the family might have gone on a walk or visited a museum. This practice left a deep sympathy for the sound and shapes of modern industry in the poet's mind, although the young Auden was not much interested in the practicalities of engineering (Carpenter 12-

13), and his relationship with technology proved more sonorous than pragmatic. He loved words and symbols and this side of his nature is expressed through his desire for technical brilliance, a quality which allowed Auden to range widely in poetic technique and critical subject.

As a child, Auden attended church regularly. His family was Church of England and for a time Auden served as assistant in the ceremonies, which he recalled primarily as aesthetic experiences: "My first religious memories are of exciting magical rites...rather than of listening to sermons" (Auden, "contribution to *Modern Canterbury Pilgrims*" 33). His attraction to ritual was not unlike that of Yeats, and likewise the allure of mythology did contain universal value for Auden: the stories of the Greek and Norse gods and heroes shaped his imagination alongside the science and mechanism he experienced as a child. Ultimately though, Auden was much more traditional in his religion and his poetry.

His early poetic exposure was limited and reflected his father's eclectic library and his exposure to reading poetry aloud (Auden, like Yeats, always thought of poetry as an aural practice). As a boy, he read widely in non-fiction including his father's medical texts and a variety of home economics works. His literary interests were more typical and reflected his interest in fantasy: Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, and Beatrix Potter ranked alongside Hans Anderson, George MacDonald, Jules Verne, Rider Haggard, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Carpenter 9). His early poetry attempted traditional nature imagery, the kind that both Yeats and Eliot use effectively, but Auden quickly moved in new urban directions. He claimed this was motivated by his bad eye-sight—he was rather near-sighted and so his surroundings were blurry because he refused to wear glasses.

Even with such an excuse, there is a sense in his early verse that Auden poetry is a poetry of post-industrial manufacturing and the new century.

Auden was limited in his reading of poetry, in part by his young age and in part from the nature of his parents' library. Looking back upon his early development, Auden considered it a major factor in his growth into a writer: "The dangers of too early a sophistication and contact with 'modern' writers are so great and I have seen sterility result too often to not be sceptical about the value of any academic courses in the contemporary arts. I was fortunate indeed in finding the only poet who wrote of my world" ("A Literary Transference" 45). By "[t]he only poet who wrote of my world," Auden meant Thomas Hardy, whom he discovered in Walter de la Mare's 1923 anthology *Come Hither* (Carpenter 34-5). Auden would mirror Hardy's style for a short while, but by the time he left for university his poetic voice was becoming more contemporary and modern (Carpenter 38).

Auden was bright, with the aptitude to win scholarships and the precociousness to lecture his friends on sexual anatomy. In 1920 he entered Gresham's School in Norfolk.³⁶ Gresham's had a strongly moralized code of behaviour at the time, which Auden later described as a life of fear: "fear of community, not to mention the temptation it offered to

³⁶ Auden also experienced his first sexual desires at Gresham's and was beginning to awaken to his homosexuality. While public schools were often the place of homosexual play and experimentation, Auden's feelings were both more permanent and possibly scarred by the oppressive sexual suppression Gresham's Honor System was designed to effect (Carpenter 27). Auden's first real romantic attraction was unrequited, but the subject of it, Robert Medley, is an interesting figure in Auden's development. Medley and Auden would have a long friendship (Auden's romantic feeling would subside) and they would often debate aesthetics with each other. Medley was essentially a Yeatsian without the occult, which is "a mixture of William Morris socialism and Blake-Shelley romanticism" (Carpenter 28). Auden, perhaps in contrast to Medley and other friends' positions or because of his own interests, would adopt the position of a classicist, attempting to reject the Romantics in favour of Renaissance ideas of the Greco-Roman world. Essentially, he was a traditionalist like Eliot.

the natural informer, and fear is not a healthy basis. It makes one furtive and dishonest and unadventurous. The best reason I have for opposing Fascism is that at school I lived in a Fascist state" ("Honor [Gresham's School, Holt]" 17). The experience of repression during his school years led Auden to psychoanalysis as an intellectual movement and separated him from his religious convictions. Like Eliot, Auden began to doubt his religious upbringing, although he remained attracted to models of history and millenarian ideas of the future. He found the services at Gresham devoid of spirit and energy; the authors Auden read—truly read—were not Christians and the widening of his intellectual community made him disapproving of faith. Nevertheless, he continued to attend church for some time afterwards and became more a deist than Christian (Carpenter 27).

After the moralized and suspicious world of Gresham's, Auden found Oxford an accepting and exciting place. He particularly disliked the way English literature was taught, with an exception made for J. R. R. Tolkien's courses in Old English. Tolkien made a deep impression on him, not in terms of his lectures (Tolkien was a notoriously hard-to-follow lecturer), but in terms of Tolkien's readings of the poems. Tolkien's oratory ability to convey the meter of Anglo-Saxon poetry inspired the young Auden in the way it brought life and force to a lost verse. This was hardly a modern voice, and like the Icelandic Sagas, it represented a pre-Modern literature to use as an imaginary foil to modernity. During his final years at Oxford, Auden became part of an elite poetic circle composed of Cecil Day-Lewis, Stephen Spender, and Louis MacNeice, and Auden was a significant influence on his peers, enough so that it caused concern on the part of the college's tutors (Carpenter 74).

In 1926, Auden first read *The Waste Land* and was seized by Eliot's poetry. He claimed to have torn up all his poetry in response to what he felt was the truer expression of Eliot's verse: "Whatever its character the provincial England of 1907, when I was born, was Tennysonian in outlook; whatever its outlook the England on 1925 when I went up to Oxford was *The Waste Land* in character" (Auden "A Literary Transference" 46). Auden's childhood friend and collaborator Christopher Isherwood described his change in style as servitude: "Eliot was now the master" (qtd. in Carpenter 57). Auden is a prime example of how influential Eliot was among young writers at the time. He deliberately cultivated impersonality and reservation, mimicking Eliot's public image. Auden's poetry essentially became a parody of Eliot's own style and it is good fortune that Auden quickly overcame his servitude after only a few months. Auden's enthusiasm for Eliot reflected his own personal tendency towards the exuberant embrace of an idea followed by a cautious retreat and reconsideration of his initial excitement (Carpenter 66-7). After he emerged from his awakening to Modern verse, Auden began to publish stronger, more independent verse and, as A. C. Partridge has noted, while Auden's verse varies in quality it was wide in subject matter and style (260-1).

Auden's career as a poet was slow to start, given how prominent he would become. In 1930, Eliot published Auden's first collection through Faber, but only a few reviewers found evidence of quality in the volume. Michael Roberts of the *Adelphi* who noted a technique enhanced by a "self-confidence [which gave] a welcome vigour to his work" (109). Auden's friends Louise MacNiece and Naomi Mitchinson both gave the book glowing reviews, but reviewers in the *TLS* and *The Listener* found the work inscrutable, a

fact that troubled Auden. Even Mitchinson, a close friend, admitted to finding his verse “wantonly obscure sometimes” (qtd. in Carpenter 117), and Auden feared such a label was fair judgement. If Auden’s reception as a poet was lukewarm, it did little to slow his writing or his engagement with literary culture. He began reviewing for *The Criterion* in April of 1930 and would also review for *Echanges*, *The Nation* and F. R. Leavis’ *Scrutiny*. The reviews reflect the breadth of his interests and range from psychology, poetry, biographies, and the Eddas and Sagas.

A growing concern for the future can be found in a number of his essays and reviews, in particular when he focuses upon education. In a review of three education studies titled “Private Pleasure,” he laments “like everything else in our civilization, the [school] system we have made has become too much for us; we can’t stop the boat...The snail is obeying its shell” (25). The idea of a snail obeying its shell is a compelling metaphor for Auden’s thinking at the time. Society is bound by its policies and made moribund by the power dynamics at play; the future is a continual mediocrity. Even the most liberal of citizens behaves in relationships of power because, according to Auden, “He hasn’t any. He can only bully the spirit [of others]. And so unconsciously the liberal becomes the secret service of the ruling class, its most powerful weapon against social revolution” (26). Auden is quite acerbic about the intellectual left which he was usually grouped with and these concerns may be why, in part, he refrained from fully embracing Communism or socialism.

In *The Nation*, Auden reviewed Bertrand Russell’s book *Education and the Social Order*, which gave him an opportunity to express his grim projections of the future:

The failure of modern education lies not in its attention to individual needs, nor to methods, nor even to the moral ideals it preaches, but in the fact that nobody genuinely believes in our society, for which the children are being trained. All books—and this is one of them—which help to make people conscious of this lack of belief are valuable and should be read. (28)

Even though Auden condemns Russell's intellectual elitism and rationalism, he still finds virtue in the sense of collapse to which the book gives voice. At heart, Auden sympathized with the idea of an impending crisis as a process to achieving a utopian world.

It is generally thought that Auden rejected Christianity during the 1930s. There is a serious desire on the part of some scholars to see Auden as weakly religious. An example of such a position is Paul Dean's review of Arthur Kirsch's book *Auden and Christianity*. Dean's review is largely negative, and he argues that Auden was much more interested in the ritual of the church and did not really believe in Christianity. While it is certainly true that Auden held idiosyncratic views on religion, David Yezzi suggests the scholarly suspicion of Auden's religiosity is best summarized by Charles Osborne's comment that "Auden's 'hiatus of unbelief' was to last a good eighteen years and whether he ever came back to the intense belief in Christianity of his childhood years may well be doubted" (qtd. in Yezzi). It is difficult, however, to consider Auden as opposed to Christianity or even unbelieving in the 1930s when presented with essays like "The Good Life."

Published in 1935 as part of the collection *Christianity and the Social Revolution*, Auden's essay is both a summation of his early beliefs and clear evidence of his millenarianism. Essentially, Auden uses the opportunity to explore possible connections

between Christianity and Communism. In response to what he calls “the Christian Dilemma,” Auden suggests that Christianity must return to the vigorous faith of the early Christians, with its emphasis on apocalypse and apolitical action (49-50). This is similar in tone, though not meaning, with Eliot’s call to order in *Thoughts on Lambeth*. Christianity, Auden argues, lost its radical faith when it became a state religion (40). Once a religion is sanctioned by authority, it loses its rebellious qualities—its apocalypticism—and becomes more concerned with protecting its interests. This is directly akin to Auden’s concerns that the liberal, educated class is the strongest protector of the status quo. To overcome the state’s control, Christianity would have to focus on apocalypse, a fact which Auden ties to his idea that religion and psychology work on the desires of humans, while politics and science work to shape our environment (31). Auden considers the former approaches to be more valuable than the later (31).

Even if, as Dean argues, Auden would later become sceptical about the virgin birth or possibly even the resurrection, he did not reject the idea of apocalypse and millennium. Even to the “early” Auden, the major tenets of faith are Agape, apolitical action, and millennium. He writes “the teaching of Jesus is fundamentally non-political” (33), anti-capitalist, and dependent on the Kingdom of God as “a moral, not a political, victory” (34). Edward Mendelson, Auden’s literary executor, argued in his review of Kirsch’s book that “Auden took seriously his membership in the Anglican Church and derived many of his moral and aesthetic ideas from Christian doctrines.” Kirsch’s own argument is focused more on the “American” Auden, but it is my hope that this discussion can be seen as being in tandem with Kirsch to show the consistent influence of Christianity in Auden’s thought.

Unlike Eliot, Auden's religion was less about community and more about the individual's commitment to a utopian future. This is likely why he abandons the kind of direct utopia-building arguments that Eliot would embrace in favour of a more divine, transcendental millennium akin to Yeats. At this early stage of his career, Auden is committed to the idea of millennium and utopia, even if he is not committed directly to a specific Church membership.

It is best to understand Auden as a social agnostic during these years, unwilling to commit himself fully to any doctrine at least in part due to social pressure. He was, at the time, attracted to the work of Gerald Heard, a popular science writer and broadcaster, who like Auden, was a non-scientist intrigued by science and someone who attempted to systemize "the chaos of human history, knowledge and belief" (Carpenter 135). In books like *The Ascent of Humanity* (1929) and *The Social Substance of Religion* (1931), Heard formed the notion that humanity had a divided nature, but the division was between a subconscious personality and an objective outer personality. The subconscious or internal being is the natural state of the person, while the objective being, the "economic man," was the result of modernity. For Heard, the increasing dominance of the outer human caused suppression of the natural human and would lead to neurosis and social upheaval.

It was during the peak of Auden's enthusiasm for Heard that *The Orators* was published. He made an attempt to append an apology for the text, but Eliot successfully argued against it. Auden's fears of obscurantism continued to echo in the press, although reviewers were quick to recognize the quality of the work: Graham Greene admitted that it represented "an astonishing advance on Mr. Auden's first book" even though he found

“the subject of the book...political, though it is hard to tell whether the author’s sympathies are Communist or Fascist” (qtd. in Carpenter 136). The implication of Greene’s review is twofold: first, it was expected that political writing would necessarily align itself with one party or another, and two, that Auden was not comfortable announcing himself for either. John Hayward (perhaps overstating the case) called the book “the most valuable contribution to English poetry since ‘The Waste Land’” and noted that “Mr Auden is profoundly dissatisfied with the state of civilization in this country” (113). Eliot, who had been Auden’s supporter and had arguably made his career as a poet possible, felt the book was a step forward, but, as he wrote to Herbert Read: “I chiefly worry about Auden’s ethical principles and convictions, not about his technical ability; or rather, I think that if a man’s ethical and religious views and convictions are feeble or limited and incapable of development, then his technical development is restricted” (qtd. in Carpenter 137).

The Auden of the 1930s, both the man and his verse, is readily held to be a figure of the British left. Several of Auden’s friends, including the novelist Edward Upward, had recently joined the Communist Party. The state of the world economy, along with dissatisfaction with the Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald, had produced a surge of Communism in England. To disaffected Western Europeans, it appeared the west had failed in its response to the utopian experiment of the Soviet Union. Auden wrote a handful of poems, including “A Communist to others” which begins with the opening word “Comrades” (later revised to “Brothers”) and his reviews begin to discuss “mass production, advertising, the divorce between mental and manual labour...all these are symptoms of an invalid society, and can only be finally cured by attending to the cause”

("A Review of *Culture and Environment*, by F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, and Other Books" 39). Auden's "cause" is a bit general and despite his growing call to action, he did not actually join the Communist Party (Carpenter 153).

Essentially Auden's flirtation with Communism was half-hearted. Like his attraction to Heard, Communism was exciting because it was a response to modernity, and not truly political creed, but a millenarianism. In his thorough analysis of Auden's poetry, Justin Replogle found that only six poems written between 1933 and 1938 showed signs of Marxism, forcing him to conclude that "most of Auden's works are not Marxist in any sense of the word" (595). Certainly Auden was influenced by Marx and Engels, but much in the way many intellectuals have been: we accept his critique of capitalism and we recognize reification, but we are not necessarily Marxist in any meaningful way. I would add that the utopian teleology of Marxism was likely a further attraction to Auden, as its millenarian resonance contributed to his longing for a better world. Auden was deeply sceptical, inaugurated by his interest in science and deepened by his reading of psychoanalysis. This scepticism is, in part, what makes him so intellectually demanding of his influences; eventually they were all found lacking in some way. At the start of 1933, Gerald Heard's influence had begun to wane and Auden abandoned an epic poem he had begun and did not write any verse for nearly three months. Ironically, it was in the midst of this artistic loss of voice that Auden suddenly found himself being made out to be the voice of his generation.

Auden wrote a poem lampooning the idea of the Auden Generation, poem XII "The month was April, the year." Using a visionary mode, the narrator falls "asleep in a

deck-chair” and dreams a highly comic nautical send up of the idea of Auden as the Captain of the ship. He is acerbic about academic readers—The Professor who appears as ship’s crew is not a flattering figure—and Auden takes the opportunity to also mock arguments for action that rely upon too simple a utopian plan:

‘I would remind you we are sailing

To the Islands of Milk and Honey

Where there’s neither death nor old age

And the poor have all the money.

The Wells are full of wine,

New bread grows on trees,

And roasted pigs run about

Crying “Eat me, if you please.” (129-136)

Auden’s comedy ends in violence, as the Captain declares the narrator “Saboteur, spy” and shoots him, startling him from the dream (201-8). With the poem, Auden suggests his own unreliability as a spokesman, and argues that his rejection of dogma would sabotage any utopian endeavour. Later, following World War II, Auden would return to these themes of dogma, utopia, and social action in *The Age of Anxiety*, but here he retreats from a full engagement with the subject.

Following the difficulties of early 1933, Auden’s life brightened. His growing fame must have consoled his fears of obscurity, and he began to write more fluidly, this time modelling his work on that of Yeats (Carpenter 159). His love life improved and his

teaching post at Downs school was fulfilling. His agnosticism was approaching atheism, and Christianity had become another part of the shell being carried forward to oblivion:

...among the various factors which several years later brought me back to the Christian faith in which I had been brought up, the memory of [the experience of love] and asking myself what it could mean was one of the most crucial, though, at the time it occurred, I thought I had done with Christianity for good. (Auden, "The Protestant Mystics" 70)

Auden began to view love as a more viable ideological foundation. In particular, the idea of Agape became a motivating force for his verse, as reflected in poems such as Poem XIV "Out on the lawn I lie in bed" in which Auden celebrates the joys of community and friendship. Edward Mendelson calls this moment a brief "reconciliation" of Auden's ideas and beliefs (*Early Auden* 167). This reconciliation, he argues, unifies Auden's ideas of "private and public realms; the present, past, and future; and the opposing powers of instinct and choice" (167). He notes Auden's use of "apocalyptic projections" in the lines "What our excitement could achieve/ But our hands left alone" (170), but Mendelson's argument uses apocalypse in its contemporary meaning of nihilistic catastrophe, not in the older sense of Biblical revelation (170). The Auden that truly emerges through the poems of 1933 is not a nihilist, but a utopian who desires a community that seeks to improve his society.

At this early stage of his career, Auden believes that his community of left-wing writers represents such a plan. Although he would later repudiate the idea of an "Auden Generation," he eagerly planned a large study into "the cause of social unrest" and moved

more strongly towards millenarian expressions. He still focused on social commentary, not real political engagement, in searching for a route to a hopeful future. The idea of Agape as a cure to the violence of the world and as a possible stopgap to the growing fears of war became a major focus. His pre-millenarianism, however, remained without a dogma and Auden lacked the orthodoxy Eliot was able to achieve through Christianity. While he would attempt to find such a model repeatedly through the late 1930s, he ultimately would find it impossible to remain a poet and a pre-millenarian.

Auden's first, and perhaps only, act of political courage was to get married to Erika Mann, the daughter of German novelist Thomas Mann. The authorities in Berlin planned on cancelling her citizenship, and with little forethought, she turned to Christopher Isherwood for help in obtaining a British passport. Isherwood felt he could not help, but he did agree to ask Auden. Auden's response was immediate and somewhat dramatic: a single telegraph: 'DELIGHTED' (Carpenter 175-6). Auden and Erika Mann were married in June 1935 having met only a few days before and the newlyweds parted ways immediately after the ceremony. Mendelson makes little mention of the marriage in his study *Early Auden* (194), but Hermann Kesten notes that while the marriage was initially "pure formality," the Mann family "developed a warm relationship" with Auden and he would visit the Mann family, especially in his American phase (Mann 371). The most important element of the marriage is the extent to which Auden is willing to aid other artists engaged in political works, which represents a growing activism on his part. Indeed, Auden and Isherwood's next collaboration, *The Ascent of F6*, further reflects Auden's new willingness to engage with national and political issues.

A story of national competition and mountain climbing, the play serves as both a metaphor of the current political tension in Europe and a reflection of Auden's concern over the social responsibilities of a poet. His failure to find a real ideological underpinning in the early 1930s had not stopped him from become a figurehead for his generation of artists, but that same success placed pressure on him to choose a particular ideology to espouse. Auden was quick to resist such pressures, although his ideas about good and evil had grown more concrete; in the "Introduction to *The Poet's Tongue*," he writes:

The propagandist, whether moral or political, complains that the writer should use his powers over words to persuade people to a particular course of action, instead of fiddling while Rome burns. But poetry is not concerned with telling people what to do, but with extending our knowledge of good and evil, perhaps making the necessity for action more urgent and its nature more clear, but only leading us to the point where it is possible for us to make a rational and moral choice. (108)

Like Eliot, whose prose of the 1930s becomes increasingly didactic and propagandist, Auden senses the limits of poetry to express pre-millenarian ideas. The Auden of the mid-1930s is more aware of his need to understand morality, and the above does contain echoes of Eliot's own writing on poetry and morality. Auden's response to modernity is still based on a rejection of capitalism and alienation, and *The Poet's Tongue* condemns modernity as the root of class strife and as the cause of a widening "gap between what is commonly called 'highbrow' and 'lowbrow'" (107). In this concern, Auden perceives a separation of society, perhaps the death of the middle class. His strong socialist tendency, based largely on his notions of Agape and egalitarianism, does not fully create a golden

age, but it does emphasize the idea of a moderate society as opposed to one of extremes.

There is a sense of a pre-modernity in which culture had more unity; however, Auden was never satisfied by the answers he or his friends could invent. He abandons any notion of continuity, and shifts firmly towards the millenarian side of the spectrum of future thought. What is truly at stake in Auden's thinking is whether he conceives of the millennium as the result of pre-millennial or post-millennial processes.

The need for a fully realized golden age might indeed be a greater part of post-millenarian thought, as Yeats so readily makes definite settings for his millenarian impulse. Eliot is more hesitant, although he does quickly come to rely upon Dante and the Medieval Church as a model of a coherent social past. Pre-millenarianism insists that society must be improved before utopia is achieved, and the poet's mind is more aware of the present. Auden's insistence upon the possibility of social change motivates his millenarianism throughout the decade, and it is not until he embraces post-millenarian ideas after World War II that he finds a golden age on which to base his poetry. In order to reach his fullest expressions of millenarianism, Auden first had to distance himself from the society he knew as a child and find a new direction for his life, one of wilful alienation and cosmopolitanism.

His choice is essentially the same one he gives to the climber Ransom in *The Ascent of F6*. As Replogle notes, "[the play] introduces a religious view of human action, presented by the Abbot and apparently accepted by Michael Ransom" (590). Ransom is offered the chance to remain in the monastery and become a monk, but refuses because to do so would enclose him from the world. In trying to complete his climb, Ransom fulfills a

kind of messianic sacrifice, dying to ensure victory for England (Auden and Isherwood 121). The play's messianic story is futile and it ends with a hidden chorus robbing Ransom's death of any propagandist virtue:

Free now from indignation,
 Immune from all frustration
 He lies in death alone;
 Now he with secret terror
 And every minor error
 Has also made Man's weakness known.

Whom history has deserted,
 These have their power exerted,
 In one convulsive throe;
 With sudden drowning suction
 Drew him to his destruction,
 [*Cresc.*] But they to dissolution go. (123)

The implication of these lines is that the individual, no matter how heroic, is insufficient to the demands of the moment. Gerald Weales has argued that Ransom is, in fact, the only possible character in Auden and Isherwood's plays, the rest are "just figures for satire, symbolism, or stage life" (309). Auden claimed the character of Ransom was based on T. E. Lawrence (Auden and Griffin, 583), but surely he felt a similar pressure on him to become a spokesman. The wholeness of Ransom's character may stem from the fact that Auden

was struggling with similar anxieties. This is not to say Auden deliberately sought to work his problems out through *Ransom*, but that he may have understood the demands placed on figures of nationalist celebrity.

