Abstract

This thesis is a study of the apocalyptic visions and forms that cropped up in the British cinema of the late 1980s and early 1990s with great frequency. It is my belief that this apocalypticism was directly related to the socio-political situation in Britain during this period—a situation that was largely the result of the rule of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, a situation that was largely the result of “Thatcherism.” Furthermore, I believe that such a turn towards apocalyptic form fits into a tradition wherein crisis, sectarianism/radicalism/leftism, and apocalypticism have been closely tied over the course of history. Thus, my argument proceeds in the following manner. Chapter one takes a look at the roots of the apocalyptic tradition within Judeo-Christian culture and attempts to specify this tradition’s principal characteristics, and how this tradition was linked with sectarianism and crises—both “real” and “perceived”—from its inception, even if the tradition has been largely dominated by more conservative interests ever since. Chapter two provides a “case example” of this particular branch of the apocalyptic tradition, examining the English Revolution and how it generated radicalized forms of apocalypticism. This chapter then devotes special attention to what Christopher Hill has termed the “experience of defeat” amongst the Revolution’s radical Nonconformists—the political and spiritual swoon that occurred when the tide turned against the radicals, and the Restoration was established—and how this experience, too, resulted in apocalyptic texts. Chapter three is a study of “Thatcherism”: where it came from, how it made its way through the
1980s and into the 1990s, how it sowed crisis all along this path. This chapter lays stress upon how Thatcherism provoked a “crisis of the left” that creates a resonant parallel with Hill’s “experience of defeat.” Chapter four focuses on the films of Derek Jarman, Peter Greenaway, Patrick Keiller, and Mike Leigh during this period: how they frequently turned towards apocalyptic visions, how