Later, in a 1963 interview, Auden reflected on his decision to leave: "I knew I must leave [England] when I wrote it....I knew it because I knew if I stayed, I would inevitably become a member of the British establishment" (qtd. in Carpenter 195). *The Ascent of F6* serves a farewell of sorts, because after its publication, Auden left England, becoming an expatriate traveller and a voice not for England, but for the world beyond it. At the midpoint of the 1930s, all three poets were concerned with the situation in Europe, especially the rise of Fascism and the Spanish Civil War. The period of the late 1930s and '40s would see Eliot turn to a new rhetoric, moving progressively away from obvious Christian appeals towards secular terms like "culture." Yeats would not live to witness the war of millenarian ideology, but his memory and influence would be marked by both Eliot and Auden.

CHAPTER FIVE: UTOPIAN CONFLICTS, 1937-1946

*More, their talk always took the wished-for turn
Dwelt on the need for someone to advise,
Yet, at each meeting, he was forced to learn
The same misunderstanding would arise.
—Auden “A Misunderstanding” (9-12)*

The closing years of the 1930s were marked by a growing sense of inevitable conflict. Certainly the Spanish Civil War was a testing ground of millenarian ideas of social organizations—anarchist, Communist, Fascist, republican—and the imperialism of the Japanese in Manchuria was another major, if less utopian, violence. Of course, the future is a spectrum and a better world does not necessarily need to be millenarian—progress is a better future, if less radical—but the 1930s are intensely millenarian. It is, simply put, the most important and the intense moment for this study. Through the preceding chapters, the idea that millenarians often reject or avoid true political engagement has been an essential facet of this argument, and the rise of Communist and Fascist states raises the question of whether these movements are examples of the political millenarianisms. As mentioned earlier, the idea that Communism and Nazism are modern examples of millenarianism was first suggested by Norman Cohn in *The Pursuit of the*

Millennium. Such a claim attracted considerable interest and in the second edition of the book, Cohn expanded upon his argument that “the ideologies of Communism and Nazism, dissimilar though they are in many respects, are both heavily indebted to that very ancient body of beliefs which constituted the popular apocalyptic lore of Europe” (309).

Cohn’s essential argument is that despite claims to the contrary, the rise of science and secular thinking did not replace the “militant, revolutionary chiliasm” of the preceding centuries. In fact, according to Cohn, the “tense expectation of a final, decisive struggle in which a world tyranny will be overthrown by a ‘chosen people’ and through which the world will be renewed and history brought to its consummation” defines both Nazism and Communism (309). He notes that the Nazi “phantasy” [sic] of Jewish conspiracy “stands at only one remove from medieval demonology” and that Communism’s idea of a proletariat rebellion “was not the fruit of [Marx’s] long years of study in the fields of economics and sociology but a quasi-apocalyptic phantasy [in which] capitalism as Babylon...shall be cleared for the egalitarian Millennium” (310-11). Further aspects of millennialism—disenfranchisement and prophetic leadership—are easily apparent in the rise of totalitarian governments of the mid-twentieth century: In the case of Fascism, Germany’s treatment under the Treaty of Versailles, the resulting massive economic inflation, and Hitler’s charismatic rise to power depended upon the dissatisfaction of the German’s in response to their economic disenfranchisement. Likewise the cults of personality surrounding other Fascists like Franco and Mussolini were able to construct new millenarian ideas of restored glory.

The above is not meant to suggest that the leaders of these parties consciously understood millenarianism and manipulated it in a premeditated way; Cohn is quick to acknowledge that

it is certain that Hitler and his associates really believed that the Jews were united in one vast, centuries-old conspiracy to enslave the human race. It is equally certain that Lenin really believed that the lot of industrial workers under twentieth-century capitalism is one of ever-increasing misery and servitude... (313)

But what Cohn's argument points to is the way millenarianism comes to express itself through supposedly secular and modern social movements. Fascism and Communism become less *political* movements of the twentieth century, but *millenarian* movements that actually achieved some a measure of success through controlling or dismantling the political apparatus (although some Communist and Fascist leaders chose military or revolutionary means to achieve power). Even in the case where elections may have placed leaders of millenarian groups into power, the political apparatus is quickly disassembled, making the prophet, priests, and heroes of the party the real controlling aspect of the society; politics as a part of social power and governance is overthrown and rejected by the new ruling faction and totalitarianism or more correctly a kind of secular theocracy becomes the primary form of government. George Orwell, with his usual insight, identifies this element of totalitarianism correctly in his essay "The Prevention of Literature": "A totalitarian state is in effect a theocracy, and its ruling caste, in order to keep its position, has to be thought of as infallible" (935). In such an environment, it is hardly unexpected that all three poets of this study turn more and more towards utopian

visions throughout the 1930s and 1940s. The wide-spread social debate about new political and millenarian forces permits Modernist poets to engage their audiences in new ways, and in my reading of Modernism, the 1930s are the climactic moment of the artistic movement.

The climax of Modern poetry and millenarianism can be found in how the poets of this study engage with one another and their societies. Yeats's passing allows Eliot and Auden the opportunity to comment on him, and they do so, providing insight into the Irishman's utopianism as well as their own. Eliot would maintain his interest in prose writing and argue that utopia could be constructed in Britain through human efforts and religious faith. For Auden, the period is the most critical in how he comes to reject the idea of social improvement through human means, and adopts a post-millenarian belief in God and revelation through language.

The Loss of a Visionary

Between 1937 and his death in 1939, Yeats was still prolific, producing several strong poems and plays, including the short drama *Purgatory*. His final major work of prose was *On the Boiler*, an essay that reflects Yeats's frustration and conservatism. Beginning with a curmudgeonly attack on popular government (13), the essay ultimately finds its stride in more comfortably millenarian territory with the section entitled "Tomorrow's Revolution," in which Yeats emphasizes his sense of alienation—"we who are the opposite of our time"—and decline. The sense of decline hinges the idea that humanity is in a state of biological and spiritual degeneration. Yeats's interest in eugenics was hardly

unique in this period, and not necessarily the outcome of any interest in far right politics. Two relatively recent studies—Walter Benn Michael's *Our America* (1995) and Donald J. Child's *Modernism and Eugenics* (2001)—have argued that British and American Modernists alike were deeply influenced by notions of race and genetics. Child's argument regarding Yeats is potent, demonstrating that Yeats's interest in eugenics is a reoccurring element in the poet's thinking, related to his fear of a declining world, or as Child's explains: "The loss of the aristocracy, the loss of poetry, and the loss of the nation's habit of mind are the same thing" (196).

We can see this in *Purgatory*, Yeats's final play, in which Yeats connects eugenics with his concerns about radical transformation of the fallen world. Stephen Coote argues that much of the play's significance is due to its combination of a rhetoric of "national decline [with Yeats's] perennial fascination with the theme of 'dreaming back', offering a picture of an Ireland in which hierarchical and ancestral virtues have been betrayed, so leaving the country in a seemingly hopeless agony, its people in a spiritual crisis that achieves genuine tragic intensity" (570). Here Coote identifies the postlapsarian sense of the world and recognizes how the play works into the larger themes of Yeats's career, but is lacking the terminology of millenarian studies to fully realize his insight.

The very same impulse drives *On the Boiler's* fear of a classless society, and Yeats's emphasis upon a ruling class is similar to Eliot's *Idea of a Christian Society* (19). His belief that "civilization has reached a crisis" is validated through the apocalyptic fear and ecstasy he has felt: "When I was writing 'A Vision' I had constantly the word 'terror' impressed upon me" (19). Yeats is cautious, claiming that he "did not take literally...the

old Stoic prophecy of earth quake [sic], fire and flood at the end of an age" but now he suggests that Michael Robartes was correct in such ideas (19-20). He has some care and concern for Ireland still, and although it is not as deeply felt in *On the Boiler*, Yeats the millenarian still believes "we Irish are nearer than the English to the Mythic Age" (21).

Elsewhere in the essay he is less coherent: Yeats makes hypocritical claims about the importance of learning Irish (28) and his position on the Renaissance is essentially one of indecision: "I detest the Renaissance because it made the human mind inorganic; I adore the Renaissance because it clarified form and created freedom" (27). Yeats's definition of freedom is perplexing here, as he attacks democracy as an illness in civilization and restates his desire for a "hierarchical" society (26) throughout his argument. It is possible he is arguing for a kind of artistic or aesthetic freedom in a sort of organic Renaissance city state, a position which would be quite similar to Eliot's ideas of a cohesive and homogeneous culture of Christians who still value free inquiry.

Despite the problems of these arguments, the truest element in *On the Boiler* is its note of sadness, especially in the moments when the ailing poet reflects upon the failures of his millenarianism: "In my savage youth I was accustomed to say that no man should be permitted to open his mouth in Parliament until he had sung his Utopia, for lacking that we could not know where he was taking us" (37). Yeats had discovered in the course of his life that politics rarely fulfill millenarian hopes and that his artistic projects, however potent they may have been, could not usher in a new age.

It is possible that Yeats might have continued his millenarian impulse, the opening of *Purgatory* was to be his last public appearance (Coote 573), and on 28 January 1939,

Yeats died in France. Condolences were sent from around the world and services were held in Dublin and London.³⁷ With his passing, the most prominent and intense post-millenarian vision of the twentieth century died. Yeats's presence would remain strong in literary studies, and his death would prompt major responses from both Eliot and Auden, a moment which affords an opportunity to consider their influence on one another and to examine Yeats's legacy.

Although they had known of, written for, and read one another's works for years, the only time Yeats, Eliot, and Auden had been engaged in a common endeavour was the formation of the Mercury Theatre in London. The committee was formed under the auspices of the director Rupert Doone, and consisted of the three poets and Ashley Dukes, a playwright and theatre manager who was working to raise the profile of verse drama in England. Between 1934 and 1935, the group discussed how to encourage audiences to attend verse plays, but the meetings were inconclusive and no real action was taken. Yeats was often away, a fact that frustrated Eliot, who once told Doone "he felt like kicking Yeats down the stairs" (Ackroyd 216).

Eliot had learnt much from Yeats, although any direct influence had long since passed. Eliot reflected on his youthful appreciation of Yeats's 1917 play *At the Hawk's Well*, writing "thereafter one saw Yeats...as a more eminent contemporary from whom one could learn" (qtd. in Coote 370) and he was among the first to send condolences after Yeats's death (Coote 578). Unlike Auden, Eliot came to Yeats's verse late in his development as a writer, around 1919 and Eliot claims Yeats was "a contemporary and not

³⁷ Due to the outbreak of World War Two, the return of Yeats's body to Ireland was delayed until 1948.

a predecessor" (Eliot, "Yeats" 296). Eliot was also chosen to give the first Yeats Memorial Lecture in 1940 and fittingly, he chose to discuss Yeats's career and influence. Eliot eulogizes Yeats in his lecture, lauding him as a "great living poet" who was compassionate to new writers and always placed art and poetry before "his own reputation" (Eliot, "Yeats" 296). Such kind words are to be expected so close to Yeats's death and the situation of Eliot's lecture, but Eliot proves more analytic in his appreciation of Yeats's works.

To Eliot, Yeats's development was remarkable because it was ongoing. Yeats did not peak at a single phase of his career nor did he engage in "a slow, continuous development of mastery," as Eliot claims Shakespeare does (297), but instead he engaged in a leaping kind of development from a strong poet of "anthologies" to the "[pre-eminent] poet of middle age" (298-301). Eliot correctly links Yeats's interest in Celtic legend with William Morris's interest in Scandinavian legend (although he fails to see how these interests both reflect a concern for the effects of modernity). Eliot also indicates that he sees Yeats's interests as more stable and that his work as a younger man remains connected to that of his later verse (298-301). Eliot did not see a radical break between an early, mid, and late-career Yeats, but instead saw a poet of depth, skill, and commitment. These observations are keen, and serve as strong reminders of how consistent Yeats's thought and millenarian was throughout his career.

Of course, Eliot cannot bring himself to "complete agreement" with Yeats. Eliot's own path is more traditional or conventional, and he finds that Yeats's personal life and doctrine is antithetical to his own:

I do not dissimulate the fact that there are aspects of Yeats's thought and feeling which to myself are unsympathetic. I say this only to indicate the limits which I have set to my criticism. The questions of difference, object and protest arise in the field of doctrine, and these are vital questions. I have been concerned only with the poet and dramatist, so far as these can be isolated. In the long run they cannot be wholly isolated. (307-308)

The question of "doctrine" for Eliot is Christianity. In a roundabout way, Eliot both acknowledges the occult Yeats and dismisses him, but for reasons unlike those of other critics. Eliot's own millenarianism rejects Yeats's and demonstrates just how firmly Eliot has set himself upon the path of pre-millennialism.

In *After Strange Gods*, Eliot had condemned "Yeats's supernatural world [as] the wrong supernatural world," rejecting the utopian morals of Yeats's Unified Being and Culture in favour of the "world of real Good and Evil" so important to Eliot's own millenarianism (51). Other critics have noted the tension between Eliot and Yeats in this work, notably Daniel Albright's commentary in "Yeats and Modernism." Although Albright overlooks Eliot's lecture on Yeats and makes Eliot's comments in *After Strange Gods* appear more directly part of Eliot's response to Yeats's death (which of course, they are not), he is correct to point to the fact that Yeats stands in contrast to Eliot and Auden, and that "the later Modernism" of both poets has a similarity to Yeats's work (60-61).

Auden's responses to Yeats's death are among the first works he wrote after arriving in America in the last days of 1938: the poetic elegy "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" and the prose dialogue "The Public v. The Late Mr William Butler Yeats". Both pieces are

rightly considered landmark moments of Yeats criticism and major highlights in Auden's career. Unlike Eliot, Auden was more graceful towards Yeats's religious ideas, at times using irony to attack critics of Yeats's beliefs and debating their merits rather than simply dismissing them. Other times, Auden creates a great depth of emotion in Yeats's honour through a sensitivity that reveals as much about Auden as it does Yeats. Yeats's death occurred in a time of great transition for Auden: first, his decision to leave Britain, and second, his own changing millenarianism. While the Auden of the 1930s had little confidence in ideology and gave voice to a kind of weak socialist pre-millenarianism, the Auden of 1939 forward finds more stability of intellect and chooses to direct his conception of society and the future towards post-millenarian Christianity. "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" marks the beginning of Auden's struggle with the pre-millenarianism of his early poetry and his famous meditation on Yeats's cultural legacy in Part II of the poem deals as much with Auden's own verse as it does with Yeats's:

You were silly like us; your gift survived it all:
 The parish of rich women, physical decay,
 Yourself. Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.
 Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,
 For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives (32-36)

This section of the poem was actually added months after its initial publication (Mendelson, *Later Auden* 10; 12) and serves as a kind of reflection on Auden's changes in thought. Auden's acknowledgement that Yeats was "silly like us" is quite telling, as it is also possible to substitute "Europe" for "Ireland" and make these lines entirely about

Auden. Of course, Auden's judgement on poetry here — that it “makes nothing happen” — is overshadowed by the poem's insistence that poetry “survives” and that the words of a writer continue on after his life, immune to the meddling of businessmen and politicians.

Edward Mendelson argues in his book *Later Auden* that the poem ultimately “claims [poetry] has far greater powers to heal, soothe, teach, liberate, and triumph” (13).

Part of this effect is due to the poem's unrestrained conclusion:

In the deserts of the heart
 Let the healing fountain start,
 In the prison of his days
 Teach the free man how to praise. (61-65)

Such a triumphant ending may also express Auden's desire to see poetry not only as a vehicle of social commentary, but as a philosophic language to explore utopianism, faith, and the future. Stanley Romaine Hopper argues that Auden is not quick to praise, and these lines are “at bottom (that is, when he is not thinking too much or trying too hard), what [Auden] believes poetry is all about” (136).

Auden's prose piece on Yeats is less widely known, but is perhaps more important. “The Public v. The Late Mr William Butler Yeats” appeared in the *Partisan Review* in September 1939 and likely reflects a more considered response than “In Memory of W. B. Yeats” (it was certainly drafted following Auden's changes to the poem, Mendelson, *Later Auden* 16). Using a more formal style, the essay takes the form of a court dialogue in which the public prosecutor argues that while Yeats was a good poet, he was not “a great poet” (3). The case against Yeats's greatness is based on the fact that he does not fulfill the

prosecution's three requirements of a great poet: "firstly a gift of a very high order for memorable language, secondly a profound understanding of the age in which he lives, and thirdly a working knowledge of and sympathetic attitude towards the most progressive thought of his time" (3). The argument presented in the prosecutor's attack is that literature exists within the bounds of history and social discourse and the correctness of the poet's thoughts are the only real way to judge poetry: "Our fathers imagined that poetry existed in some private garden of its own, totally unrelated to the workaday world, and to be judged by pure aesthetic standards alone. We know that now to be an illusion" (3). On a whole, given his familiarity with the range and duration of Yeats's career and subject matter, Auden likely means for the prosecutor to be read as facetious and as a representative of Left-leaning literary figures who demand political resonance from art.

The prosecutor finds Yeats further compromised by his elitism: "He was prepared to admire the poor just as long as they remained poor and deferential, accepting without protest the burden of maintaining a little athenian [sic] band of literary landowners, who without their toil could not exist for five minutes" (3). In this second criterion, the prosecution dismisses elitism in art as archaic; artists of the present must be both populist and political. As he was supposedly not engaged in the true spirit of the age, Yeats is not a great poet. Yeats's involvement in Ireland's cultural and political development is given a short *coup-de-grace* in the case against him: "It is true that he played a certain part in the movement for Irish Independence, but I hardly think my learned friend will draw your attention to that. Of all the modes of self evasion open to the well-to-do, Nationalism is the easiest and most dishonest" (4). The fact that Yeats lived (relatively) well and never took

up actual arms in revolution is used by the prosecutor to question the validity of his nationalism as well as attack his poetic legacy. It is difficult to find a poet of the period who might fulfill the prosecutor's criteria and this underlying problem in the Prosecution's case is also deliberate and ironic on Auden's part.

The third criterion for greatness—being among the progressively minded—is refuted because, to the prosecutor's mind, modernity and development is synonymous with scepticism and technology. Yeats's writings are dismissed because they lack in scientific rigour or objectivity:

Gentlemen, it is hard to be charitable when we find that the deceased, far from outgrowing his folly, has plunged even deeper. In 1900 he believed in fairies; that was bad enough; but in 1930 we are confronted with the pitiful, the deplorable spectacle of a grown man occupied with the mumbojumbo of magic and the nonsense of India. Whether he seriously believed such stuff to be true, or merely thought it pretty, or imagined it would impress the public, is immaterial. The plain fact remains that he made it the centre of his work. (5)

In the Prosecution's attacks, Auden appears to be giving voice to not only part of the public's voice, but also to one-half of his mind. Auden's appreciation for science and technology is certainly at the heart of the last condemnation of Yeats above, but it also represents the idea of technological progress as an end in itself. The Prosecutor never attempts to nuance the idea of development, and this might be an indictment of attempts to rapidly modernize countries like Spain and Russia, which were both important interests to the British left.

But The Counsel for the Defence who speaks next makes a strong, insightful argument:

If I may be allowed to quote my learned friend: "We are here to judge, not a man, but his work." We have been told that the deceased was conceited, that he was a snob, that he was a physical coward, that his taste in contemporary poetry was uncertain, that he could not understand physics and chemistry. If this is not an invitation to judge the man, I do not know what is...Take away the frills, and the argument of the prosecution is reduced to this: "A great poet must give the right answers to the problems which perplex his generation. The deceased gave the wrong answers. Therefore the deceased was not a great poet." (5)

The defence claims that judging a poet in this manner is impossible and argues that such a criteria would eliminate a great many poets:

In an age of rising nationalism, Dante looked back with envy to the Roman Empire. Was this socially progressive? Will only a Catholic admit that Dryden's "The Hind and the Panther" is a good poem? Do we condemn Blake because he rejected Newton's Theory of Light, or rank Wordsworth lower than Baker, because the latter had a deeper appreciation of the steam engine? (5)

The defence argues that the prosecution's argument has no aesthetic concerns at all and amounts to little more than casuistry in the service of character assassination. This is first a formalist defence of Yeats. Auden was deeply concerned with formalist matters and there is an echo of the idea that "poetry does nothing" in his insistence to consider formal properties the paramount concern in evaluating a poet. However, Auden then expands a

greater argument that built almost entirely out of Yeats's millenarianism; the implication of Auden's argument is that Yeats's occult beliefs supported the way poetry expresses the value of human imagination. This can be extended in Auden's own thought to lead us to discover millennium through poetry.

First of all, Auden's defence of Yeats begins its rhetoric by expounding on the fallen, disenfranchised present: "a civilisation in which the only emotion common to all classes is a feeling of individual isolation from everyone else, a civilisation torn apart by the opposing emotions born of economic injustice, the just envy of the poor and the selfish terror of the rich" (6). Yeats is a poet who is able to respond to this situation. The progress of Auden's argument as a legal debate allows him consider Yeats's millenarian response to modernity, a result so insightful that it mirrors a shift in his own engagement with the future and is an early sign that Auden is abandoning his pre-millenarian socialist position in favor of post-millenarian theology.

For the defence in Auden's trial, Yeats's poetry stands as a bulwark against modernity. The counsellor is granted far more eloquence and poise than the prosecutor's base language, especially when he argues:

From first to last they express a sustained protest against the social atomisation caused by industrialism, and both in their ideas and their language a constant struggle to overcome it. The fairies and heroes of the early work were an attempt to find through folk tradition a binding force for society; and the doctrine of Anima Mundi found in the later poems is the same thing in a more developed form, which has left purely local peculiarities behind, in favour of something that the deceased

hoped was universal; in other words, he was looking for a world religion. A purely religious solution may be unworkable, but the search for it is, at least, the result of a true perception of a social evil. (7)

Auden's counsel for the defence condemns the fact that Yeats had to engage in such poetry, because the creation of a just society—a utopia as it were—is “the task of the politician, not the poet” (7). Here Auden echoes “In Memory of W. B. Yeats's” lines that “poetry makes nothing happen” to attack readers who fail to recognize that Yeats's vision of the future was at least better than current political ideas and more intellectually radical than many of the supposedly radical actions of Auden's contemporary's.

Everything Auden reveals about Yeats simultaneously reveals his own growth as a poet and millenarian. Both Eliot and Auden's responses to Yeats's career grapple with poetry and millennium and it is striking how they address the continuity of millenarianism in Modernism, as well as reinforcing the differences present in the spectrum of the future. Yeats, the staunch post-millennial occultist, finds little sympathy in the more dogmatic and pre-millennial Eliot, while Auden can sense his own changing position and ultimately comes to accept Yeats's position as a potent, even compatible vision of the future.

The Utopia of Continuity

Like Yeats in 1908, Eliot published two career retrospectives in 1935: *Essays Ancient and Modern* and *Collected Poems 1909-1935*. The majority of the essays included in the first volume draw from his post-conversion writing, including several pieces that attempt to

clarify his religious position. In particular, “Religion and Literature” argues that “literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint” (21). Eliot treads lightly because he knows the idea that judging art on moral grounds and not “solely by literary standards” is a slippery slope towards condemnation and censorship (21).

While he allows each generation to have its own moral code—“whether it lives by that code or not” (21)—Eliot rejects the idea that all artists are individuals, arguing that literature is a “mass movement” in which individual genius is really an illusion (28). This state of misunderstanding literature is due to the artificial separation of faith and art: “I am convinced that we fail to realize how completely, and yet how irrationally, we separate our literary from our religious judgements” (24). The argument is a tenuous one that almost becomes offensive, but it is motivated by Eliot’s need for social unity and moral certainty. He finds a society without a moral rudder incapable of producing successful artists and critics, because he believes a coherent system of ethics to necessary to guide both creation and evaluation. It is possible that this rhetoric attempts to overturn the cultural and atheist ideas of replacing sacred texts with the canon of secular literature.

Eliot attempts to avoid the apocalyptic tone of *Thoughts after Lambeth*, claiming “I do not want to give the impression that I have delivered a mere fretful jeremiad against contemporary literature” (28), a clause which reflects a self-awareness of his intellectual leanings towards millenarian rhetoric. What Eliot does fear is a critic unable to perceive “the primacy of the supernatural over the natural life” (28). The subtext of Eliot’s assertion of the “primacy of the supernatural” might indeed be “a good critic is a Christian critic

like me," but Eliot avoids making a direct claim. (Eliot will however, repudiate Yeats for his occultism throughout the 1930s.) Ultimately, Eliot fears that a declining supernatural world would lead more secular critics like F. R. Leavis to reject him. Throughout the late 1930s and the 1940s, Eliot sought to clarify his sense of spiritual and social unease, trying to find a way to balance a millenarian desire for a spiritual utopian community with an intellectual need for a plurality of expression. Lyndall Gordon identifies Eliot's prophetic tone in *Notes towards a Definition of Culture*, and she suggests it was part of his post-war rhetoric (472-474), but I would intervene and point out that Eliot's tendency to make prophecy and engage in utopian discussions runs throughout all of his work in after 1927.

Eliot's activities throughout the 1930s and 40s represent an attempt to engage a wider public audience. The most utopian essay of his late phase, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, was given as public lectures and Eliot participated in conferences, delivered radio addresses, and served as a member of the Christian intellectual group The Moot from 1938 to 1943 (Asher 85). While Eliot's 1927 conversion to Anglicanism was an important turning point in his critical thought and artistic expression, it was not a radical break with his earlier thought. Instead, Eliot's millenarianism serves as a link between his early and late periods. In Eliot's Christianity is a desire for completeness, a wholeness of being, and an attempt to project this desire upon the society around him in order to resist ideas of nihilism and catastrophe. Some of Eliot's positions during this period were rehearsed briefly in *After Strange Gods*, the only writing Eliot suppressed. In that awkward and early form, ideas of organic community and coherent society were expressed, but in a limited and clumsy fashion (18-19).

After the failure of *After Strange Gods*, Eliot begins a much more explicit and direct exploration of his millenarianism with *The Idea of a Christian Society*. The clarity Eliot finds at the end of the 1930s may be due simply to having time to develop his ideas, but it is also possible that Eliot's work with Karl Mannheim in The Moot provided him new intellectual stimulus. Mannheim published a major survey of utopianism, *Ideology and Utopia*, in 1936 and was a strong voice for political action within The Moot; Eliot resisted Mannheim's call for action and would eventually leave the group because of it (Ackroyd 257). Mannheim was critical of utopianism's repeated avowal of real political solutions and argued that

the concept of *utopian* thinking reflects the opposite discovery of the political struggle, namely that certain oppressed groups are intellectually so strongly interested in the destruction and transformation of a given condition of society that they unwittingly see only those elements in the situation which tend to negate it. Their thinking is incapable of correctly diagnosing an existing condition of society.

(40)

Mannheim correctly notes the Manichean dimension of millenarianism, as well as its tendency to divide society along moral lines. This is a problem in visualizing the future, because the utopian desire can force millenarians into situations that might demand action, often of a violent nature, and so they require a dogma to warrant their actions. Such action was underway in Germany and Russia at the time of both Mannheim's and Eliot's writing, but Mannheim's rejection of utopianism is almost diametrically opposed to Eliot's millenarianism.

In his biography of Eliot, Peter Ackroyd has difficulty penetrating Eliot's faith and the essays of the 1930s, in part because he lacks the vocabulary of millenarianism. At times Ackroyd demonstrates a graciousness to his subject, such as when he suggests that "we cannot hope to understand Eliot as he knelt in that chapel [in East Coker] or in the presence of God. It was at such times, he said, that he was divested of all those characteristics of family, personality and reputation which identified him to the outside world. We cannot reach into the mystery of Eliot's solitude" (239). At others times Ackroyd resorts to the kind of judgmental rejection that millenarian statements generally receive: to Ackroyd the Eliot of *The Idea of a Christian Society* uses a "bizarre" sort of rhetoric and performs the "role of Jeremiah" (250-1). While *The Idea of a Christian Society* is certainly related to the jeremiad—a prophetic critique of society—Eliot's millenarian rhetoric is not so much bizarre as it is rather sedate for a millenarian argument. This calmer tone is likely due to Eliot's commitment to a pre-millenarian future; such a position allows Eliot to be less esoteric than Yeats's *Vision*, and less linguistic than Auden's later works.

The Idea of a Christian Society fits the millennial model, not only because it articulates a vision of an idealized future society, but also because of its reactionary nature. The final endnote of the published lectures provides a letter which Eliot calls "the immediate stimulus for the lectures" (67). The letter is clearly a response to the Munich Agreement signed just days earlier (The Munich Agreement bowed to Hitler's demands to annex Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia). On one hand, it is as much a call to arms against

Nazism as it is a conservative statement of religious faith. And on the other, it also insists upon the possibility of achieving a Christian utopia in the future:

May our salvation lie in an attempt to recover our Christian heritage, not in the sense of going back to the past but of discovering in the central affirmations and insights of the Christian faith new spiritual energies to regenerate and vitalize our sick society? (Eliot 68)

This is the question that Eliot attempts to answer in his lecture.

Of course, Eliot is sympathetic and his simple answer could have been yes, but the letter cautions his reader to avoid “quick, easy or confident answer[s]” (68). Eliot does not explicitly detail a plan to achieve his utopian vision and admits to a fear of “contribut[ing] one more amateur sketch of an abstract and impracticable future,” but paradoxically introduces the essay by insisting that “from the beginning...this book does not make a plea for a 'religious revival' in a sense with which we are already familiar” (Eliot 4). What is at stake for Eliot is not the present, but the future. He thinks of totalitarianism as a path to catastrophe, and because the present is also unacceptable, Eliot can only accept a utopian revival of spirituality and social well-being.

Eliot attempts to transcend the familiar forms of revival by positing society both in terms of culture and politics. Despite repeated attacks on Fascism and Communism, he circumvents them by claiming non-democratic states are not the focus of his concerns. This rhetorical movement sidesteps contemporary debates about democracy and totalitarianism through an emphasis on values and faith, as opposed to nationalism and ideology. His attempted rhetorical movement results in an awkward tension in his

treatment of government—Eliot is critical of nearly every form of governance available to him—but we can infer that his Christian Society would be at least marginally democratic considering Eliot's remarks elsewhere that “The best thing a totalitarian state could do would be abdicate” (qtd. in Asher 85). Whatever form of democracy Eliot's utopia might take, it is not a government absorbed with political debate, but a far more insular one concerned with the welfare of its citizens and informed by Christian values.³⁸

His utopia avoids political reality by focusing his audience's attention on battling modernity. Eliot repeatedly returns to the subject of “the problem of industrial, urban and suburban life... [that] has produced a world for which Christian social forms are imperfectly adapted” (25). He continues to insist that “the machinery of modern life is merely a sanction for un-Christian aims” (27) and has resulted in the “unescapable implication in non-Christian institutions and systems” (40). It follows then that there is something intrinsic about modernity that makes it un-Christian. Eliot's opinion, seen in both his poetry and his earlier essays, has modernity as the source of alienation, disenfranchisement, and severance. The kind of constant present a future defined by continuity offers is unacceptable to the utopian impulse of both Eliot and Modernism. While Eliot wants a society linked to traditional Christian history, he does not want a continual 1930s, but a better, millenarian world.

³⁸ Eliot does not clearly define what the Christian values are that he refers to, but the tenor of his argument indicates that the phrase refers more to the Beatitudes than the Ten Commandments. There is neither a mention of “thou shalt not” nor an insistence upon the Church wielding legal power. Instead, this is “a society in which the natural end of man—virtue and well-being in community—is acknowledged for all, and the supernatural end—beatitude—for those who have the eyes to see it” (27). While Christianity as a religious faith remains important in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Christianity as a moral philosophy becomes insistent and the basis of the society it aspires to.

Eliot argues that the best, if not the only way, to ensure the development of a morally Christian society is through education. This Christian education would not be based upon belief (22), but would be structured around an education that would not limit curiosity or even religious study while being “directed by a Christian philosophy of life” (30). Again, Eliot has to work out a paradox in order to define a process of education that would produce Christian moral behaviour—the sort of behaviour that Christ articulates in the Sermon on the Mount—without it becoming an ideology that would blind a society to the reality of its situation and create a sense of superiority that would lead to dilution and corruption of its values. Clearly a nation-state that could achieve such a goal would be a utopia, but it is a difficult process to envision nonetheless and Eliot struggles throughout the essay with this problem.

He forces himself to walk a tightrope between his insistences that *The Idea of a Christian Society* is not an abstract design and yet is somehow beyond current understanding. This balancing act is further complicated by his resistance to advocating action, and instead Eliot offers the merest sketch of what England could become. He eagerly assents to “[Jacques] Maritain's utopian vision of an organic merging of professional and non-professional modes of Christian leadership” (Miller 231), but he cannot provide a clear process by which this ideal state could be formed. This appears to be a combination of clergy and lay-person and may be an attempt to reinforce his own position as a Christian intellection, but the insecurity and hesitation of his rhetoric reveals both the depth of Eliot's commitment to millennial thought and his desire to be taken seriously.

Eliot's rejection of modernity is defined by his defence of traditional values: first, organic community and cultural unity, and second, by an antithesis between Christianity and materialism. Burridge's model of millenarianism is found in Eliot's condemnation of industrialism and economics. Eliot's views on nature, particularly the view that modernity is at odds with a natural order is similar to aspects of modern environmentalism, especially deep ecology. He argues that "religion...implies a life in conformity with nature" and that "the natural life and the supernatural life have a conformity to each other that neither has with the mechanistic life" (48). Eliot also considers industrialism dangerous on ecological grounds:

We are being made aware that the organization of society on the principle of private profit, as well as public destruction, is leading both to the deformation of humanity by unregulated industrialism, and to the exhaustion of natural resources, and that a good deal of our material progress is a progress for which succeeding generations may have to pay dearly. (48-49)

It is not without irony that the comments the "conservative" Eliot makes here would be widely accepted at the most radical of present-day environmental or anti-globalization protests and would be rejected by those who currently consider themselves political conservatives. While Eliot motions towards D. H. Lawrence following his attack on industrialism, other authors, notably other Christian authors such as Charles Williams and J. R. R. Tolkien, portray similar sentiments regarding the destruction of traditional cultural practices through metaphors of industrialization. Any division of nature and society, or nature and modern society, is a highly artificial one, but Eliot insists that "a wrong attitude

towards nature implies...a wrong attitude towards God, and that consequence is an inevitable doom" (49). Eliot finds he is unable to avoid apocalyptic tones in the final pages of his essay. The rising millenarianism is clearest in his idealization of a lost organic community and his demands for a return to the origins of Christianity.³⁹

The element of millenarianism that reinforces the idea of the golden past finds expression in Eliot's argument when he argues "We need to know how to see the world as the Christian Fathers saw it; and the purpose of reascending to origins is that we should be able to return, with greater spiritual knowledge, to our own situation" (49). Eliot's call for a constant renewal of the core values of his society is designed to reinvigorate a culture of moral philosophy that would inevitably wither due to "innumerable seeds of decay" (Eliot 47). This argument is, in essence, a repetition of his earlier concerns in *Thoughts on Lambeth*. What is important now, however, is that Eliot turns to the idea of Apocalypse:

It is very easy for speculation on a possible Christian order in the future to...rest in a kind of apocalyptic vision of a golden age of virtue. But we have to remember that the Kingdom of Christ on earth will never be realised; we must remember that whatever reform or revolution we carry out, the result will always be a sordid tragedy of what human society should be... (Eliot 47)

The above passage denies the possibility of a divinely-fulfilling utopia and insists that society must return again and again to the kind of reformations he suggests. Exactly how this perpetual millenarian movement is to take place is never entirely determined, although Eliot avoids any kind of messianic or transcendental event.

³⁹ It is difficult to ascertain whether or not Eliot is moving towards the notion of Christian Stewardship and therefore rejects the dominion given to Noah following the flood (Gen 9).

In this case, Eliot is still millenarian and committed to the Second Coming, but the above reveals a tension in his thinking: while his whole argument has given voice to utopia, he acknowledges that “the Kingdom of Christ on earth” will be even greater. The imposition of limitations upon his utopia further represents the conflicted nature of Eliot's argument and reflects some of the problems with millennial desire. His conception of the world is one of postlapsarian sin, and even though there is a positive idealism in Eliot's moral philosophy, the flaws and complications in the framework of *The Idea of a Christian Society* limit its applicability and its attractiveness.

Despite his warning that “I should not like the ‘Community of Christians’ of which I have spoken, to be thought of as merely the nicest, most intelligent and public-spirited of the upper middle class...” (48), Eliot's essay is rife with a judgmental approach to those not of his class. For example, Eliot considers “the great mass of humanity [to be so limited in] their capacity for *thinking* [Eliot's emphasis] about the object of faith is [so] small [that] their Christianity may be almost wholly realized in their behaviour” (Eliot 23). To Eliot, those without advanced education are incapable of fully understanding religion and are unable to rationally reflect on their principles. Similarly, Eliot is unable to conceive of a Christian society that does not contain a class hierarchy (Eliot 24), although his model of education favors the intelligent over the well-born. This model of education provides some sense that meritocracy might be possible in Eliot's class-based utopia, but it also has the effect of shoring up Eliot's own position within English society.

Eliot's protection of his class position further exposes complications in his millennialism. If disenfranchisement is indeed a necessary part of his impulse, can one

actually consider him disenfranchised? Eliot is neither oppressed nor denied access to the political tools necessary to effect change. Instead, he is threatened by the growing pluralism of British society, the collapse of the Empire, and by the growing democratic influence of the lower classes and the political left (the result of which was a Labour government elected following World War II). These concerns explain why Eliot expends so much initial energy disengaging from political arguments. His position is one of authority and seeks to avoid appearing to be simply protecting his privileges; Eliot focuses attention upon modernity in order to win over his audience (although he was clearly speaking to the converted in his lecture).

In addition to remaining bound in class structures, Eliot's utopia is exclusive on the grounds of faith and isolationist in its model of national politics. Early in his argument, he tries to be inclusive in his theory of education:

That culture and the cultivation of philosophy and the arts should be confined to the cloister would be a decline into a Dark Age....on the other hand, the segregation of lay 'intellectuals' into a world of their own, which very few ecclesiastics or politicians...penetrate...is not a progressive situation either. (Eliot 30)

Here Eliot shows his distrust of academia, denigrating both the ivory tower and monastery metaphors of the university. He also decries censorship (29) and suggests that belief should not be a defining factor of citizenship, that a Christian society should include a "mixture... [of] persons of exceptional ability who may be indifferent or disbelieving... [and include] persons professing other faiths than Christianity" (Eliot 29).

But, and it is a rather large exception, Eliot spends the final two chapters narrowing the focus of his ideal society from one of pluralism and egalitarian education to one of homogeneous Christian unity and finally to an Anglican and British solidarity (37-51). He is wary of nationalism as it might detract from the Christian rhetoric he uses, and so Eliot turns to his discussion of modernity after insisting upon social unity and gathers significant momentum that might distract readers from the problems caused by stating his model society can only be achieved “when the great majority of the sheep belong to one fold” and that it is necessary to disregard “those who maintain that unity is a matter of indifference...or that a diversity of theological views is a good thing to an indefinite degree” (Eliot 37). The question this statement raises is exactly where these non-Christians fit into the assumed homogeneous society articulated in *The Idea of a Christian Society*? Are they merely show-pieces to be used to justify a society which runs the terrible risk of becoming an oligarchy—a form of government that Eliot avoids mentioning except for a brief reference to contemporary Britain not being a true democracy but a financial oligarchy (Eliot 11)? Is this merely an attempt to avoid the ugliness of his early statement about Jews and other races from *After Strange Gods*? It most certainly is a turn towards the ideas of dogma and apocalypse he expressed earlier in *Thoughts on Lambeth*. While these are possible interpretations, it is more likely that the ultimate truth of Eliot's argument is that this new English society would not be a financial oligarchy, but an intellectual Christian oligarchy.

It is important not to marginalize Eliot's thinking and risk falling into the response of critics who might see these ideas as a break from his earlier work or would ask whether

or not Eliot's "mind [has] been overthrown?," as Albert Mordell does in his polemical essay "T. S. Eliot's Deficiencies as a Social Critic" (25). Parts of Eliot's essay do articulate a positive moral and environmental vision that resonates with our present circumstance, but the reactionary nature of his argument and his desire to be taken as a critic rather than visionary leave him torn between a practical model for social activism and a desire for sweeping social change. Here is the heart of Eliot's millenarianism, trapped between action and expression. While not all pre-millenarians are so paralytic in their beliefs—certainly the success of organizations like the Salvation Army indicate otherwise—Eliot does exhibit a deep suspicion of politics.

Eliot would eventually quit The Moot due to their discussion of political action, but he nonetheless felt compelled to contribute to the British efforts in World War II, and toyed with the idea of forming a "Fraternity dedicated to action" in a speech in 1940. Many critics have found the Eliot of this period flawed—Roger Kojecký summarizes the early response as one "shocked and repelled" by Eliot's position (11). Kojecký's own argument in *T. S. Eliot's Social Criticism* adopts an inductive approach and judges Eliot as offering more "in the area of theory and principle than that of practical politics" (224). The fact is that Eliot is not engaged in conventional politics at all, but is focused on an attempt to influence the course of the future.

Eliot's prose begins to change its style following the midpoint of the war and his retreat from the Moot coincides with the publication of the lecture essay "The Social Function of Poetry" (1943; 1945) and a longer work, *Notes towards a Definition of Culture* (1948). Following World War II, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* represents a

development in Eliot's social and political conservatism. His late essays are awkward texts, as they rely heavily on the assumption of a sympathetic audience and take a number of things—primarily political and religious homogeneity—for granted. What is most critical in the post-war period is that despite his social and religious homogeneity, Eliot attempts to reach to an even wider audience.

Eliot's social and religious assumptions create a broad range of possible responses, from simple agreement to finding the essays, as Richard Rees has suggested, "intolerable if [one is] out of sympathy with Eliot's fundamental position" (103). Clinton A. Brand has argued that for liberal readers, the late Eliot becomes "a bitter, atavistic churchwarden, hiding in the sacristy, consumed by guilt and sin" (Brand 360). In the wake of literary theory, Eliot's conservatism fared poorly in the eyes of Marxist or identity-based readings, and not without justifiable cause: in both 1939's *The Idea of a Christian Society*, and 1946's *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, Eliot is intensely hierarchical and his suggestions lean towards oligarchy and snobbery. The less-palatable parts of Eliot's cultural theory combine with his poetic brilliance to place him at the centre of what Andrew John Miller has called "a tangled web of conflicting elements" (229).

Unlike *The Idea of a Christian Society*, *Notes towards a Definition of Culture* was not originally a series of lectures, although the second appendix "The Unity of European Culture" was broadcast in Germany. Preliminary drafts were published throughout 1945 in *The New English Weekly*, *Prospect for Christendom*, and *The New English Review*. This difference is important to consider because *Notes towards a Definition of Culture* is a wider public statement than *The Idea of a Christian Society*. Eliot is still highly involved in the

intellectual religious life of English society, but his focus has shifted from speaking to the converted, as he does in the earlier essay, to addressing an audience that is more diverse and perhaps less friendly than that to whom he first attempted to explain his millenarian ideas. Glenn Willmott has described Eliot's essays on culture and society as "plodding, inconsistent discourse" (132). I disagree. Eliot's rhetoric certainly changes, but his ideas remain focused on a better world defined by a society based on a tension between homogeneous faith and heterogeneous inquiry.

Eliot claims his thesis in *Notes towards a Definition of Culture* is "to help to define a word, the word culture" (Eliot, *Notes* 85). This is, on the surface, the thrust of the argument, but there is a much deeper concern running through the essay, specifically Eliot's utopianism: "The question asked by this essay, is whether there are any permanent conditions, in the absence of which no higher culture can be expected" (Eliot, *Notes* 91). This question asks how we achieve a utopia, a condition in which we might have reached the pinnacle of culture, with no further growth required. Instead of appealing directly to a Christian society, Eliot reorients his terminology, shifting from "Christianity" to "culture," but the ultimate impulse is the same: utopia is the goal, and religion still plays a critical role in Eliot's argument.

Eliot's use of "culture" is largely a rhetorical device. He provides some insight into the word, but his goal of defining it is really a strategy that allows him to continue his argument about the necessity of a common morality and a mode of intellectual meritocracy. This rhetorical structure first appears to be in conflict with Eliot's statement that he is not attempting "a political or social philosophy," but it is possible to try to

understand Eliot's statement against political or social interpretation in light of its historical moment. Written in the close of World War II, which served as the climax of so many decades of radical political and social experiments, Eliot is cautious in his opening argument. He does not want to polarize his reader from the outset, a mistake that *The Idea of a Christian Society* makes. Furthermore, it is important to reiterate that millenarian statements do not necessarily translate easily into political or social philosophies.

While critics have become comfortable with using the term "political" in a much larger sense, such as the use Fredric Jameson argues for in *The Political Unconscious*, Eliot is careful to use it in its specific, smaller, sense. The millenarian impulse is apolitical or at least wary of engaging in a political discourse, and the negative opinions held by prior scholars are based in part upon a misinterpretation of his unwillingness to engage in political solutions. Millenarians view the political apparatus as flawed and therefore see it as only hindering their utopian designs. Therefore, Eliot seeks to circumvent political arguments. He appeals to culture because, like Matthew Arnold before him, he views it, like religion, as something outside of the political sphere, a word that can be used to express ideas intended to rise above the competing ideology and violence of World War II.

The word "culture" is the intrinsic rhetoric of *Notes towards a Definition of Culture*. While he claims to focus upon culture as a whole way of life, this is really a strategy to broaden the argument first attempted in *The Idea of a Christian Society*. Eliot links the smallest of his definitions to the individual, and he elaborates at length about the role education plays in bringing about his ideal society. The Christian education he previously envisioned was not based upon belief (Eliot, *Idea* 22), and would not limit curiosity or even

religious study, but would be “directed by a Christian philosophy of life” (Eliot, *Idea* 30). This paradoxical educational model may provide some insight into why Eliot chose High Church Anglicanism, as it combines the Protestant freedom of inquiry with Roman Catholic ritual. This foundation still exists in *Notes towards a Definition of Culture*, in large part because of the process Eliot uses to describe the basic operations of culture. As individuals we are educated in a cultural tradition, and therefore society must perfect education in order to perfect its members.

This idea of cultural perfection is tied to a Christian, or at least a religious, framework. *Notes towards a Definition of Culture* is an essay peppered with signposts of millenarian fears: Eliot returns again and again to the declining nature of western culture:

Cultural disintegration is present when two or more strata [of society become] so separate that [they] become in effect distinct cultures...If I am not mistaken, some disintegration of the classes in which culture is, or would be, most highly developed, has already taken place in western society...Religious thought and practice, philosophy and art, all tend to become isolated areas cultivated by groups in no communication with one another. (*Notes* 98)

In this passage we can see Eliot’s basic concern that art, philosophy, and religion have gone their separate ways. To Eliot this situation is a major failing and one that results in the decline of civilizations. He claims that Christianity has resisted this decline better than other religions, and he is careful not to appear dogmatic or judgmental in his linking of religion to education and the culture of the one and the many. For example, he welcomes scepticism as “a highly civilized trait” while cautioning that it can descend into

“pyrrhonism.” Additionally, Eliot is quick to speak out against the easy labelling of others as infidels and aggressively proselytizing to them:

To believe that we are religious people and that other people are without religion is a simplification which approaches distortion. To reflect that from one point of view religion is culture and from another point of view culture is religion, can be very disturbing. (Eliot, *Notes* 104-5)

While Eliot’s considerable nuance can also be found in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, it is even more pronounced here. Eliot’s view of religion is neither as dogmatic as his early essays, nor is his argument insensitive to difference or identity, but nonetheless, *Notes towards a Definition of Culture* continues to insist that religion defines what is best about a culture.

Eliot’s most ardent position is that “we can see a religion as a whole way of life of a people, from birth to grace, from morning to night and even in sleep, and that way of life is also its culture” (Eliot, *Notes* 103). Eliot suggests that the best cultures are those that are most deeply connected to their religion. He understands the difficulties presented in this model, noting that conflict between religions or segments of society is likely when antagonism can be generated, particularly by the state. This shading of his argument comes later, when Eliot begins to relate his ideas to the current historical moment. He suggests that Nazism, and Fascism in general, is flawed because it misjudges the values of others and attempts to separate religion from culture (Eliot, *Notes* 196); the Soviet model of the state is also flawed because it attempts to create a new religion out of the Communist model of loyalty (Eliot, *Notes* 136). He even reflects on the wartime unity of the British

identity and on the camaraderie and levelling effect of the bomb shelters, a reality which he does not think should be continued into the post-war period (Eliot, *Notes* 124). What Eliot finds difficult about the wartime unity is, from his point of view, it lacked a class structure and was therefore not a workable model of cultural unity. (This was not the historical reality—working class men still did the majority of dangerous tasks like excavation and firefighting.)

Ultimately, *Notes towards a Definition of Culture* represents a continuation of his utopian ideals, but with modifications to its rhetoric. Eliot essentially replaces Christianity with “Culture” as another means with which to express his ideal Christian society. Throughout the essay, Eliot gives voice to the fear of collapse, the fear of change and a lack of coherence; for example: “Many people seem to take for granted that English culture is something self-sufficient and secure; that it will persist whatever happens” (Eliot, *Notes* 131). Eliot sees the extinguishing of English identity in both foreign influence and internal complacency. The sense of disintegration and decline is resisted through a direct appeal to the organic community, that a point of time (for Eliot, sometime in the high Middle Ages), in which Europe was united by its faith. This reinforcement of what could be called a Catholic Age in Eliot’s mind, returns us to over a decade earlier in *Thoughts after Lambeth* and even further back to his essay on Dante and the poems of the 1920s.

Eliot’s cultural essays are conservative, reactionary, and utopian and these tensions articulate his anxieties and his beliefs. Eliot wants there to be an elite, and more correctly, he wants an elite that thinks like him and shares his values, but he tries so hard to resist an urge towards homogeneity and privilege. His desire to see his present “blossom into a

culture more brilliant than we can show today" (Eliot, *Notes* 106) combines with his inability to imagine a world without religion or class and comes into conflict with the more pragmatic aspect of his thinking. As much as Eliot desires a culture of well-educated Christians, he cannot also imagine a society without difference or conflict: "the vital importance for a society [is] friction between its parts" (Eliot, *Notes* 132). He remains steadfast that "within the unity there should be an endless conflict between ideas" (Eliot, *Notes* 157). This is an odd state of culture, united by religious expression, but in constant struggle over its ideas and identity. It is possible that what underlies Eliot's thinking is an idealization of religion, or perhaps Eliot wishes to retain the impulse to critique and dissent so necessary to Protestantism. Clearly, what he is trying to express is a state of culture and society in which the millenarian impulse towards a golden age is realized.

If Eliot had been a different sort of writer, a different sort of philosopher, he might have written the exact same essays but exchanged "religion" for "science" as some millenarians do, or perhaps he might have dreamed of a great spiritual overturning of Christianity like Yeats. Ultimately his pre-millenarianism was given a voice in these works, but never coalesced into dramatic action. This might be due to the fact that World War II undermined his sense of what was possible in terms of social change, or made him realize that a pluralistic society was inevitable or even necessary to the future of England. But it must be admitted that the change in his rhetoric might have been a result of the personal reserve and inner life that we do not yet fully understand.

A New Homeland

Just as Eliot's experience of the 1930s and 40s altered the language of his pre-millenarianism, Auden's perspective of the same events would lead him to abandon pre-millenarianism all together and shift across the spectrum towards post-millenarianism. This transition can be recognized as early as 1935 when Auden began a series of extended trips beginning with Iceland, and later Spain, China, and Belgium. These travels would culminate in his decision to leave England and emigrate to the USA, to return to Christianity, and to change both his approach to poetry and the future.

The trip to Iceland was to be a way of both avoiding England and fulfilling his love of the Norse Sagas. As his time in Iceland ended, Auden began composing his first complete long poem, *A Letter to Lord Byron*. Auden felt closer to Byron than Wordsworth, and his movement towards Romanticism reflects his growing sense of becoming more fully engaged with the world while retaining and motivating his millenarianism. Auden would write in *Letters from Iceland* "We are all too deeply involved with Europe to be able, or even to wish to escape" (30).

For the remainder of the decade, Auden would explore Europe and Asia for a solution to his discomfort. Perhaps the most famous context for these explorations was the Spanish Civil War. Like Eliot, Auden would not become a politician, but the Spanish Civil War was, as Humphrey Carpenter puts it, "the apocalyptic battle [Auden and his friends] had been hoping for" (206). The crashing together of two utopian projects—Fascism and Communism—provided a millenarian frisson to the European stage and Auden was attracted to the war because it reflected a cause that "made action urgent and its nature

clear” and because he so hated “everyday political activities...but here is something I can do as a citizen and now as a writer” (qtd. in Carpenter 206).

Carpenter not only notes that the above comments contain no real care for the Spanish or their cause, but also that Auden offers no clearer motivation for his interest. (207). It is likely that Auden used the Spanish conflict as a moment on which to test his interest in utopian politics. If the perfect world is to be achieved, and if he is to be able to express some hope of it, he must go forward and experience the vitality of the conflict himself. The media quickly seized on Auden’s decision to go to Spain and ran stories with headlines like “Famous Poet to Drive Ambulance in Spain” (Hynes 243). Like other writers from England, including Stephen Spender and George Orwell, Auden was initially impressed by the state of Socialist/Republican Barcelona, but the supposedly “faithless” Auden was struck by the state of the Catholic churches: “all the churches were closed and there was not a priest to be seen. To my astonishment, this discovery left me profoundly shocked and disturbed” (*Modern Canterbury Pilgrims* 41). Auden’s experience in Spain reawakened his religious sensibilities. It would still be years until Auden re-joined the Church, but the tension he felt in Spain is important in an attempt to understand his millenarianism.

Auden was not only cautious about religion, he also once again hesitated to join the Communist Party, and any real propaganda value Auden may have represented to the Republicans went unrealized (Carpenter 211). The longer he remained in Spain, the more cautious Auden became of the Communist forces. The war seems to have tainted his initial enthusiasm and as the violence of the war grew, Auden emotionally retreated from any

ideological cause; in an unpublished *Time* magazine interview, he explained “Just seeing what Civil War was like was a shock. Nothing good could come of it...One asked oneself, did one want to win?” (qtd. in Carpenter 214). George Orwell, in *Homage to Catalonia*, notes that the whole war had a kind of futility about it due to the Communist attempt to form an “non-political” army (27-8). It is possible that for both Orwell and Auden, the inconclusiveness of the war stemmed from the inability of competing utopian and millenarian movements to achieve actual dominance over one another through the Spanish Civil War. Essentially, the war reflects the failure of millenarians to offer real political solutions to their present circumstances.

One facet of millenarianism that Yeats, Eliot, and Auden all experienced in the 1930s and 40s was a collapsing or deflating of their millenarianism. It is somewhat sad (although not tragic in these cases) that their ideas for a better world all failed in this period, whether it was the kind of radical new world of Yeats or simply Auden’s Agape-driven socialist peace. When Auden returned to England in 1937 he was uncharacteristically reserved about Spain: “I did not wish to talk about Spain when I returned because I was upset by many things I saw or heard about. Some of them were described better than I could ever have done by George Orwell... Others were what I learned about the treatment of priests” (qtd. in Ford 288, note 8). Auden later remembered, “I was shocked and disillusioned. But any disillusion of mine could only be of advantage to Franco. And however I felt, I certainly didn’t want Franco to win. It is always a moral problem when to speak. To speak at the wrong time can do great harm. Franco won. What

was the use? If the Republic had been victorious, then there would have been reason to speak out about what was wrong with it" (qtd. in Carpenter 215).

In *The Auden Generation*, Samuel Hynes explores how Auden made an attempt to renew his worldview through poetry, specifically asking the reader to surmise how Auden might have responded to Christopher Caudwell's last chapter of *Illusion and Reality*, "The Future of Poetry" (259). Hynes' interest stems from the fact that Auden and his contemporaries are singled out in Caudwell's chapter as being deficient in their political commitment. While he admits that Caudwell is correct in his judgement that "Auden's sense of the future is set down in images of bourgeois freedom and bourgeois equality," Hynes finds Caudwell incorrect to see this as "a poetical failing" (260). Instead, Hynes argues for the value in how Auden most of all recognized "that poetry comes out of the life one has lived, and that a bourgeois poet cannot make himself proletarian by an act of will" (260). There is a basic level of truth to Hynes' ideas—Auden does repeatedly stop on the threshold of action—but it is also possible that the hesitation Auden experiences is a result of his millenarianism: to act upon utopian ideas is to run great risks.⁴⁰

"Spain 1937" is the first of a series of three similar poems that Auden would write over the next eight years. Each poem—"Spain 1937," "In Time of War," and "Memorial for the City,"—mediates upon the progress of history and the idea of a "Just city." "Spain 1937" uses the distinction between yesterday and today to emphasize a sense of teleology and urgency:

⁴⁰ While Auden reviewed Caudwell glowingly, acclaiming *Illusion and Reality* as "the most important book on poetry since the books of Dr. Richards, and, in [his] opinion, provides a more satisfactory answer to many of the problems which poetry raises" (387), he did not remain even a lukewarm Marxist and his verse reflects his turning away from Communism.

The trail of heretics among the columns of stone;

Yesterday the theological feuds in the taverns

And the miraculous cure at the fountain;

Yesterday the Sabbath of the Witches. But to-day the struggle.

Yesterday the installation of dynamos and turbines;

The construction of railways in the colonial desert;

Yesterday the classic lecture

On the origin of Mankind. But to-day the struggle. (13-20)

These lines contrast faith and science, moving the reader from the Reformation to the Enlightenment and beyond. Auden describes Spain as a place to which all eyes have turned and a place where “History the operator” might be seen (35). It is important to note that “Spain 1937” is a distinctly Marxist poem, and 1937 was the apex of his interest in Marx and Engels (Replogle 591). In the poem, Spain rejects the idea that history has purpose and instead claims to be “Yes-man, the bar-companion, the easily-duped: / I am whatever you do.” If the reader proposes “the Just City,” as Plato or Augustine do, Spain is willing attempt it, but it is equally willing to attempt “the suicide pact, the romantic / Death?” (47-56).

The poem then shifts from discussing the relationship of past and present to discussing the relationship of future and present. This shift places the speaker in the war—“To-day the inevitable increase in the chances of death” (81)—and permits the poem to remind us what is lost in war: scholarship and scientific discovery (69-72), romantic love

(73), relaxation and art (74-80). Peace is a time when poets can be found “exploding like bombs,” but war does not allow for such luxuries or foolish metaphors. Instead, in the poems end

The stars are dead; the animals will not look:

We are left alone with our day, and the time is short and

History to the defeated

May say Alas but cannot help our pardon.

Auden would later repudiate these closing lines (going so far as to call them “a lie” in Cyril Connolly’s copy of the 1966 *Collected Short Poems* [Fuller, *Commentary* 286-7]), but they express the tenor of his waning pre-millenarianism. John Fuller argues that the opening of the stanza indicates that “only mankind is forced to make moral choices” and this is a strong insight, but when coupled with his other possible meaning—“a moment of stasis and horror” we can see how the poem’s conclusion finds something unnatural about Communism and Fascism (*Commentary* 286-7).

In “Spain 1937” Auden uses nature to exclude millenarian ideas in order to distance him from the war. When he later returns to themes of nature and millennium, as he does in “Memorial for the City,” animals watch keenly. What we read in “Spain 1937” is a growing sense of futility that Auden feels towards utopian rhetoric which relies on secular expression and violent conflict. The poem makes stark choices apparent: humanity is responsible for itself and we cannot wait for divine salvation. As Replogole puts it, the poems view of history denies any opportunity to “shuffle off human responsibility by hoping that some convenient ‘force’ in the universe will provide a benevolent plan” and it

insists on human action (590). This is a marker of how Auden stresses a pre-millennial route to Utopia in the 1930s. Humanity can and should work towards a better world. But such a position would be short lived. "Spain 1937" marks the beginning of Auden's movement towards a more traditional Christian post-millenarianism, a shift that would move Auden's verse away from social commentary towards technique and philosophy.

From 1938 forward, Auden begins to alter the course of his millenarianism. He successively retreats from pre-millenarian inquiry in favour of a post-millenarian religiosity. This is in part why he chose to suppress "Spain 1937" and other poems, including "September 1, 1939." They represent Auden's early idealism and his millenarian notions of the future. To extol that "we must love one another or die" as Auden does in "September 1, 1939" became increasingly untenable to Auden after his adoption of a post-millennial position (88). Both "Spain 1937" and "September 1, 1939" show an intense, almost pleading, desire for social change. The change is not transcendental, not religious, but is longed for in these poems, and as Auden's writings on Yeats also remind us, "poetry makes nothing happen: it survives" (36).

The period of 1938-40 was exceptionally productive for Auden, and a large number of the poems he is most remembered for, such as "*Musée des Beaux Arts*," were written during this period. His fame was also at its height: in 1937, he was awarded the King's Gold Medal for Poetry. Stephen Spender expressed regret over Auden's acceptance of the medal in *New Verse*, a left-wing poetry magazine, suggesting the medal was "part of the process by which the writer who has a good heart at the age of twenty and is therefore a socialist, develops a good brain at forty and becomes a conservative" (qtd. in Carpenter

230). Despite the disappointment of his friends on the left, Auden still maintained a large presence as a writer: *New Verse* published a double-issue dedicated to essays on Auden, in which Edwin Muir, Graham Greene, and Dylan Thomas (among others) praised his poetry.

The editor and co-founder of *New Verse*, Geoffrey Grigson, still referred to the 1930s as “The Auden Age” (Carpenter 230). But if Auden was the defining poet of the decade, it appears to be a title which he himself was uncomfortable with, and he was quick to leave England again, this time heading for China. He must have sensed that being used as a label for some kind of “Auden Age” or “Auden Generation” held the potential of locking his literary career into a form of stasis. This, in effect, is exactly what has happened: the Auden of the 1930s is the Auden most commonly anthologized, despite the fact that his most complex and mature poetry—two-thirds of his entire *oeuvre*—would be composed *after* 1940.

Auden’s 1938 trip to China with Christopher Isherwood set the stage for his emigration to the United States. Unlike Iceland, China had no childhood resonance for him and the country held many surprises and shocks for Auden. At times Auden and Isherwood would adopt the personas of schoolboy chums, more out-to-play than seriously considering the implications of the Japanese invasion of China. The trip produced one of Auden’s best reflections on war, “In Time of War,” which was included in Auden and Isherwood’s travel book *Journey to a War*. While serving as a contrast to the more aloof prose sections (Fuller, *Commentary* 235), the poem also represents a continuation of Auden’s thoughts about history and the future. Auden returns to the ideas of “Spain 1937”

and develops its motifs of human history, utopia, and violence. "In Time of War" is a much more expansive work than "Spain 1937" and contains a more detailed idea of humanity and history in its twenty-seven sonnets and its 310 line "verse commentary," but it also lacks the concision that Auden is later able to bring to these themes in "Memorial for a City."

"In Time of War" begins with images of a natural world full of bounty:

So from the years the gifts were showered; each
 Ran off with his at once into his life:
 Bee took the politics that make a hive,
 Fish swam as fish, peach settled into peach. (I.1-4)

The images here are primordial and pre-human. Auden introduces the human as a "childish creature," able to develop and fashion its future, "On whom the years could model any feature," but who is also a creature of duality, a creature able to "fake with ease a leopard or a dove" (I.9-11). Sonnet II takes up history immediately after the loss of Eden, a choice of subject that allows him to place a golden age into the past. John Fuller notes that the poem views this as an impossibility, and Fuller's interpretation that "Man is this in a state, not of Being, but of Becoming" might be taken further (*Commentary* 236). The utopia of Eden is not fully rejected and the process of Becoming can be seen as a route to a utopian future. This emphasis on a state of becoming reflects Auden's slow adoption of a post-millenarian perspective.

The post-millenarianism can be seen in how Auden's argument divides humanity from nature:

They left: immediately the memory faded

Of all they'd learnt; they could not understand

The dogs now who, before had always aided;

The stream was dumb with whom they'd always planned. (5-8)

Humanity has a particular journey out of Eden to undertake and so, at the end of the stanza, humanity finds itself set against the universe, much like it did at the end of "Spain 1937." This forced separation or struggle between humanity and the rest of nature is important in the light of Auden's "Commentary," which emphasizes evolution:

Certainly the growth of the fore-brain has been a success:

He has not got lost in a backwater like the lampshell

Of the limpet; he has not died out like the super-lizards. (10-12)

Auden's use of secular language and scientific ideas are motivated by their millenarian content. The kind of poorly-worded and teleological language that surrounds public discussions of evolution most often centres on the idea of an "ascent of man" (a rhetoric that had attracted Auden to Gerald Heard's work). This attribution of a special uniqueness to the human condition is foolhardy and uncritical, as neither nature nor the process of evolution has any goal or end-point. The attraction of the idea of ascent is that it privileges human consciousness and maintains the supremacy of the human in a manner nearly identical to the Biblical claim that God created humanity in his image. Auden clearly intends to challenge the separation of religious and secular teleology.

The sonnet sequence moves through the rise and fall of both Rome and medieval Christendom and into a new age, in which capitalism and democracy develop:

He turned his field into a meeting-place,
 And grew the tolerant ironic eye,
 And formed the mobile money-changer's face
 And found the notion of equality. (VIII.1-4)

These changes might be improvements, especially as the Enlightenment and humanism allow for great deeds and a movement away from religious violence—"And with his spires he made a human sky" (VIII.6)—but these changes also produce the alienation of modernity: the city develops too quickly, "And he forgot what once it had been made for, / And gathered into crowds and was alone," (VII.10-11). The image of the city as a failed meeting-place and a place of isolation would be explored more deeply in "Memorial for the City," but "In a Time of War" moves past the image quickly, in large part because Auden wants to move past the historical discussion and meditate upon the failure of the present.

History has no constant in the poem or, as Auden will come to think of it, a contrasting element. It moves forward because like in "Spain 1937" Auden still hopes to engage the present as a way of improving the future. The opening of sonnet XIV, "Yes, we are going to suffer, now; the sky / Throbs like a feverish forehead; pain is real;" (1-2) is a restatement of "Spain 1937" and its refrain "But to-day the struggle." The present is now the war in China, and the present is violent because,

Behind each sociable home-loving eye
 The private massacres are taking place;
 All women, Jews, the Rich, the Human Race. (XIV.9-12)

Auden's great ironic voice is apparent in the idea of "private massacres" which he links to the collective violence of Fascism, or in the case of China, nationalism and imperialism.

In the violence of the present, we are still divided from nature and still dumb to it:

The mountains cannot judge us when we lie:

We dwell upon the earth; the earth obeys

The intelligent and evil till they die.

The plain language of the poem works well to convey its ideas. Auden clearly hoped to be understood and the poem bears few obscure lines. Instead, the poem's later sonnets grow in specificity and the images of mountains recur, expressing an idea of hope—"A mountain people dwelling among the mountains" (XXVII.12)—at the close of the poem. It is an image of harmony and peace that pairs well with the commentary's closing verses:

Clear from the head the masses of impressive rubbish;

Rally the lost and trembling forces of the will,

Gather them up and let them loose upon the earth,

Till they construct at last a human justice,

Till the contribution of our star, with the shadow

Of which uplifting, loving, and constraining power

All other reasons may rejoice and operate.' (294-310)

Such a hopeful exultation of the reader is clearly intended as a call-to-arms, not to war but to build a better future. The poem is marked by a prelapsarian longing, or what Mendelson calls "the dream of a free arcadian past (*Early* 357). Fuller also notes the

“unattainable Golden Age” in the poem (*Commentary* 241). While both critics are able to link these ideas of Auden’s religion, neither critic is able to fully connect the pattern of a prelapsarianism to the utopian longing which motivated him to seek answers to the question of justice and history. In fact, Auden remains attached to secular language, despite the poem’s flirtation with religious imagery, and the utopia he imagines here is entirely human. Following his trip to China, Auden would further reject the idea of a human justice and begin to move away from pre-millenarianism towards a theological post-millenarianism.

Auden and Isherwood returned to England from China via the USA and both writers were immediately taken with the energy and lifestyle of New York. Following another short overseas trip to Brussels, Auden decided to leave England for America. Auden embraced the idea of America like he had embraced Marxism and the work of Gerald Heard, with intense enthusiasm and little critical evaluation at first (Auden’s refusal to be dogmatic invariably soured his early enthusiasm). America represented a chance to start over, in a city that was still metropolitan and connected to Europe but different from the English society that Auden was coming to view as hostile to his writing.

In his “Introduction to the *Oxford Book of Light Verse*,” Auden takes the opportunity to discuss the collapse of “social community” (433). He sees the growth of psychological depth in literature as a direct result of the development of modernity and its stress on the contrast between the individual and the group. For Auden, this separation becomes a larger problem in the present: “The problem for the modern poet, as for every one (sic) else to-day, is how to find or form a genuine community, in which each has his valued

place and can feel at home. The old Pre-industrial community and culture are gone and cannot be brought back" (436). Auden is quick to not idealize the medieval, and he cautions the reader against simple nostalgia: "Nor is it desirable that they should be. They were too unjust, too squalid, and too custom-bound" (436). Unlike Yeats and Eliot, Auden cannot valorize the Middle Ages and instead turns to the radical idea that language itself represents a space similar to an organic community.

Not wanting to return to the past leads Auden to the future, and his rhetoric begins to combine past and future in a distinctly millenarian fashion:

In the future, societies will not grow of themselves. They will either be made consciously or decay. A democracy in which each citizen is as fully conscious and capable of making a rational choice, as in the past has been possible only for the wealthier few, is the only kind of society which in the future is likely to survive for long. (436)

The tone here is quite catastrophic and Auden places a great deal of emphasis upon the vague social-levelling provided by education. There is a broad commonality with Eliot's ideas, especially in the attempt to retain democracy, provide education, and achieve a utopia.⁴¹ It is possible that Auden appeals to the ideas of organic community and organic

⁴¹ Auden's other writings on politics from the late 1930s also dwell upon the challenge of creating a democratic utopia. In "Democracy's Reply to the Challenge of Dictators," He finds the lure of Fascism to be in the failure of Liberal Democracy to be concerned with justice:

[Fascism] is the most important problem of the countries of the world to-day. It does not consist simply of one or two men, so that, if Hitler were pumped off, it would disappear. The danger of Fascism arises because Liberal Democracy, by failing to mete out justice in society, has made people feel that freedom is not worth while...Fascists, again, say that there is here and now the perfect form of society which will last forever. (464-65)

Auden argues that "Social Democracy" has to respond to such claims. For his part, Auden argues that education must be the bedrock of our response, but unlike Eliot, who places faith at the centre of his utopia,

art; he is clear that art cannot be fully achieved unless this “integrated and free” society comes about (436); he considers an organic community necessary to produce great art, a position similar to what Yeats’s Byzantium and Eliot’s Dante represent.

Auden’s ideas of morality and justice are more clearly explored in his essay “Morality in an Age of Change” and are based upon a linguistic clarity that relates to a broader social order. He argues that our notions of morality are unclear and undefined and that “it is the duty of every one of us, not only to ourselves but to future generations of men, to have a clear understanding of what we mean when we uses these words” (486). The words he refers to are good and evil, democracy and liberty, justice and reason, and Auden stresses that these function as part of a community. He finds any idea of a social contract false and thinks the individual to be purely “an intellectual abstraction” (479). He draws a clear line between his views on society and the future, emphasizing the opposition of socialism and Fascism and arguing that a choice has to be made between them:

Thus I cannot see how a Socialist country could tolerate the existence of a Fascist party any more than a Fascist country could tolerate the existence of a Socialist party. I judge them differently because I think that the Socialists are right and the Fascists are wrong in their view of society. (It is always wrong in an absolute sense to kill, but all killing is not equally bad; it does matter who is killed.) (486)

Auden focuses on the necessity for social justice. Justice would remain the foundation of Auden’s millenarianism and his religion as well, but here is still working within a kind of secular socialist pre-millenarian desire for action.

Auden outlines the Manichaeism of the period more clearly than Yeats and Eliot, in large part because in contrast with those two earlier poets Auden tried to find a secular expression for his millenarianism. At the end of the 1930s, Auden would abandon secular millenarianism in favour of a return to Christianity, a process he was already undertaking when he wrote these essays.

Auden and Isherwood arrived in America on 26 January 1939, shortly before Yeats's death and the start of World War II. Auden was eagerly received by literary circles, with the poet Richard Eberhart suggesting "Auden's coming to America may prove as significant as Eliot's leaving it" (qtd. in Carpenter 254). In England, Auden's choice to leave and not return made him a pariah, and he was attacked as either as a coward or a careerist. Part of the content of these criticisms was fuelled by the fact that the USA had far more opportunities to make an income as a writer and Auden did find it easier to make a living both as a teacher and a writer following the move.

Throughout the early and mid-thirties, Auden had maintained a stylish agnosticism, just as he had maintained a vague left-wing socialist position. Following his experiences in Spain and China, Auden's thinking on the matter of faith and politics changed. Despite the fact that Auden would tease his friends, especially Isherwood with religious taunts—"Careful, careful, my dear—if you go on like that, you'll have *such* a conversion, one of these days"—Isherwood also wrote of Auden in his secular period, "I have to keep a sharp eye on [Auden]—or down flop the characters on their knees; another constant danger is that of choral interruptions by angel-voices" (qtd. in Carpenter 237). Although Auden played the role of secular intellectual, his desire for a system to order his

thoughts and express his utopian ideas would lead him towards active religious experimentation.

There are other changes in Auden's philosophy that reflect the growing strength of his millenarianism. Foremost among them is his final rejection of politics. In 1939, Auden had given a speech in support of Spanish Refugees during which he discovered "I could really do it, that I could make a fighting demagogic speech and have the audience roaring. I felt just covered in dirt afterwards...Never, *never* again will I speak at a political meeting" (qtd. in Carpenter 256). This repudiation of politics continued throughout the years of World War II—he was able to praise Reinhold Niebuhr's 1941 *The Nature and Destiny of Man* as "the most lucid and balanced statement of orthodox Protestantism that we are likely to see for a long time" but Auden refused to comment publically on the implications of Neibuhr's anti-pacifist views. Auden's retreat from politics was the result of his dissatisfaction with their millenarian potential. Like Eliot, Auden rejected the idea of making political concessions to his utopia.

But if Auden was adopting an apolitical stance more common to millenarians, he was not entering into an asocial phase. In 1940 he had returned to the Anglican Church of his youth, but many of his late-1930s poetic subjects continued to find expression in his poetry. The themes of history and violence which had previously dominated "Spain 1937" and "In a Time of War" found a new counterpoint in "Memorial for the City." Written in 1949, the poem claims to be an elegy in memory of Charles Williams (Hamilton 170).⁴²

⁴² Auden had met Williams in 1937, when Auden had proposed the Oxford Book of Light Verse. Williams's manner made a deep impression on Auden and he later recalled the meeting in glowing terms: "I had met many good people before who made me feel ashamed of my own shortcomings, but in the presence of this

Auden's verse seems to have found the death of figures like Yeats and Williams a way of channelling his own voice and focusing his own ideas through the act of eulogy, and his four part poem provides a greater philosophic depth than his prior meditations on the subject of a Just City.

"Memorial for the City" begins by conflating nature and technology in a way that his earlier poems would not have allowed: "The eyes of the crow and the eye the camera open" (l.1) These eyes will move through the poem, function as observers of the world and as a film montage. The poem opens "Onto Homer's world, not ours" and then, like "Spain 1937" and "In a Time of War," progresses forward through history. Part I moves the reader from Troy to Rome where "the steady eyes of the crow and the camera's candid eye/ See as honestly as they know how" (24-5). This might indicate some kind of reassurance or universal constant (nature is always there, humanity's tools are ours to use) but in fact "they lie" to us: the passage of time is not "the crime of life" in the poem. Instead the crime of life is a division between the real and the spiritual as the city Auden emphasizes in the title—the City of God—is the only real constant.

Part two of the poem moves the historical perspective through medieval Europe to the Enlightenment. Auden offers some praise for the medieval world, which is not entirely unexpected given the religious argument of the poem:

The facts, the acts of the City bore a double meaning:

Limbs became hymns; embraces expressed in jest

A more permanent tie; infidel faces replaced

man—we never discussed anything but literary business—I did not feel ashamed. I felt transformed into a person who was incapable of doing or thinking anything base or unloving" (*Modern Canterbury Pilgrims* 41).

The family foe in the choleric's nightmare. (43-6)

But as the Romans give way to Christianity and "Those born under Saturn felt the gloom of the day of doom" (49), Auden's verse judges much of the medieval world as poor: the Crusaders become "suspicious tribes combined / to rescue Jerusalem from a dull god" and the community of faith is undone when "Luther denounced as obscene / The machine that so smoothly forgave and saved / If paid" (57-9). Auden's use of rhyme is especially skilful here, as is his ability to use the rhythm of popular music to make the Reformation remarkably contemporary to the reader.

In fact, "Memorial for the City" uses a kind of anachronistic juxtaposition of language and imagery to reinforce the immediacy of the poem's action. The poem's attack on the Enlightenment is just as quick as it is in the case of Medieval Europe. Science is a torturer's art: "Nature was put to the Question in the Prince's name; / She confessed, what he wished to hear, that she had no soul" (71-2) and the great plans of Revolutionary France are seen as pure folly:

In a national capital Mirabeau and his set

Attacked mystery; the packed galleries roared

And history marched to the drums of a clear idea,

The aim of the Rational City, quick to admire,

Quick to tire: she used up Napoleon and threw him away;

Her pallid affected heroes

Began their hectic quest for the prelapsarian man. (78-84)

The idea of finding “the prelapsarian man” is a dismissal of the edict of the natural man or the noble savage of Rousseau and, according to Lucy McDiarmid, part of the poem’s indictment of Romanticism itself (*Civilization* 100). It is after the fall of Paris as the great city and the ships of civilization have been shipwrecked “on the Gibbering Isles” (94) of the Romantics, that a new “Conscious City” comes to the foreground (98). Craig Hamilton argues that the Conscious City is an indictment of “the Moscow created by the Russian Revolution” (175) and this appear to work well with the poem’s symbolic use of utopian cities: Rome, the City of God, Revolutionary Paris, and so on.

But the poem then departs from the historical mode. Auden’s earlier attempts at discussing the influence of history on the present always concluded with a vague summation—the mute stars of “Spain 1937” or the silent mountains of “In a Time of War.” In “Memorial for the City,” Auden uses natural imagery only briefly, turning to the urban landscape he understands. The landscape of Part III is a blasted cityscape:

Across the square

Between the burnt-out Law Courts and Police Headquarters,

Past the Cathedral far too damaged to repair (99-101)

The urban landscape of the poem is “abolished” and “erased” (104; 110); the physical violence of Auden’s present has damaged the minds of the survivors and our dreams are a place of where “barbed wire also runs” (112). The effect of modernity and war is to “[trip] us so we fall” (112). But then the poem begins to change its expression because “behind the wire” our “Image” (117-18)—humanity’s true self—is untouched:

It has no image to admire
 No age, no sex, no memory, no creed, no name,
 It can be counted multiplied, employed
 In any place, at any time destroyed. (119-22)

These are strange lines to describe what Auden reveals to be the Image of “Adam waiting for His City” (128). The idea though is literally a hopeful one in the poem: “that is our hope; that we weep and it does not grieve / That for It the wire and the ruins are not the end” (124-25).

The revelation of Adam and the City of God is answered by the single emphasized line the poem: “*Let Our Weakness speak*” (129). This might in fact be the voice of Adam, but it is equally possible that the voice is the cry of humanity seeking salvation. McDiarmind claims the poem “is not revelation, just theological assertion,” but this reading discounts the earning for millennium in the poem and seems to arbitrarily limit Auden’s ideas to a “blur [of] theology and literary criticism” (*Apologies* 140). Either way, it introduces a new figure into the poem, the speaker of part IV. With a new voice, the poem shifts to the use of the first-person singular and the City of God reassures us that it has always been present from Adam through Orpheus, Jesus through Galahad, Hamlet through Captain Ahab. This rhetorical choice echoes Yeats’s interests in “*Rosa Alchemica*,” where characters, not authors, were the keys to enlightenment. These religious and literary figures, reflect an attempt to argue that writing and literature are the way towards revelation, and Auden would increasingly come to see literature and language, not society or politics, as the space for utopian expression.

The rise of New York, “Metropolis,” as the great city of the present is found wanting by the Eternal City — “Her speeches impress me little, her statistics less” (146) — and offers a promise to the future “I shall rise again to hear her judged” (148). Such an idea places the return of the Eternal City into the future and the poem as a whole embraces a transcendental vision of imminent utopia. Recent readings of the poem, such as Hamilton’s or Mendelson’s, read the poem for its use of motifs like the city or the body (178), but fail to engage with the utopianism of the poem in a concrete fashion. McDiarmid does discuss the poem’s spiritual significance, but dismisses it as a “poem [which] renounces its own importance as it denies culture spiritual value” (*Apologies* 148). While McDiarmid does recognize the importance of Auden’s utopianism, her reading does not address the way this poem marks a major transition in Auden’s thinking.

What Auden could not fully express in his earlier poems was the path to utopia, but “Memorial for the City” succeeds in being Auden’s fullest and perhaps most hopeful expression of his millenarianism during this period. The resting place of millennium comes to lie in the creative human act and to be best expressed in the language of a culture. Language and structure is dramatically important to the post-1930s Auden, or as Fuller describes it, “this model [of the poem] underlines the role of language in the solution to the riddle” it is not only our Weakness but our Weakness understanding and speaking Adam’s cry of ‘*O Felix Culpa*’ (*Commentary* 420-21). “Memorial of the City” does not ironically dismiss the City of God, but laments humanity’s eagerness to be seduced by other, more mundane cities.

Auden's verse and writings of the late 1930s and early 1940s show his transition from a pre-millenarian socialist to a post-millenarian Christian. He moves along the spectrum of millenarianism to a position perhaps even more orthodox than Eliot. Eliot's political conservatism divides him from Auden's liberalism, but like Eliot, Auden turns towards traditional, even conventional forms through which to express his millenarianism. Auden lacked Yeats's raw creative ability to re-imagine the world, but in the decades to follow Auden's writing will test the degree to which post-millenarianism and rationalism could be contained in verse, an organic community of language.

Perhaps the greatest challenge Eliot and Auden faced in the post-war period is a waning of Modernism's thematic interest in utopia. Over the decades to come, the violence of World War II would engender a movement towards greater relativism, both in philosophy and politics. The effect of this intellectual shift would produce a new set of social concerns and the spectrum of the future would oscillate more dramatically between millennium, continuity, and catastrophe. While neither poet would abandon millenarian themes, the war and its aftereffect would inevitably influence and alter their ideas.

CHAPTER SIX: THE CHANGING CENTURY, 1946-1973

*This while when, practical like paper-dishes,
Truth is convertible to kilowatts,
Our last to do by is an anti-model,
Some truth anyone can give the lie to,
A nothing no one need believe is there.
— Auden, "The History of Truth" (12-16)*

If the first half of the twentieth century was focused on millenarian ideas of utopia, the latter half was forced to cope with a much more catastrophic potential future. The appearance of nuclear weapons dramatically altered our conception of the future. For the first time in our history, humanity now had an entirely secular way to end civilization's problems, but not through a utopian celebration of science. The closing year of World War II disrupted the idea of the future, resulting in a Manichaeian struggle between democracy and Communism fought through proxy wars and cultural imperialism.

The ability to annihilate whole cities and societies was no longer the province of the Old Testament, and was now a matter of public policy. It is possible that the impact nuclear weapons had upon our notion of the future disabled our ability to meaningfully understand nuclear power as an alternative to fossil fuels, because notions of catastrophe radically challenge the ideas of continuity and millennium. The ability to foresee a future devoid of humanity due to our own actions creates a rather grim opinion of our ability to think rationally and to act in our own best interests, akin to Ronald Wright's exploration of

civilization in his 2004 Massey Lecture *A Short History of Progress*, or Jared Diamond's similarly pessimistic *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (2005). Essentially, the post-war period is marked by an abandonment of millennium and a growing sense of catastrophe.

Despite the growing dominance of a catastrophic future, millenarianism did not fade away but found numerous and diverse expressions throughout the period. The Cold War was intensely characterized by a growing millenarianism in the United States of America. The fact that McCarthyism is so readily comparable to witch trials and medieval inquisition is not a coincidence or clever metaphor; in fact, such a comparison is hardly even a metaphor, simply recognition that the motives of religious and political dogmas are the same and the methods they use reflect their desire to maintain control of the faithful: control by positioning an external enemy. Alternatively, and perhaps more positively, the counter-culture movement of the 1960s can be seen as a keenly millenarian movement, which is not terribly distinct from religious notions of Agape and liberation. The civil rights movement, especially as expressed through Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speeches, was deeply millenarian, and the violence with which the civil rights movement was met demonstrates the degree to which "democracies" themselves can be divided deeply into Manichaeian projects of us and them. These divisions are the result of our attempts to control the future, the future being ultimately what is at stake in any challenge to a society's status quo.

Literature's place in society would shift during this period as new media became more wide-spread and more sophisticated. Poetry, in particular visionary poetry, would

become less fashionable and begin to fade from public discourse. A radically different study from this one might be able to explore the way millenarian poetics became entwined with popular music in the 1960s and might be able to argue that the song became an ideal vehicle for millenarian rhetoric in the latter quarter of the century, even while the technology used to listen to that very music increases our alienation and isolation.

For Eliot and Auden, the notion of a secular society was an undesirable one. The closing decades of their careers allowed them to express their notions of future and millennium much more deeply and personally than the political arguments of the 1930s had. Their works stand as a stark reminder that millenarianism begins with an individual sense of alienation and then reaches out for collective action, not the other way around. What is critically different, of course, is that Eliot is staunchly pre-millenarian. He believes that utopia is a process of gradual, social improvement, while Auden abandons such ideas, turning to the post-millenarian conception of apocalyptic utopia.

The Age of Anxiety

Early in 1945, Auden was contacted by the Pentagon and asked to be part of the *United States Strategic Bombing Survey* in Germany. He leapt at the chance and was given the rank of Major. After arriving in Germany in May, Auden worked for several months, interviewing survivors and civilians as a Bombing Research Analyst with the Morale Division. Auden's own sense of humanity and his critical mind kept him from being fully involved in the survey, commenting that "This *morale* title is illiterate and absurd. How can one learn anything about morals, when one's actions are so beyond any kind of

morality. Morale with an 'e' at the end is psycho-sociological nonsense. What they want to say, but don't say, is how many people we killed and how many buildings we destroyed by that wicked bombing" (Nabakov 136). His stay in Germany was short, and ultimately saddening; he remarked to Stephen Spender that the Allied occupation was going to fail: "Something might have been done, but it's too late" (qtd. in Carpenter 336).

The experience Auden had with the soldiers and researchers conducting the survey played a small part in the final revisions of a long poem Auden had begun formulating in 1944: *The Age of Anxiety*. The poem marks a radical departure for Auden and served as both a technical experiment and a way to explore themes of society and justice through verse. Even though Auden later approaches a post-millenarian set of themes in "Memorial for the City," *The Age of Anxiety* is more complex mediation on humanity's role in millennium than a visionary poem of utopia or exploration of Jungian psychology. Auden certainly connects the poem's ideas of social justice to a millenarian desire for utopia, but undercuts the poem's ability to achieve it without divine intervention. This is a strong contrast with Eliot, who would likely have argued that a unified Christian society was possible with sustained effort.

The Age of Anxiety is set in New York on All Soul's Night during World War II. There are four characters: Quant, a store clerk; Malin, a doctor serving in the Canadian RAF; Rossetta, a buyer for a corporation; and Emble, a sailor in the US Navy. These characters meet in a bar and fall into conversation against a backdrop of wartime news reports. They debate the development of the individual in "The Seven Ages" and then embark on a quest through "Seven Stages" of social or historical development to find a

utopian solution to their anxiety. Their journey soon enters a death spiral when the characters move to Rosetta's apartment in the Dirge. Their collapse into failure continues in *The Masque*, in which the quest motif fragments into isolation and alienation. The Epilogue offers little consolation because the characters are subsumed into everyday life once again, re-entering the damaged society they sought to escape through their quest.

Structurally, the poem is based on an alliterative meter mixed with prose passages. The alliterative meter lacks the Anglo-Saxon and Icelandic ornamentation of Auden's early work, and instead uses an abundance of Early Modern diction that has been criticized as being both awkward and challenging (Wright, 155-56, Duchêne 159). This choice of form conflates the idealized heroic past of the Old English lay with the flowering of English poetic traditions in the Early Modern period. This style is not a flaw, but rather a marker of the millenarian mode of the poem. The meter looks backwards to an idealized past, while the narrative and characters attempt to look forward and transform their present.

Beyond the structure, a further indication of the poem's millenarian focus is found in its first sentence. This line sets both the scene and tone for the whole work:

When the historical process breaks down and armies organize with their embossed
debates the ensuing void which they can never consecrate, when necessity is
associated with horror and freedom with boredom, then it looks good for the bar
business. (255)

Aside from the apparent “universal truth” of its concluding point, this sentence provides a number of important points to consider. First, history is a process, and second, history’s collapse creates a “void” which armies cannot consecrate, a word which in turn suggests a

sense of religiosity for the poem and its exploration of history from its outset. Auden poses a question to the reader through this argument: If history is a process in the poem, is this a narrative that has broken down or stalled?

The process of history Auden refers to is a desire for narrative continuity. There is obvious sympathy between this point and Hayden White's discussion of history and narrative in his essay "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." Drawing upon Barthes, White argues that "narrative is a metacode" that serves as the basis for "transcultural messages about the nature of shared reality can be transmitted" and that a collapse of such narrativity "indicates an absence or refusal of meaning" (6). History therefore is a prime example of the way humans use narrative to order our sense of self, society, and future. Narrative seen in this way serves as a constructing process of the social contract and the ideologies that support it. A collapse of such narratives would destabilize an individual's sense of society and would necessitate a seeking of stability and a re-narrativization of society. Such a re-narrativization would allow the teleological process of salvation to return and essentially re-inscribes the millennium into the poem's future.

This is the process of both millenarianism and Auden's poem: to seek a stable narrative would allow an individual or a group to imagine a future. Without a narrative, there can be no continuation or linearity to history, only a constant present; teleology breaks down and the future loses meaning. The poem's quest narrative is an explicit example of seeking after this re-narrativization. Therefore, the anxiety at the root of the poem and its characters is not World War II itself, but rather the danger war and modernity pose to the narrative sense we use to organize our individual and social

futures. There is an injustice present in these moments of narrative disruption, and ideology cannot sustain itself in periods of collapse: militarism cannot consecrate the future, necessity becomes conflated with horror instead of comfortable fulfillment, and the desire for personal freedom becomes a yearning for boredom. The poem reveals the ideologies which construct the social contract to be inadequate and the individual is left in an anxious existence that reveals the absurdity of their condition.

This "Age of Anxiety" then is not necessarily a specific period, but rather a strain placed upon the individual by the collapse of social ideologies. It denies narrative, and becomes as Auden says through Malin, an "incessant Now" (271). For Malin, the "incessant Now" is connected to "The traveler through time" (271). This traveler:

is at once

Outside and inside his own demand

For personal pattern" (271).

A "personal pattern" is a narrative, and after Malin suggests the possibility of re-narrativizing their lives, the four characters engage in the creation of two narratives: The Seven Ages and The Seven Stages. In the quest undertaken against the anti-narrative of modernity, a millenarian narrative unfolds, revealed by the structure of the poem and the actions of the characters. The basic millennial pattern outlined by Burrridge is uncannily performed in the poem and when read through as millenarian narrative structure the full development of the poem's utopian theme becomes clear.

The first stage of the millenarian narrative, triggered by the war, collapses the historical narrative. Once the poem is able to articulate the collapse, it can set a millenarian

narrative into motion. Individuals must begin intellectual endeavors to understand their crisis and then seek a basis for common experience in others. This process occurs throughout the “Prologue” to the poem. Each character begins lost in their own thoughts, each attempting to come to terms with their anxiety. These private thoughts dwell on their unhappiness: Quant's vitriolic tone as he asks his reflection in a mirror:

...You seem amused.

How well and witty when you wake up,
 How glad and good when you go to bed,
 Do you feel, my friend?... (Auden 258).

Malin meditates on the place of humanity in both science and nature, while Rosetta lingers on idyllic images from her youth. Emble appears as a strong, possibly authorial voice, overlooking the actions of the others until a radio playing a wartime propaganda broadcast creates a moment of community that gives them the opportunity to enter into conversation.

Even as the radio gathers the characters together, it symbolizes Auden's condemnation of the current state of the social contract. The cynicism the poem evinces towards the “official doctored message” (261) of the broadcast indicates the fraught nature of the situation—the government and social ideology cannot be trusted. Once the characters enter into conversation, they immediately begin to explore their experiences and gather into “the quieter intimacy of a booth” (273) to order drinks and begin their discussion of The Seven Ages of the individual. Each character has a chance to speak during each successive age of the individual, defined here as childhood, youth, adulthood,

middle age, late middle age, old age, and then a second childhood in the extremes of advanced age.

The model of life used by the poem is one of “rise and fall,” but the poem does not embrace cyclical notions of time or history. As a traditional millennial narrative, it begins in a state of innocence immediately followed by a fall:

Whatever that is, whatever why
 Forbids his bound; till that ban tempts him;
 He jumps and is judged: he joins mankind,
 The fallen families, freedom lost,
 Love becomes Law. (274)

The most immediate result of the above passage is the way it links society and socialization to the fallen state of the individual. Monroe K. Spears conflates the concept of “Love becom[ing] Law” with Auden’s earlier ideas of Agape, pointing out that in the poem “only faith can enable man to take ‘short views’ and ‘redeem the time’” (232). John Fuller on the other hand, considered the imagery of prelapsarian Eden and postlapsarian Fall to be “Eliotelian” (*Guide* 194) and the tentative connection he makes between Eliot’s *Four Quartets* and Auden’s *The Age of Anxiety* by such a comment is insightful. Eliot and Auden both explore millenarian themes and adopt a Christian approach to the subject of utopia, so Fuller’s observation regarding the common use of certain symbols and themes only supports the millenarian connection between the two poets. We are not born anxious in Auden’s poem, but become so only once we have become part of the workings of society.

The model of society offered in the poem attempts to return the characters to a prelapsarian state, as well as to reorder society upon egalitarian lines. The use of the quest motif indicates that the millenarian movement of the poem has entered into the more active phase of working to restore social stability and announce a golden age. Despite the fact that the characters leave the bar, the quest is less a journey than a revelation:

At first all is dark and each walks alone. That they share is only the feeling of remoteness and desertion, of having marched for miles and miles, of having lost their bearings, of a restless urge to find water. Gradually for each in turn the darkness begins to dissolve and their vision to take shape. (297)

Each character has a continued sense of alienation and their visions are highly individualized—even as a group these characters are unable to connect meaningfully in a social way, nor are they capable of experiencing joy as individuals.

Modernity hinders the realization of the character's millennial desires and they journey not through a landscape so much as through society itself. They linger repeatedly upon society's flaws, calling it a "public prison" that inhibits the ability to "love ourselves and live / in just anarchic joy" (308). The stories told in this section of the poem dwell upon inequalities and the complicity of government in perpetuating these injustices, such as the story of a big house that was built by "A scholarly scoundrel / whose fortune was founded on the follies of others" and was ultimately "passed to the Crown" (312). That is, the government profits from the abuses its citizens inflict on each other.

These stages of society are representations of, as Rosetta says, "a World that is fallen" (314); as the questors approach the end of their journey, the imagery becomes

more idyllic and Edenic. In the seventh and final stage, the millennial movement reaches its climax: “Is triumph possible? If so, are they chosen? Is triumph worth it? If so, are they worthy?” (324). At this moment, the millennial strains of Revelation can be heard, as the questors ask

And that we cannot be deaf to the question:

‘Do I love this world so well

That I have to know how it ends?’” (325)

This question and its possible answers implodes the vision of the Seven Stages at its moment of completion and the questors awaken suddenly in the bar; the reader realizes that the characters never left their seats—all the action of the poem has been intellectual, none of it social (329). The millennial movement of the poem collapses into “The Dirge” (330). This time the characters do physically leave the bar, but only in defeat. They journey to Rosetta's apartment in an attempt to sustain the social connection they formed earlier, but this effort in turn collapses and the characters go their own way. This turn of events raises the following question: Why does their quest, the millennial dream, fail?

The answer is connected to the poem's original premise of a better world. The social contract is merely a model for social order. It implies neither equality nor equity. Millennialism does not simply aim to re-narrativize the social contract but to rewrite it into a new form that would provide actual social justice. But *The Age of Anxiety* fails to actualize any such an ideal. Why? Is it a failure of poetic vision on part of the poet? Is it that the poem suggests that social justice is impossible? It appears that the characters themselves are overwhelmed by the utopian possibilities they have imagined. The critical line is

Auden's idea of "Love becomes law." This phrase, which occurs so early in the attempt to re-narrativize history, is the key to understanding Auden's transition from a socialist pre-millenarian to a more conservative post-millenarian. Auden's rejection of pre-millenarianism forces him to regard a state of Agape as state in which love would become the law, as precipitated by a divine act. In the millennial framework of the poem, the individual is born innocent and once the person falls—entering into the social contract—the possibility of Love becomes sacrificed for law, or the legal structure of the society. In effect, a human is forced to surrender their idealism in order to playing within society's rules and make political accommodation, and therefore surrender utopia for consensus. The fear of "selling out" is therefore inherent in the millennial dream from its outset and made manifest in the failure of the characters.

The characters are unable or unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to carry out their ideals—they do not leave the bar until their quest has failed, and the millennial movement never begins, in large part because, to Auden after 1940, the idea of humanity actually achieving utopia without divine intervention is absurd. The epilogue's epigraph—a moment from *Paradise Lost* following the ejection from Eden, "Some natural tears they drop'd, but wip'd them soon; / The world was all before them, where to choose..." (348)—marks both the effort the characters made and the cost of their failure: the millennium is inherently a divine act that can only occur when the will of God allows it to; hence the poem allows Auden to critique pre-millenarianism and validates his movement toward a post-millenarian theology, all without forcing Auden to adopt a visionary or prophetic rhetoric.

In *The Age of Anxiety*, the idea of millennium is so vast and overwhelming that it daunts both poet and reader. At the end of the poem, Malin returns to his military duty, “reclaimed by the actual world where time is real and in which, therefore, poetry can take no interest” (353). The model of poetry put forward here is that one that exists outside the movement of time and space. Poetry can create a space in which the characters are allowed to attempt a transcendence their anxiety; this is important as it marks the beginning of Auden conception of language itself as a millenarian space. He still holds that poetry makes nothing happen, but he is beginning to understand language as a crosser of thresholds, and a tool through which a better world cannot only be imagined but also experienced. At the end of the poem, Malin returns “Facing another long day of servitude to willful authority and blind accident, creation lay in pain and earnest, once more reprieved from self-destruction, its adoption, as usual, postponed” (353). Therefore the poem is not so much a call to arms as it is a much as a moment of escape and reconciliation.

The poem emphasizes what Deleuze and Guattari might insist upon as “not form, but a procedure, a process” (8). Auden would stress the process of “becoming” throughout his post-millenarian writings, particularly in “Homage to Clio.” Despite its clear use of a millenarian narrative structure, *The Age of Anxiety* is not a *guidebook* to utopia, but a spur towards the *idea* of utopia. For Auden, the idealism of Agape, social justice, and social transformation is too sentimental if presented directly. If the desire is fulfilled in a poem, it simplifies the desire, reducing it to a mere form rather than a process. Although Auden did embrace narratives that feature a completed millenarian arc, he himself did not write a

truly visionary poem or successful millenarian narrative.

The Age of Anxiety mirrors the millennial narrative model: following an experience of disenfranchisement, there is a movement towards discussion and intellectual or quasi-intellectual endeavors. Individuals in this situation begin to seek the basis of a common experience that has been compromised because of a loss of industriousness, capacities of intellect, courage in war, or by handling money. From here a millenarian movement will either meet political accommodation and diffuse, or emerge into an organized group that results in either revolutionary victory, a collapse into the initial phase, or the formation of a sect (Burridge 115-116). The structure of the poem uncannily mirrors the process described by Burridge and allows Auden to confront the idea of utopia as a result of human action.

Auden explores other themes of utopia in his late 1940s work, and Arthur Kirsch's reading of "Horae Canonicae" in *Auden and Christianity* is a comparable reading of Auden's development of his religious and utopian themes (109-140). Although his overt Christian expression has attracted some criticism, and despite a degree of critical disfavor for poems like *The Age of Anxiety*, the first printing of the poem sold out quickly and was reprinted several times, an unusual fate for such a long and complex work. It was the first work of Auden's verse to sell better in the USA than in the UK and was turned into a symphony by Leonard Bernstein and a 1950 ballet based on the score.⁴³ Later critics, like Monroe K. Spears, considered the way Auden's transition in the 1940s from agnosticism to Christianity "not a denial but a fulfillment of his earlier beliefs; the religious values do not

⁴³ Auden "disliked" the music and "despised" the ballet (Carpenter 347-8).

contradict the others, but clarify them and take them to another level" (171-2). Spears recognizes the existential nature of Auden's faith and it is worth adding that the movement from direct social engagement to a more philosophic restatement of utopianism is best understood as a shift from a pre-millenarian perspective to a post-millenarian perspective.

During the time Auden had spent composing *The Age of Anxiety*, he had become an American citizen. Although his post-war reputation in England was still low, he enjoyed a great deal of attention in the USA. University students would seek him out and many young poets visited him, including Allen Ginsberg, Louis Simpson, Daniel Hoffman, and Richard Howard. He became, according to John Hollander "an unofficial teacher, as well as the resident poet of our city" (qtd. in Carpenter 339). Auden became increasingly conservative about technique, insisting that "every new work one writes should, among other (and of course more important) things, attempt to solve one new technical problem for oneself" (qtd. in Carpenter 339). Auden himself would maintain a commitment to experimentation not in the modern sense of experimental poetry or even free verse, but a personal experimentation with every kind of metre and form that presented itself.

In fact, Auden would consistently repudiate free verse as undemanding and unstructured. The one exception to this was Eliot, whose work Auden still held in high regard. Auden wrote to Spender to explain his continued respect for his editor:

My objection to most free verse is that I cannot feel any necessity behind it...in Eliot's verse, even if I cant [sic] finally analyse it, I feel there is a principle behind what appear to my eyes as arbitrary distortions. The trouble to-day with so many

would-be artists is that they see, quite correctly, that many of the greatest works...are so extraordinarily free and easy...and they think that they can start off writing like that. But that sort of grace is the end point of a long process, first learning technique (every technique is a convention and therefore dangerous) and then unlearning. It is much easier to learn than to unlearn, and most of us will not get further than learning, but there is no other route to greatness, even if we get stuck half-way. (qtd. in Carpenter 340)

These comments might make Auden appear conservative in his poetic aesthetics, but they reinforce a line of thinking related to his millenarianism. Like Auden's interest in theology, poetic technique was a set of rules that served to order one's thoughts and in the period following his conversion, Auden came to see literature as a new space in which to explore utopian ideas specifically through language. Auden's religious faith was oriented towards formality, and his early childhood love of rituals was due not only to the mystery of the rite, but also to its formal structures. Just as *The Age of Anxiety* attempted to work out individual and social models of utopia, millenarianism requires systems and processes; this takes the form not only of sects and cults, but also the way individuals live their lives, trying to find an ascetic or hedonist way to define their being.

There is one area of Auden's life that bears close attention in its relationship with his Christianity: his sexuality. Although Auden was primarily homosexual, he did have relationships with women, not only in the 1920s but also in the 1940s, when he had a year-long affair with Rhonda Haffe, an attractive woman who was then in the process of separating from her husband. The relationship was sexual and romantic, but faded

quickly, in part because of Auden's relationship with Chester Kallman. Although Kallman and Auden had stopped having sex several years before (Auden had been heartbroken by Kallman's infidelities), the two would live together more or less continually for the next three decades.

Auden's own sense of his sexuality and its role in his faith is complex, if troubling by contemporary standards of equality. In 1947 he explained to the poet Alan Ansen:

I've come to the conclusion that it's wrong to be queer, but that's a long story. Oh, the reasons why are comparatively simple. In the first place, all homosexual acts are acts of envy. In the second, the more you're involved with someone the more trouble arises, and affection shouldn't result in that. It shows something's wrong somewhere. (qtd. in Kirsch 172-173)

Auden's opinions appear to echo a Christian sense of guilt and sin. Like Eliot, Auden believed that sin is a constant and required element of faith. This fits well into the millenarian need for a fallen state and Auden may have emphasized his homosexuality in order to use it as a vehicle to place his identity or soul into a fallen state. This could be seen as a sad or grim kind of self-abuse, but it is important to note that Auden did not wear his sexuality like a hairshirt—he continued to be a major figure of the gay subculture in New York, and like Eliot, he occasionally produced pornographic poetry for friends (one poem "The Platonic Blow" was published much to Auden's embarrassment—he adamantly denied writing the poem). In the late 1960s, he even warmed to the idea of coming out of the closet, allowing interviewers to mention his "homosexual routine" as *Life* called it in 1970 (Schott 52).

Despite Auden's sense of sexual sin, his commitment to Christianity remained strong throughout his final three decades of writing. Eliot wrote to Ursula Niebuhr in 1946 that "[Auden's] spiritual development has outstripped his technical development, while his technique is such that it is able almost to deceive us (and himself) into thinking that it is adequate" (qtd. in Carpenter 344). Eliot was, of course, in sympathy with Auden's Anglo-Catholic beliefs, even if Auden himself was much less doctrinaire, but other critics found Auden's later work out-of-sync with the present, in part because it abandoned the political themes of the 1930s in favour of traditional millenarian subjects like religion. Auden's personal and intellectual millenarianism had put him out of favour with many critics, and despite the continuity of his ideas, discussions of Auden's later poetry are most readily found in attempts to understand his religion. His earlier views were utopian and his later views are utopian; what changes is only the vehicle of delivery, an emphasis on language over human action.

Even in *The Enchafed Flood*, many of Auden's early concerns—classicism and romanticism, art and faith, the individual and the social—are present; what changes is his position. Like his sexuality, Auden's millenarianism was not fixed in one expression but experienced movement along a spectrum. His early voice had been pre-millenarian, but weakly so because it lacked commitment. *The Age of Anxiety* had attempted to find a new direction for his millenarianism, but had failed. The lectures that make up *The Enchafed Flood*, however, find Auden recovering Romanticism in order to better structure and reinforce his post-millenarianism.

Auden's relationship with Romanticism was almost entirely unlike that of Yeats and his discussions of it reflect that difference. Yeats was quick to praise the aesthetic and visionary qualities of Romanticism and it is those very qualities Auden treats lightly. Writers such as Blake become "polemicist[s]" whose great fear was "the universe he associates with Newton" (33-4). Yeats would never have been able to adopt a position against Blake because of his dislike for science; Auden is a much more contemporary figure, a thinker used to electrical lights and cars. The tendency for Auden was always towards the cosmopolitan and this demanded that he take science seriously, although he did not believe that science and scepticism fully accounted for the nature of reality or our experience of it (*The Enchafed Flood* 35).

The reality of the present is that the Romantic world is no longer ours: "Our temptations are not theirs" (91). In the modern world, the tension is not between a religious millenarianism and a secular anti-millenarianism but between religious and secular millennia: "We are less likely to be tempted by solitude into Promethean pride: we are far more likely to become cowards in the face of the tyrant who would compel us to lie in the service of the False City. It is not madness we need to flee but prostitution" (91). These are intense lines and stress Auden's need for commitment to ideals. Religion as philosophy is a way to focus and direct our attentions to a better future, the future of the builders working on the Eternal City. The reality that Auden stresses in both *The Age of Anxiety* and *The Enchafed Flood* is that no great social or secular project will achieve utopia, only the slow, final revelation of humanity's faith and love. Until that point, we will repeat the "fatal, but heroic voyages" of earlier centuries (91).

Following the explorations of millenarianism and literature that marked his late 1940s writing, Auden found himself committed entirely to the traditional, post-millenarian notion of the Second Coming. In a two-part essay published in *Theology*, entitled “The Things Which are Caesar’s” Auden stresses his post-millenarianism when he argues that “When the Christian layman prays ‘Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven’ he implies that the coming of the Kingdom is to be God’s decision, not his” (209). Auden is still committed to the idea of free belief, an extension of Kierkegaard’s leap of faith, but this is nuanced by a demand that “only two temporal categories are significant, the present instance and eternity” (209). His model of the future rests entirely upon the ability of the “present instance [to create] the future” (209). Without Christ, humanity will place its focus elsewhere—“an idol, his reason, his power, the wave of the future, etc” —but the new focus is really just a new object of faith and in Auden’s analysis the action of imagining the future as utopia is the same.

Auden lacked Yeats’s conviction and ability to dismiss science in favour of the occult and this causes his poetry to hesitate at the moment of vision—in effect, Auden consistently draws his thinking back just before the Second Coming. But with this hesitation, Auden is able to see clearly the way the many political movements of his time were engaged in utopian ideas of the future, a clear sightedness that has often been overlooked. Any steps Auden might have taken towards enabling prophecy in his poetry were arrested suddenly in the early 1950s, in part because his life entered into a new

period of travel.⁴⁴ In his first study of Auden's verse, *A Reader's Guide to W. H. Auden*, John Fuller notes that as early as 1947 Auden had begun to bid "farewell to [his] American period" (187). Like Eliot, and to an extent Yeats before him, Auden reflects the new mobility and international nature of English poetry.

Meditating on the Pre-Millennium

Like Auden, the war years had changed the way Eliot thought about his writing. Certainly the crisis of World War II had caused him to alter the tenor of his social arguments, but he also found it difficult to maintain the kind of daily focus needed to continue writing plays. This difficulty led him to take up an idea for a longer poetic sequence he had begun in 1934, an idea that would eventually become his last major poetic project: *Four Quartets*.

Considering the four poems a "project" might be an overstatement. Eliot wrote "Burnt Norton" in 1934 and it is possible that single poem, as Eliot later wrote, "might have remained by itself if it hadn't been for the war...The war destroyed [my interest in drama] for a time...'East Coker' was the result—and it was only in writing 'East Coker' that I began to see the Quartets as a set of four" ("The Genesis of *Four Quartets*" 23). As his rhetoric changed in his essays, Eliot appears to realize that "Burnt Norton" was a way to develop both his emotional and intellectual ideas, so he returned to the poem and began to construct a poetic expression of a hopeful future. His goals in composing the *Four Quartets* appear to be manifold: he sought to express his current ideas of utopia, find some

⁴⁴ Auden and Kallman began summering in Italy, which allowed Auden to restructure his writing periods—summer was for poetry, and the academic year was used to produce the lectures and essays that paid for his extended holidays.

comprehension of World War II, and move his verse in a new direction. The development of this new poetic style was based in part upon Eliot's interest in Dante ("Dante and 'Little Gidding'" 24-5) and represents an attempt to create a new meditative lyric style.

As a technical achievement, the *Four Quartets* is a successful reinvention of Eliot's poetry. He moves in a new direction while maintaining a clear link to his earlier work; that is to say, *Four Quartets* is recognizably a work written by Eliot in its themes and images, but the poems do not repeat the technical strategies of *The Waste Land* or his earlier poems.⁴⁵ The theme of oppositions working to resolution, so important to *The Hollow Men*, is a major element of *Four Quartets*. Instead of working towards faith, Eliot's use of opposites is able to resolve the problem of time his early verse struggled with in poems such as "Gerontion." As George Williamson writes, "Eliot concludes against Gerontion, that in history the pattern or timeless form of life is realized and may be discerned" (236).

M. H. Abrams also notes the continuity of ideas in Eliot's verse in *Natural Supernaturalism*, especially in Eliot's "union of contraries" (319). Abrams places the *Four Quartets* in the line of Romantic visionary poetry and argues that it performs a "circuitous return" to earlier apocalyptic ideas of revelation and a "reversion to its Christian prototype" (322-3). This idea of a return to prophetic poetry reinforces the fact that Eliot is a millenarian and *Four Quartets* is a clear statement of his utopia desire. One point Abrams does not fully develop is the fact that Eliot's ideas are not visionary in the sense of the post-millennial rhetoric of Blake or Shelley (or Yeats). Instead, *Four Quartets* is Eliot's only

⁴⁵ Gish suggests the style of sections V and VI of *Ash Wednesday* are quite similar to the style of "Burnt Norton" (237).

truly successful attempt to elucidate both the personal and public aspects of his pre-millenarianism.

From the outset of the sequence, Eliot places the problems of time and redemption in a dominant position in "Burnt Norton":

Time present and time past
 Are both perhaps present in time future,
 And time future contained in time past.
 If all time is eternally present
 All time is unredeemable. (1-5)

The problem Eliot finds here is one of history. If the still point of *The Waste Land* is to be achieved, these lines raise the question of whether or not the enlightenment that passes understanding creates a state wherein redemption is impossible. Doris T. Wight has suggested that the opening of the poem is a "powerful paradox" (63), but she also is forced to acknowledge that the paradox in the first three lines is immediately resolved (64). Time is only unredeemed if it is eternally present. Essentially, so long as society adopts an idea of the future as a continual present (the centre of the spectrum), then time is unredeemable: humanity will abandon the idea of a truly better world.⁴⁶

"Burnt Norton" initially dwells upon the individual, but, upon entering a garden, the poem quickly invokes a "we." The rose-garden of the poem is an archetypal reference to Eden — "Other echoes / inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?" (19-20). Like Yeats's rose and the hollow men's rose, this rose is an important marker of hope and

⁴⁶ This is also a theological statement: if you abandon God's narrative of time, then your soul is forfeit. Eliot is occasionally stern about such matters, especially in his more religious prose.

revelation. There are flashes of the lost Garden: “unheard music” and the “unseen eyebeam” that looks upon the roses (an image of God’s observance 29-31). Perhaps the most visionary image is that of the dry pool which is suddenly “filled with water out of sunlight” (37), but the vision fails, for as the bird says: “human kind / Cannot bear very much reality” (44-45). The individual is not as important as the social in “Burnt Norton,” a fact that reflects Eliot’s continued argument for social coherence as a route to utopia.

John Xiros Cooper has argued that Eliot’s concern for Utopia and society in the 1930s and 40s reflects a “crisis among the mandarins” (28). As was argued earlier, Eliot’s utopian prose, particularly *The Idea of a Christian Society*, emphasizes the role of intellectuals like him, to the point where his utopia might be considered an intellectual oligarchy, but Cooper’s argument might be nuanced in a different direction. Firstly, Cooper considers Eliot’s society an elitist one, which is a clear tension in Eliot’s own writings on the subject; Eliot’s societies cannot work without classes and elites, but this is not to say they are oppressive. This may be a slippery slope in Eliot’s thinking, but the idea of a class-divided society without oppression is a key element to his utopianism. Secondly, Cooper terms Eliot’s desires here a “provisional delusion.” It seems unlikely that Cooper is knowingly continuing the tradition of labelling millenarians as insane or deluded, but he does paint Eliot as either an ideologue (99) or as a concerned voice of an alienated and weakening intellectual elite. Certainly Eliot contains both of these elements, but they only truly come into play because they are elements of millenarianism. Eliot’s ideology in the *Four Quartets* is not one of class struggle or politics, but one of millenarian salvation.

History and time are at the heart of *Four Quartets* and Eliot's line in "Burnt Norton" "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality" (44-5) is a phrase connected with the problem of "Time past and time future" (46) and the reconciliation of eschatology and teleology that lies at the heart of millenarianism. The revelation of utopia serves as "both a new world / And the old made explicit" (77-8), a state which will grant us some understanding of the universe: "In the completion of its partial ecstasy, / The resolution of its partial horror" (79-80). The concern for time found throughout the *Four Quartets* serves as a meditation upon the process of achieving utopia. The philosophical or meditative quality of the verse reflects Eliot's attempt to personalize his millenarianism while at the same time reaching a wider audience.

Language is portrayed as difficult in *Four Quartets*, especially in the final stanzas of "Burnt Norton" "Words strain, / Crack and sometimes break, under the burden" (152-153). Eliot's use of "words" echoes *Ash Wednesday* and the poem returns to the earlier grammar of the 1920s with the lines: "The Word in the desert / Is most attacked by voices of temptation" (158-159). But the poem is able to break through such temptation and the poem ends with a stronger image of hope:

Sudden in the shaft of sunlight
 Even while the dust moves
 There rises the hidden laughter
 Of children in the foliage (172-175)

In his essay "Quest for the Word in Eliot's *Four Quartets*," George A. Knox suggests the use of "word points to a spiritual meaning beyond its literal sense, to significance beyond

sense apprehension" (310). "Burnt Norton" uses this significance to work towards a meditative verse which moves from modernity toward hope. Eliot's earliest poem of the *Quartets* describes the difficulty of writing utopian verse. The final lines of "Burnt Norton," Knox suggests, are "only a metaphor for a stage in realizing union with the Logos" (314). Certainly *Four Quartets* relate to the circumstances of their composition, especially World War II, but "Burnt Norton" is written so much earlier that it is better related to Eliot's pre-war prose arguments for utopia.

The large gap in time of composition between "Burnt Norton" and the final three pieces suggest that the war made Eliot's millenarianism more imminent. The opening of "East Coker" marks both the passage of time and the loss of organic community, with images of a changing landscape being replaced by the modern:

Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
 Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
 Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass.
 Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,
 Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth (2-6)

This seems a dark idea, one removed of positive potential, and as Kenneth Paul Kramer points out in *Redeeming Time*, "where Burnt Norton is filled with illuminating light, East Coker unfolds in the shadow of darkness" (78). It is possible that Eliot means to imply a lack of understanding or an inability to communicate: "leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle / With words and meanings" (71-72). The desire to express what may

not be expressed runs throughout the poems and marks the difficulty Eliot has in announcing his utopia.

“East Coker” includes lines which reply to Yeats’s “an Acre of Grass” in which Yeats asked for “an old man’s frenzy” to “remake” himself (13-14). Eliot will also turn to Yeats in “Little Gidding” but “East Coker” is quite wary of Yeats (Roth 412):

Do not let me hear
Of the wisdom of old men, but rather of their folly,
Their fear of fear and frenzy, their fear of possession,
Of belonging to another, or to others, or to God. (94-97)

Eliot’s caution is likely due to a fear of being sublimated by Yeats’s intensely millenarian verse. Sabine Roth’s analysis of Yeats’s influence on the poem argues that Eliot uses Yeats’s “purely aesthetic vision of rebirth” as a foil to his own views (415). Eliot is graceful to Yeats, and while Roth does not link millenarianism to her argument, Eliot’s use of Yeats relies on a manifest tension between their visions. While he does not reject Yeats’s impulse to utopia, Eliot rejects the methods by which Yeats sought it, attempting, as Roth puts it “to bring the corrupt mythology of Yeats back into its proper context” (418). To Eliot, that proper context is a Christian millennium.

Even though the poems do make use of Indic ideas, Eliot remains as insistent upon clarity of vision and doctrine in “The Dry Salvages” as he was in his essays:

We cannot think of a time that is oceanless
Or of an ocean not littered with wastage

Or of a future that is not liable

Like the past, to have no destination.

We have to think of them as forever bailing, (70-75)

This image of the sailors adrift in an ocean of time, bailing out the water is a call to hope:

faith is the answer to the problem of time and meaning, the future is not without

“destination,” because, for Eliot, it is predestined.

In addition to rejecting ideas of timelessness, Eliot voices reservations about science and its challenge to accepted tradition:

It seems, as one becomes older,

That the past has another pattern, and ceases to be a mere sequence—

Or even development: the latter a partial fallacy

Encouraged by superficial notions of evolution,

Which becomes, in the popular mind, a means of disowning the past. (87-91)

Eliot’s fear of disowning the past represents his desire for tradition and continuity.

Throughout *Four Quartets*, Eliot rejects a purely materialist notion of history—the

“superficial notions of evolution”—because they seem to undo

The moments of happiness—not the sense of well-being,

Fruition, fulfilment, security or affection,

Or even a very good dinner, but the sudden illumination—“ (92-4)

These moments are the way humans meditate on and experience the supernatural. In the poem, a world without these moments is diminished in its ability to understand reality.

“The Dry Salvages” continues Eliot’s argument regarding the nature of faith and hope by insisting:

We had the experience but missed the meaning,
 And approach to the meaning restores the experience
 In a different form, beyond any meaning” (96-8).

Such language approaches visionary ideas of post-millennialism, but he quickly qualifies this idea of something being beyond meaning with a long passage:

I have said before
 That the past experience revived in the meaning
 Is not the experience of one life only
 But of many generations—not forgetting
 Something that is probably quite ineffable:
 The backward look behind the assurance
 Of recorded history, the backward half-look
 Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror.
 Now, we come to discover that the moments of agony
 (Whether, or not, due to misunderstanding,
 Having hoped for the wrong things or dreaded the wrong things,
 Is not in question) are likewise permanent
 With such permanence as time has... (99-110)

There is more confidence in Eliot’s rejection of the past than there is in the fulfillment of the future at this point in “The Dry Salvages;” history only assures us a future because we

think of it as something intangible, something we can possess—a “backward half-look” that reminds us of the permanence of whence we came—and it becomes equally clear that pain is equally present.

Eliot uses the tension between the act of remembrance and the act of forgetting to prepare for the appearance of a strong utopian rhetoric, beginning with the idea that humanity is poor at recalling the mistakes we should not repeat while being equally unable to let the past be the past. Any resolution of this false state is mystified in the poem until the figure of Christ appears:

These are only hints and guesses,

Hints followed by guesses; and the rest

Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.

The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation. (216-19)

In “The Dry Salvages” only Christ can act as a true guide, an example of what Eliot calls “...the impossible union / Of spheres of existence is actual,” (220-21) and it is such a space that “past and future / Are conquered, and reconciled,” (222-23).

If “The Dry Salvages” reveals the salvific power of Christ into the argument of time and millennium, “Little Gidding” is the poem that shifts the rhetoric away from any transcendental idea of history, to focus upon an active, pre-millenarian idea of building a perfect society:

Either you had no purpose

Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured

And is altered in fulfilment. There are other places

Which also are the world's end, some at the sea jaws,
 Or over a dark lake, in a desert or a city—
 But this is the nearest, in place and time,
 Now and in England... (34-40)

England then, just as it is in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, is a place when utopia can be made real. There is interplay between place and time in “Little Gidding,” and England is not “an intersection” but “*the* intersection” (emphasis added). The praying mind of England creates an inevitability to the millennium—never and always—a constant possibility recurring, much like the idea of Arthur as the “once and future king.” For the poem, patriotism, or at least the “love of a country,” begins through the

attachment to our own field of action

And comes to find that action of little importance
 Though never indifferent (161-64)

Eliot avoids being too nationalistic, and is quick to turn the poems subject back towards a broader sense of history, playing with dualities as he did in *The Hollow Men*, but the millenarian rhetoric of *Four Quartets* clearly uses the same narrowing field of application that is present in *The Idea of a Christian Society*.

The reason for this shift is due to the poem’s attempt to address both the individual soul and the human community as utopian possibilities. History therefore is a duality: “History may be servitude, / History may be freedom...” (164-65). Helen Gardner argues that Eliot specifically revised “Little Gidding” to focus on the future, and so the rose symbol used in *The Hollow Men* reoccurs in “Little Gidding:”

It is not to ring the bell backward
 Nor is it an incantation
 To summon the spectre of a Rose.
 We cannot revive old factions
 We cannot restore old policies
 Or follow an antique drum. (184-89)

Eliot rejects ideas of transcendence and mysticism, especially the idea of “incantation,” a fact which marks his millennium as radically different from Yeats, who held the idea of incantation quite tightly to his own utopia. Eliot argues not for these things, and not for old “factions” and “policies,” all because the “rose” of the poem demands a new heaven on earth. The internal longing for transcendence he explored in the 1920s is now sublimated by the pre-millenarian project of building a perfect world.

Eliot further develops his argument by using the violence of the war to stress the unity of humanity and underscore the need for change:

These men, and those who opposed them
 And those whom they opposed
 Accept the constitution of silence
 And are folded in a single party.
 Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
 We have taken from the defeated
 What they had to leave us—a symbol:
 A symbol perfected in death. (190-202)

By stressing the symbolic potential of World War II's nature as total war, Eliot is able to shift his rhetoric and increase the energy of the poem, as he does in the section that follows:

The dove descending breaks the air
 With flame of incandescent terror
 Of which the tongues declare
 The one discharged from sin and error.
 The only hope, or else despair
 Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—
 To be redeemed from fire by fire. (207-13)

The symbol of the dove is an image of hope that counters the negative idea of Hell, a possible image of purgation or the scene in Acts 2:1-4, in which the Holy Spirit enters the body. Eliot emphasizes a loving God in this section, claiming "Love" devised such a "torment," and Eliot considers such choice—the fire of God or the fire of Hell—to be the basis of human life: "We only live, only suspire / Consumed by either fire or fire" (219-22).

Eliot does modulate this idea of hope in the closing of "Little Gidding" through a possible solution in the fact that:

What we call the beginning is often the end
 And to make an end is to make a beginning.
 The end is where we start from." (221-3)

What Eliot suggests is that the ultimate freedom is a freedom based on finding the right action to take and that this kind of moral action liberates one, paradoxically, from "past

and future" (160-61). Eliot's verse in *Four Quartets*, and especially in "Little Gidding" moves language into history and beyond to utopia. A. David Moody has described this as an attempt at common language: "the language lends itself to it as something that is in its nature, which it so say in its history, as a permanent tradition" (180). To extend Moody's idea slightly, this permanent tradition would harmonize the organic community of language and faith and create Eliot's utopia of a consistent society. Moody also notes the "immediacy" of the poetic voice, and as *Four Quartets* moves towards conclusion, the sense of imminent apocalypse is heightened.

The growing energy of the poem allows Eliot to reassert his idea of society by insisting that life and death are balanced and history is a sequence that can work towards conclusion:

The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree
 Are of equal duration. A people without history
 Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern
 Of timeless moments. So, while the light fails
 On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel
 History is now and England. (239-45)

England, as in his prose writings, becomes the place where a people *with* history can both embrace and escape the potential of history. R. W. Flint calls this line "the most moving in Eliot" precisely because it expresses a desire to initiate real change (81). The millennium is possible and Eliot insists

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. (246-49)

Such explorations or development of society will take England “Through the unknown, unremembered gate” and into a primeval garden akin to Eden:

When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea. (251-57)

It is after finding this paradise on earth—a true, Christian society—that the language of the poem becomes its most imminent and apocalyptic:

Quick now, here, now, always—
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded

Into the crowned knot of fire

And the fire and the rose are one. (258-65)

Eliot therefore suggests that if England can take the right moral course, it will be able to create an Edenic paradise on earth, in effect creating the millennium. B. H. Fussell has argued: "Little Gidding fuses beginning and end in a new whole: the end (not in the sense of goal or destiny) is attained by arrival at the chapel; the end of sin through purgation, of self through self-sacrifice, is attained by the beginning of Love and a lifetime's calling" (Fussell 226). But Fussell's point overlooks the importance of the movement to the garden, a new utopian social sphere. This is a goal and a destination for Eliot: once the garden can be realized, the rose symbol can be re-exerted, not as a transcendental symbol of sudden revelation, but as a result of the effort taken to create a better society.

With these final lines, Eliot achieves the poetic expression of what he had previously only been able to achieve in prose. Helen Gardner quite correctly argues that Eliot was pleased with the poems, willing to discuss them openly and without irony (3-4). These four poems—Eliot's last sustained poetic statement—are remarkable not only for the skill they demonstrate, but for the fact that they manage to give voice to a wide range of pre-millennialism's intellectual and emotional facets. Conventionally, pre-millennialism is often associated with utopian communes or the brash actions of evangelical Christians, but Eliot renders the idea of building a utopia on earth in a more comprehensive and successful manner. The length of time it took him to compose the sequence demonstrates some of the difficult pre-millennialism poses for poetry, while the pressure of World War II underscores the importance of social upheaval in motivating millenarian thinking.

Despite the quality of its verse, *Four Quartets* lacks some of the confidence of *The Idea of a Christian Society* and suggests the careful retreat into new terms that Eliot makes in *Notes towards a Definition of Culture*. Eliot's pre-millenarianism allowed him to moderate the intense Manichaeism common to millenarianism, and he is always cautious to avoid truly revolutionary rhetoric, but *Four Quartets* nonetheless develops a more active idea of utopia, albeit through metaphor and symbol rather than clear prose. R. W. Flint suggests that Eliot is distinct because "in taking the role of philosopher seriously, Eliot has given his faith a dramatic interest that is lacking in the work of poets, who like Auden...want, if possible, to be all thing to all men" (73).

The Eliot of the post-war years chose to return to drama, perhaps because of the difficulties he experienced in trying to express his millenarianism in verse. His life became structured very tightly around a set routine, although his office and house were often in disarray, personal qualities he shared with Auden (Ackroyd 279, 321). He still maintained his public image as tightly as possible and seemed to have some fear of intimacy during the late-forties and early-fifties (281) and the isolation was noticed by several who knew him, including Edmund Wilson and V. S. Pritchett, the latter of which described Eliot as "a company of actions inside one suit, each twitting the other" in the *New York Times Magazine* (73).

Despite the iciness of his persona, Eliot found himself still very much in demand as a speaker and writer. His plays had been revived and well received, especially *The Family Reunion*, which had faltered in its debut in 1939 but became a hit play in 1946 (Ackroyd 283). He was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine and his work was becoming a matter

of general culture—Esso used the line “Time future contained in time past” in a 1948 advertisement. Eliot’s plays would be televised, *The Family Reunion* in 1950 and *The Cocktail Party* in 1952 and his fame was such that in 1956 he drew an audience of 14,000 to a baseball stadium at the University of Minnesota, where he discussed “The Frontiers of Criticism.”

Eliot’s reputation had been widened by the plays and also through his 1948 Nobel Prize. The prize was awarded at a better time than Yeats’s and commemorated achievements that better reflected Eliot’s role not only as a writer but as a publisher, editor, and “leader and champion of a new period in the long history of the world’s poetry” (qtd. in Ackroyd 289). The kind of public recognition Eliot enjoyed in the last decades may have been exciting, but it is his marriage to Valerie Fletcher that seems to have given him the greatest joy. He proposed in late 1956 and they married on 10 January 1957 at 6:15 in the morning (Ackroyd 319).

For the last eight years of his life, Eliot appears to have been much happier; in photographs, the firm face of the author of *The Waste Land* becomes a smiling casual figure in the company of his wife. He kept a series of scrapbooks, only revealed by Valerie in 2009, in which Eliot collected newspaper clippings, menus, and notes in celebration of his second marriage (McCrum). Valerie gave Eliot a kind of domesticity he had never known in his adult life and it was to her credit that his weak health was buoyed for several years. After a period of hospitalization and a weakening heart, Eliot lapsed into a coma and died on 4 January 1965.

Auden had previously recorded an obituary about Eliot for the BBC, which he told Elizabeth Mayer was “a ghoulis business” (qtd. in Carpenter 412). When Eliot died, Auden was found by television journalists in Greece, to whom he refused to give comment. When Auden did final make a public statement, it was respectful and demure: “no future changes and fluctuations in taste will consign his work to oblivion” (qtd. in Carpenter 412). While Eliot may have held a much stronger critical and public position, Auden showed honest pain over the passing of a fellow poet and the publisher which had supported his career.

The happiness of Eliot’s final years did not radically change his beliefs—there was no great renunciation of anything he had written, although he was cautious about being considered a “New Critic” and disliked being thought of dogmatically. Eliot’s real strength, but often not his legacy, rests upon his poetic voice and his millenarian desire. Poetry, as Yeats and Auden suggest, is well-suited to the visionary intensities of post-millenarian prophecy. In Eliot’s case however, as a prophet of a utopia, poetry faltered. The conflict of Eliot’s poetry lies in both the individual quality of verse—the form’s insistence upon the internal experience of the speaker—and his attempt to find a voice for his millenarian desire. *Four Quartets* serves as a model philosophical or meditative poetry through which to express his hope for the future, but it is his prose which gives a clearer image of his ideal world—a world of intellectual support and communal faith—and which reveal that pre-millenarianism, although largely suspicious of political apparatus, is more suited to a direct conversation about how the present may be improved by human efforts rather than a radical vision of the future.

A Utopia in Language

Following his brief Italian phase, Auden found himself returning more and more frequently to northern Europe. Although he would remain an American citizen and still spent time in his adopted country, he accepted a professorship at Oxford and bought a home in Kirchstetten, Austria (Carpenter 387). Auden commemorated the move to Austria in the poem "Good-Bye to the Mezzogiorno" by casting himself as a descendent of the "gothic North," a "[child] /Of a potato, beer-or-whisky / Guilt culture" (1-3), a man who had enjoyed the Mediterranean but who was inevitably bound to return to the North. In his last decades, Auden simultaneously moves forward to a more millenarian conception of language and returns to old ideas to further his development as a poet and critic. His return to a Northern European identity marks a renewed interest in the *Sagas*, and Iceland. Auden made a second trip to Iceland in 1964 and would work with Paul Taylor on a translation of the *Elder Edda*, published in 1969.

Auden's renewed focus on Northern themes found an outlet in his enthusiasm for the works of J. R. R. Tolkien. In his reviews of *The Lord of the Rings*, Auden emphasizes Tolkien's success in creating an imaginary world and Auden would later come to use Tolkien's idea of "secondary world" in his criticism. A term coined by Tolkien in his 1938 Andrew Lang Lecture "On Fairy-Stories," secondary worlds are the worlds of creativity that function as distinct from the primary world of real life and the senses (142). For Tolkien, the secondary world was the highest order of Fantasy and the greatest use of human imagination. The kind of three-dimensional and fully coherent secondary world Tolkien valued made a deep impression on Auden's imagination.

As a poet, Auden was especially drawn to Tolkien's use of language, both the medievalism of his diction and the power and creativity of his onomastics and invented tongues. Auden's interest in Tolkien's world-building is indicative of Auden's imaginative range and he appears to recognize the vast difficulty inherent in the construction of convincing secondary worlds. For Auden, the task of creating a Secondary World is akin to the problem of naming the plants and animals of Eden: "he has to invent names for everything and everyone, and these names must be both apt and consistent with each other" (492). The difficulty of Tolkien's linguistic task was to not only create languages, but to try to represent a whole moral dimension in their sound and expression, for example the "Black Speech" of Mordor, a motif which Auden eagerly praised (492). Tolkien's ability to use language to express what Auden considered a Manichean world connected with Auden's growing idea that the source of utopia lay not in society, but in language.

Auden's appreciation for *The Lord of the Rings* recognized the novel's sympathy for its contemporary culture. His judgement that "Tolkien's greatest achievement is to have written a heroic romance which seems wholly relevant to the realities of our concrete historical existence" (493) and the speed with which he dismisses the notion of allegorical analysis (the One Ring as Atomic Bomb, for example) shows the depth of consideration he gave the novel. In his reviews, he argues "there may be some...who [will] draw too literal a parallel between [the novel] and our present historical situation. In a romance it is right

and proper that evil ideas should be incarnate as evil beings; in history it is a disastrous notion" (494).⁴⁷

Auden's observation that romance can engage in the act of incarnating evil hints at the attraction of secondary worlds for Auden. This attraction is carried further by the fact that *The Lord of the Rings* essentially acts as an internally consistent Christian millenarian narrative. The characters of Frodo and Aragorn serve as millenarian heroes anointed by the prophet Gandalf to return the fallen Third Age of Middle-earth to its former glory by heralding a new (Fourth) age (Brisbois 205-210). In Tolkien's view, the value of Fantasy lay in its ability to function in a manner independent of the historical events of our primary world, and the way readers are able to regain a kind of psychic composure through the exploration of a secondary world (146-53). For a reader of *The Lord of the Rings* then, the millenarian story of the novel allows the reader to participate in a vicarious movement towards utopia that prefigures a response to modernity through the rejection of violence and domination.

However, Auden's passion for Tolkien was one of sympathy rather than influence. Auden recognized a similar interest in understanding faith and millennium in Tolkien's work and may have been attracted to the Catholic basis of Middle-earth as well. Unlike many of Auden's other intellectual passions, his respect for Tolkien's work did not fade and they maintained a sporadic correspondence (Carpenter 379). Auden did not abandon his own verse projects to engage with Tolkien's ideas, but rather drew them into his own

⁴⁷ Tolkien himself responded to the idea of allegory in his foreword to the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings* arguing that while the story of the War of the Ring may be applicable to our modern lives, it was not intended to be allegorical of them.

projects, suggesting Auden had developed a more independent approach to his influences. His passion for Middle-earth remained strong and Auden would, if given the chance, discuss the work at length with even new acquaintances, as he did with Elizabeth Mayer's granddaughter during a party, and he famously claimed (to Tolkien's embarrassment) on the BCC that "If someone dislikes [*The Lord of the Rings*], I shall never trust their literary judgement about anything again" (Carpenter 379). For Auden, Tolkien's construction and use of languages indicated the way words themselves could carry a millenarian significance and this began to shape Auden's continued work on utopianism.

Auden wrote two poems in reflection upon Tolkien, "Homage to Clio" and "A Short Ode to a Philologist." He originally intended to dedicate the first poem to Tolkien, but apparently changed his mind before completing the verse (Carpenter 378). Auden thought of the poem as an indirect prayer to the Virgin Mary and it is possible that Auden recognized Tolkien's deep appreciation of Mary. The idea of an indirect representation of Mary through the muse Clio may have been inspired by Tolkien's use of his character Galadriel as a Mary-figure. Auden had praised the way Tolkien had managed "to write a 'Christian' piece of literature without making it obvious" (qtd. in Mendelson *Later Auden* 196) and that praise may have shaped some of this post-*Lord of the Rings* verse.

Auden's choice not to dedicate the poem to Tolkien likely stemmed from the fact that "Homage to Clio" moved into personal and intellectual territory that Auden felt was central to his own art. By the 1950s, Auden is more confident of his own position and craft and rarely falls under the sway of intellectual movements and thinkers like he did repeatedly in the 1930s. He is more confident and his millenarianism is his own, rooted in

a theological and philosophical Christian practice. "Homage to Clio" emerges out of this confidence and ability, as well as his interest in society and history.

Clio, the Greek Muse of History is the focus of the piece, but the poem paradoxically insists on her silent role in history:

You had nothing to say and did not, one could see,

Observe where you were, Muse of the unique

Historical fact, defending with silence

Some world of your beholding, a silence (65-68)

Auden recasts Clio here, moving her from Greek to Christian through the act of making her a muse of "the unique / Historical fact," a manoeuvre which places an emphasis upon a millenarian historiography which relies upon the Kierkegaardian idea of the singularity of events. The poem builds to an announcement of faith as a process of history and underscores the post-millenarian quality of Auden's later verse.

This declaration uses two principle metaphors that work in contrast to one another: silence and music. In the poem they are not synonymous, but they are entwined:

Not yours. Lives that obey you move like music,

Becoming now what they only can be once,

Making of silence decisive sound: it sounds

Easy, but one must find the time. (77-80)

"Lives that obey you move like music" (77). The goal of the paradox of music and sound is to emphasize the next word "becoming" (78). The notion of Becoming is a process of history

working towards the revelation or apocalyptic “decisive sound” (79).⁴⁸ Edward Mendelson links the use of music in the poem to Auden’s “Kierkegaardian, and wilfully paradoxical, argument that music imitates history” (*Later Auden* 197). The paradox is not so unclear when one considers a millenarian must understand history as a sequence built upon a plan. As a metaphor, music’s use of notes to string together a series of choices within or without a mode is an attractive way to think about a harmony to the progress and violence of history. For Auden, the human is not able to announce revelation—the sudden colloquialism of “but one must find the time” reinforces this—but the human is able perceive it through art and language.

Auden describes humanity as only able to make “noises” in the pattern of history and uses an audible resonance of the Lord’s Prayer in the lines

Muse of Time, but for whose merciful silence

Only the first step would count and that

Would always be murder, whose kindness never

Is taken in, forgive our noises

And teach us our recollections... (81-85)

This section of the poem appears to recognize of the divine authority of God over history.

John Fuller has argued that the poem stresses the way those who resist history’s plan are “secular tyrants” and “victims of time” (*Commentary* 465) and Auden’s conclusion to the poem emphasizes humility and faith:

⁴⁸ Similarly, when Tolkien rewrites Genesis for his pre-history of Middle-earth *The Silmarillion*, he also turns to music as a metaphor to describe the creation of the universe and the pattern of God’s will.

...Approachable as you seem,
 I dare not ask if you bless the poets,
 For you do not look as if you ever read them,
 Nor can I see a reason why you should. (88-92)

Auden restates the idea that poetry cannot effect time or history. Mendelson notes the “elliptical” quality of the verse, how the lines cycle back over older themes in an attempt to erase his earlier verse:

Auden repeatedly said after 1939, that no work of art ever had any effect on history; that, as he replied to praise for his political poems, ‘nothing I wrote prevented one Jew from being gassed.’ (‘The only person who really benefited from it was me, because it gave me a certain literary reputation,’ he added.) (398)

As a result of the perceived failure of his early verse, Auden adopts a post-millenarian concept of history and faith and uses this position to shape his criticism in his final decades. His 1962 collection *The Dyer’s Hand* was designed around a very specific Christian goal and Auden insisted to Stephen Spender that “the *whole* book is really about [Christianity and Art], the theme which dictated my selection of pieces and their order” (qtd. in Carpenter 404). An earlier work titled “The Dyer’s Hand” had been originally broadcast as a trilogy of radio talks in June of 1955 and in a sense deals with much the same goals as “The Homage to Clio.”

Auden structures his opening argument in “The Dyer’s Hand” around two kinds of writers: The Poet and The Historian. Both are allied with strains of literature and the division is not unlike that of Erich Auerbach’s distinction in *Mimesis*: The Poet is largely

subjective, Greek, and elitist; the Historian is largely objective, Judeo-Christian, and egalitarian. Auden's own placement in this division seems to be oriented towards The Poet; in the second lecture, Auden answers the question "Do you think you can affect the actions of the gods by composing poems?" by stating that poetry has no inherent magical power (537-8; 550). Poetry does, however, possess the ability to construct secondary worlds for Auden: "What poetry can do is transform the real world into an imaginary one which is god-like in its permanence and beauty, providing a picture of life which is worthy of imitation as far as it is possible" Auden's humour and irony demands a more nuanced admission though, and he closes the Poet's claim by reminding us that "It is not possible, of course, but without the attempt the real world would get even worse" (538).

If poetry is able to represent the ideal world, then it follows that language (poetry's tools) is capable of some representation of the utopia in and of itself. This "logic" seems to argue a magical, performative power to words themselves, and this comes to serve as the basis of Auden's notion of millennium. He argues that poetry's focus on beauty serves as an analogy to Goodness and through that Utopia. Millennium is therefore "possible and verbal only," a strange paradox that suggests that only language is capable of both announcing and creating a perfect world. Auden is quite far-reaching in this argument, claiming:

Every poet, consciously or unconsciously, holds the following absolute presuppositions, as the dogmas of his art:

- (1) A historical world of unique events and persons exists and that its existence is a good.

(2) This historical world is a fallen world, full of unfreedom and disorder. It is good that it exists but the way in which it exists is evil.

(3) This historical world is a redeemable world. The unfreedom and disorder of the past can be reconciled in the future. Every successful poem, therefore, presents an analogue of that Paradisal state in which Freedom and Law, System and Order are united and contradictions reconciled and sins forgiven.

Every good poem represents already very nearly Utopia. (557)

Within this model of art, Auden is able to justify his millenarianism without resorting to an explicitly prophetic verse, because all verse is prophetic. It also reflects the degree to which he now understood secondary worlds as the vehicle for millenarian expression.

For Auden, from the period of 1954 and onward, language was the route to millennium. Humphrey Carpenter describes Auden's increasing fascination with metre and diction as being "the place in his poetry that had once been occupied by the dogmas of Layard, Lawrence, Groddreck, Marx and Gerald Heard" (419). Literature and language therefore become the vehicle for and resting place of Auden's utopian desire. This is not an unexpected shift in his thinking, as it was clearly present in the conclusion of "Memorial for the City" and its conflation of the City of God with literary and religious language. Literature therefore becomes the space of the millennium in a meaningful manner and the secondary world becomes the route through which the human mind explores the possibility of a better, ideal world. This mechanism is not simple escapism, but is in fact the highest order of art in Auden's view.

Auden chose to express this position more clearly in his series of lectures called *Secondary Worlds*. Just as Eliot inaugurated the first of a series of lectures dedicated to the memory of Yeats, Auden would inaugurate the annual T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures at the University of Kent in 1967. Although they represent a substantial and long quartet of lectures, *Secondary Worlds* is often relegated to the edges of Auden's career. Edward Mendelson, for example, views it as a transitional piece, taking Auden away from firm belief in the values of aspiring to truth to an argument based on "common experience" (*Later Auden* 489). Mendelson's argument that "Auden's universe had disintegrated into isolated, plural, secondary worlds, all of them alienated from the singular primary world" is an interesting one. If expanded upon and considered in the light of millenarianism, it might be considered an argument that suggests that Auden's utopianism fails and any coherent movement that could have been generated from him is essentially self-defeating.

However, Auden's earlier ideas of language had already begun to argue that literature may be the strongest space for utopian and millenarian experience. In this way, Auden's ideas run similar to Fredric Jameson's argument in *Archaeologies of the Future* that despite the "unusual destiny" of utopia as a literary and political issue, "the fluctuations of its historical context do nothing to resolve this variability, which is also not a matter of taste or individual judgement" (xi). To Auden, a secondary world is a way for utopia to exist beyond context and to envision a radical future. No matter how "gloomy" (142) a future may seem, or how "impotent" art is, it is possible to focus on the ability "to make an object, be it an epic or a two-line epigram, which will remain permanently on hand in the world" (141). A secondary world is a way to overcome ideas of catastrophe and

continuity, a way to a better world through language and creativity. This argument, which Auden uses to close his lectures, is dramatically similar to the argument of “In Memory of W. B. Yeats,” — that poetry changes nothing but survives — and these similarities are a strong reminder of the consistency of Auden’s thoughts on poetry. It is also an echo, perhaps intentionally, of Tolkien’s argument about the nature of fantasy in “On Fairy-Stories.”

The subject matter of *Secondary Worlds* encapsulates arguments about the martyr as hero, the Norse Sagas, opera, and the nature of language and faith. Auden admits he ranges widely and largely in his own interests, although the first and last lectures are closer to Eliot’s themes. The critical millenarian element in Auden’s argument is the way each of his topics contain utopias of a sort: the portrayal of the martyr in dramas like Eliot’s *Murder at the Cathedral* are not confined to historical fact (23), but in a very Aristotelian sense, are able to move beyond representation into a kind of “moral sophistication” that enables utopian spaces (45). The Icelandic Sagas create a space where “the Historian and the Poet” of “The Dyer’s Hand” are unified, a state completely unlike the modern primary world and reflective of Auden’s poetic organic community (82-3). Opera serves as a “last refuge” (116) for a kind of explosive, melodramatic expression of the internal human world, serving as a literalization of “extraordinary situations or states of violent emotion in which we feel an urgent need for utterance” (87). Ultimately in the last lecture, language itself is able to respond to change, compressing meaning, and transcending the primary world (144).

Auden does not reject language as a source of community; indeed it remains the site of our imagination and the source of Agape. Literature's ability to open up secondary worlds of imagination and utopia grants it a radical and humane effect; in effect, language is what allows us to imagine the millenarian vision of a better world.⁴⁹ In later years, such as when he served on a committee tasked to updating the Episcopal Psalter for modern readers, Auden thought of his task as "[trying] to persuade the scholars not to alter [anything] unless there is a definite mistranslation" (qtd. in Mendelson, *Later Auden* 518). The kind of religious conservatism Eliot and Auden displayed was not idiosyncrasy, but a deep expression of their hopes for the future. For a millenarian, the past must be retained in order to generate the golden age ahead; otherwise the vision is only a restatement of progress or continuity. As Auden commented in *Vogue* in 1973, "The first Christians had no linguistic problems because they expected the Parousia to occur in their lifetime; with us it is different. We are conscious of nearly two thousand years of Christian tradition behind us which it is our duty to transmit to future generations" (qtd. in Mendelson, *Later Auden* 519).

Auden's traditionalism found itself out of sync with the 1960s and although his liberalism remained strong he developed a strong dislike of mass media and further distanced himself from politics. He was also very concerned about being commemorated in his lifetime, owing in part to his sense that Yeats suffered because of his lionization from the 1920s onward (Carpenter 399). Such concerns also led Auden to repudiate many of his earlier poems: in preparation for the 1966 edition of *Collected Shorter Poems* Auden

⁴⁹ There is some indication that D. H. Lawrence might have been moving towards a similar theory of apocalypse and revelation based upon literary devices in his last book *Apocalypse*.

removed "Spain 1937" and "September 1, 1939." The removal of "Spain" might be due to the fact that he considered the poem unnecessary with the inclusion of "Memorial for the City,"⁵⁰ but Auden's reasons for excluding "September 1, 1939" are clearer. In a draft of a letter to Naomi Mitchinson, Auden explained that "The reason (artistic) I left England and went to the U.S. was precisely to *stop* me writing poems like 'Sept 1st 1939' (sic)", the most dishonest poem I have ever written. A hang-over from the U.K. It takes time to cure oneself" (qtd. in Carpenter 416).⁵¹

Critics and biographers have suggested that Auden's rejection of the poem is also a rejection of Yeats, and Auden did write to Stephen Spender in 1964 casting Yeats as "a symbol of my own devil of unauthenticity, of everything which I must try to eliminate from my own poetry, false emotions, inflated rhetoric, empty sonorities...His [poems] make me whore after lies" (qtd. in Carpenter 416). Such a caustic dismissal may be, in fact, due to a conflict caused by Yeats's occult post-millenarianism and Auden's Christian post-millenarian. Although the Auden of the 1930s was interested in pre-millenarian utopias, it was Yeats's verse and Auden's commemoration of Yeats that served as a vehicle for his movement along the spectrum of millenarianism from "pre-" to "post-." It is impossible to really ascertain the extent to which Auden may have recognized this tension between him and Yeats; While Auden's comments in "The Dyer's Hand" about utopian poetry suggests

⁵⁰ Humphrey Carpenter suggests that Auden "may well have felt uneasy at contemplating a poem which grew out of his unhappy involvement with the Spanish war" (Carpenter 416).

⁵¹ It is possible that Auden felt uncomfortable in the US because of the intense anti-Communist sentiment. Mitchinson was a figure of the English left and so he may be deliberately downplaying the political angle of his early writing. We now know that American intelligence agencies began keeping files on Auden as early as 1934.

at least a partial awareness of the post-millenarianism connection, it is never quite explicit enough in his writing to be a concrete assertion.

Part of his hesitation lies in the fact that Auden retreated from any kind of prophetic role. Yeats eagerly acted the poetic prophet and Eliot was committed to announcing the way to a Christian utopia. By comparison, Auden's millenarianism seems more individual. This presents an interesting counterpoint to the notion that Auden's work declines following the early 1940s. Those who would argue for the continued quality of Auden's verse often refer to the range of his work, from *The Age of Anxiety* to "Horae Canonicae," and the diversity of his technical skill. Certainly Auden's focus on a wide-range of technical forms is impressive (albeit possibly unfocused) but his maturation away from the kind of wide-eyed hope of the 1930s makes him less accessible to his readership and less acceptable to anti-religious positions. However his later work is read, Auden considered truth to be the paramount responsibility of the poet and this truth demanded a kind of realism to his millenarianism (Carpenter 421-2). Auden's repudiation of poetry's social power allows verse and language to become "pure" and an expression of utopia.

His late phase is therefore best thought of as a reduction or tightening of his earlier themes, not a decline. His demand for truth can be found in his response to those who rejected Tolkien, and led him to renounce earlier poems in favour of the more arduous philosophizing of his later verse. Of course, Auden could never truly suppress his early writing and he is remembered for his most sentimental statements of pre-millenarianism hope. In the weeks following the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Towers, Auden's verse acquired a kind of omnipresence in New York, with Daniel Swift noting in

the *TLS* that “Auden’s words are everywhere” and that at least four newspapers ran “September 1, 1939” as an editorial, suggesting that Auden’s verse still has a place in our conceptions of the future (17).

Despite the fact that his earlier work remains the source of his reputation, Auden was highly productive even in his final years, producing a number of new collections and writing widely and variedly. These works bear a sense of approaching death and reflect a fear of loneliness. Chester Kallman was often away working and Auden eventually accepted an offer to live at Oxford in 1972 because he was concerned about his death going unnoticed, “Suppose I had a coronary. It might be weeks before I was found” (qtd. in Carpenter 439). Another contributing factor to Auden’s sense of demise was the fact that most of his peers were dead; of the so-called “Auden group,” only Stephen Spender would outlive their namesake. In his final years, Auden essentially returned home to England, dividing his time between Oxford and Kirchstetten. Like his return to Northern themes, Auden’s return allowed him perspective and, to a degree, intellectual release.

On 28 September 1973, Auden passed away in his sleep of a heart attack. Memorials were held and commemorative tributes made. With Auden’s passing, one of the twentieth century’s most diverse poetic talents and most receptive critics ceased to write. Along with his death, a line of poetry, a chronology or sequence of millenarian thought that sought to understand and respond to modernity in a way that sought hope and transcendence, also came to a close: Modernism. Other kinds of futures had come into being—science fiction utopias, nuclear wastelands, and environmental destruction—and millenarianism itself in no way slowed or lessened its hold on humanity’s lives and

imaginations. It would change and permutate, but poetry's attempt to express millenarianism would become rarer and less valorised. New avenues of realism and expression would continue humanity's discussion of utopia, but the Modernist experiment with the future had come to an end.

CONCLUSION

*Evil is unspectacular and always human,
And shares our bed and eats at our own table,
And we are introduced to Goodness every day,
Even in drawing-rooms among a crowd of faults;
— Auden, "Herman Melville" (17-20)*

At some point, every generation of authors must consider the future. Humanity, in all its diversity, has the potential for a wide range of possible outcomes, and literature echoes this spectrum in its shifts in period, ideology, and technique. I hope the preceding pages suggest that Modernism relies on a hopeful future for the substructure of its intellectual and aesthetic expression. The period covered by this study is one of great violence and social change, and its artists responded to this challenge through an attempt to envision a better world. The Modernist turn towards subjectivity, or Ezra Pound's demand "make it new!," are not merely aesthetic choices, but are attempts to break with the present and create a radically new and radically better world of human identity and expression.

Millennium looms large in the minds of the poets I have studied here. Yeats, who would reinvent himself throughout his career, from Celtic dreamer to the wild old man, sought to reinvent the future, and find a route to utopian. Eliot, by contrast, places less emphasis upon the mystic and more upon the material. In his view, the process to utopia is a social one and Eliot's difficulty in expressing his pre-millenarianism in verse gave rise

to his later essays and finally to the brilliance of *Four Quartets*. Auden rejected the offered role as social spokesman for a much less celebrated role as a Christian poet and a devout post-millenarian. Language, for Auden, became the true resting place of a better future; our imaginations became a space where all things are possible.

My focus on the future was a slow process of realizing the importance of millenarian thought. The apparent irrationality of millenarianism is the result of an assumption that the secular, the rational, and the modern go hand in hand. Several recent works, such as Vincent P. Pecora's *Secularism and Cultural Criticism* or Theodore Ziolkowski's *Modes of Faith* have raised important questions about how academics have misunderstood the development of religion in relation to modernity. In his introduction, Pecora characterizes the late-twentieth-century approach to religion and society as a "contradictory" one: we characterize religion as merely an ideological product of "material and political power," but at the same time "we" also insist "that religion, whatever a largely secular elite may think, matters a great deal" (1). This logic implies that, by considering religion to be another part of the circulation of social power, we allow it to be subsumed by the political (in the broadest sense of the word). To borrow a phrase, the twentieth century often considers religion a continuation of politics by other means. What scholars such as Cohn, Burridge, and Barkun and authors like Yeats, Eliot, and Auden suggest is that this formulation is wrong. If any topical inquiry argues otherwise, millenarian studies suggest that religion is either apolitical or that the dissenting point-of-view may be reversed: politics is the continuation of religion by other means.

Perhaps the most significant and recent parallel argument to mine has been David Rudrum's essay "Slouching towards Bethlehem: Yeats, Eliot, and the Modernist Apocalypse." Rudrum bases his position on Frank Kermode's argument in *The Sense of an Ending* and uses examples from Yeats's and Eliot's poetry to stress the importance of apocalyptic thought in Modernism. Modernism, Rudrum argues, was marked by the imminence of apocalypse: "the end of the world, or at least the violent end of an era, is about to occur, but it is being preceded by an age of decadence, a time of decline" (60). He also correctly notes that "both Yeats and Eliot describe their apocalypses in the present tense" (63). This is, of course, in concordance with the argument I have made throughout this study, but there are points at which Rudrum's argument and my own part ways.

The first is his reliance on a general negative connotation to the apocalypse. Such a position may be due to the fact that he focuses upon "The Second Coming" and "The Hollow Men," two apocalyptic poems that do use catastrophic images; an essay that focused upon "The Happy Townland" and "Little Gidding" may well have produced a very different result, one which stressed the hopeful aspect of Modernism. It is, however, entirely possible that Rudrum's position is simply an assumption based on the contemporary use of the word apocalypse as a synonym for catastrophe.

The second problem occurs in Rudrum's discussion of Yeats's ideas of cycles; Rudrum points out that this differs from standard eschatology, and that is certainly true. He then quotes Wittgenstein's statement that "The truly apocalyptic view of the world is that things do *not* repeat themselves" (64). This is only true of catastrophic apocalypticism, as the millennium of Christianity demands a very important repetition: the Second

Coming. Only a nihilistic view of the future denies the possibility of repetition, and Modernism longs for utopia. Equal important is the reality that while Yeats's mode of history does indeed move in cycles, it moves towards a better universe, not a state of an eternal present or an infinite flux of events. Ultimately, Rudrum is confined to a single essay and he does not have the space I am afforded here, and so it is possible that he may have reached the same conclusions if given the time and space.

One problem with literary discussions of millennium and apocalypse stems from Kermode's use of "clerkly scepticism" in *The Sense of the Ending*. The academic tendency to ridicule millennial thinking is evident in his discussion of "The Modern Apocalypse":

The first phase of modernism, which so far as the English language goes we associate with Pound and Yeats, Wyndham Lewis and Eliot and Joyce, was clerkly enough, sceptical in many ways; and yet we can without difficulty convict most of these authors of dangerous lapses in to mythical thinking. (104)

Kermode here is both judge and jury, convicting guilty authors of being incorrect in their ideas. Kermode insists that Yeats was "at bottom...sceptical about the nonsense" of the occult (104). I will admit part of me does rush to agree, to echo Kermode's irony, but the loss of objectivity would mean that risking misreading the poetry as well. As Northrop Frye points out in "The Double Mirror," to demythologize mythic material is to effectively "obliterate them" (36). We cannot denounce the beliefs of the writer while at the same time valorizing their poetry. We might also wonder what, at bottom, is wrong or illegal about mythical thinking.

It is, of course, possible to denounce both a writer and their verse, but that is hardly possible in the case of Yeats, Eliot, or Auden—simply put, they are too good to be discarded. The warrant granted by their poetry was one reason they became the figureheads of Modernism—it is not easy to discount them. One might also consider the source of our desire to look back at historical figures (which is what these poets are to us), and acting as judge and jury. Calling Eliot “a scoundrel” as James Fenton did in 1996 is paradoxical (Gordon 475). Were any of these men paragons of virtue? No, and while their tendency, especially in Eliot’s case, to make moral statements that we can disagree with may leave them open to criticism, the desire to condemn them reflects poorly on us as readers. Perhaps our ability to study prior literatures and recognizing that the writing does not living up to our present values is one way to measure our progress in the humanities, but we should also note our desire to condemn historical figures suggests there is still progress to be made. Was Eliot an anti-Semite? Was Yeats a fascist? Was Auden’s guilt over his homosexual wrong? Were they, each in their own way, hateful? The answer to these questions may be yes or no, but if I simply condemn or silence them, then am I not engaging in a kind of literary fascism of my own? Am I not building a utopia of a canon? While objectivity may not be truly possible in literary research, we can at least try to recognize when we, as scholars, reject other thinkers notions simply because they run counter to the ideological pressures of the academy. Or, as Lyndall Gordon has put it more succinctly, “it is naïve to expect the great to be good” (2).

Modernist poetry effectively disrupts academic notions of utopians: they are not necessarily marginal, pathological, or guilty of misthinking. Jay Winter raises similar issues in his epilogue to “An Alternative History of the Twentieth Century:”

I am the last to underestimate the disfiguring effects of war and collective violence, but I have become uncomfortable with the tendency among my students and scholars to ignore the visions of those who passed through these events and still believed there was another way. To be sure, there is at work here a very fashionable tendency among students and scholars to confuse cynicism with wisdom. The notion of a different kind of international order, or an alternative vision of society, is usually treated as the stuff of children or madman, or the irrelevant recollection of totalitarian blueprints discredited long ago. (205)

Winter uses the term “superior history” to indicate scholarship “written by someone self-consciously shrewder and with fewer illusions than the period under study” (205). Much like Eugen Weber, Winter is rightly suspicious of scholars who attempt to belittle the dreams of others because they seem improbable. It is my hope that my own work here is not marked by such a folly, and that it has attempted to deal with millenarians evenly and openly. We must dispense with the fear of being fashionable, and allow alternative views of society equal space in literary, cultural, and scholarly debate.

It is only through understanding apocalyptic thought as a perpetual spectrum present in human cultures that we are able to truly make sense of Modernism’s utopian desire. The metaphor of a spectrum does suggest a need for further work, and a further study of the post-modern period or of catastrophic futures may be necessary. The growing

sense of catastrophe we face in emerging environmental challenges suggests our conception of the future is entirely anti-Modern, as we may face the possibility of no better world than the one we live in now. Certainly the fact that our present world is based upon an economy of finite resources suggests a radically different world is inevitable. Whether this world will be better or worse than our own is still, for now, the province of prophets, secular and sacred.⁵²

In retrospect, it may have been the genres of science fiction and fantasy that gained the most from the rise of the catastrophic future in the latter half of the twentieth century. The success of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic films allowed artists to envision the future in a more direct fashion and to engage in social commentary on a wider scale than poetry could afford them. Science Fiction is an intensely realist genre (Fantasy, in its own way, is just as realist, but less readily perceived as such), but the millenarian narratives that lie at the heart of the most widely popular Science Fiction and Fantasy — *The Lord of the Rings*, *Dune*, *Star Wars*, *The Matrix* — suggests two things: one, the experience of millenarianism may be even more widespread in our “secular” society; two, that even the most realistic of Science Fiction needs to engage in a utopian or catastrophic vision.

Post-modernism is not a Modernism that becomes self-aware, but a Modernism stripped of its millenarianism. Works like Graham Swift’s *Waterland* or Don DeLillo’s *White Noise* emphasize the catastrophic dimensions of our future thought and writers like Cormac McCarthy reflect a kind of violent naturalism that runs counter to millenarian notions of utopia. Of course, there are forerunners of such ideas, but the weak dystopia of

⁵² Although the literal manifestations of catastrophe outweigh the figurative in our post-modern period.

Huxley's *A Brave New World*, or the stronger vision of Orwell's *1984* are more challenges to the notion of continuity, which stand alongside H. P. Lovecraft's atheist horror stories as allegories of our limitations.

These notions of catastrophe mark a change by which English literature abandons Modernism's radical hope for a fear of collapse. In his recent work *Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia*, Leon Surette describes the literary history of Modernism as "motivated by the desire to expose a grand narrative shared by modernist writers" (x). This study is very much guilty of such a motive, but I hope in some small way, that this argument has shed light on how the sacred and secular, or perhaps the religious and the political, are at once divided by their intellectual and social functions and yet defined by their need for *the* future. Perhaps, in our future, we might return to an aesthetic of hope and the aesthetics of Modernism.

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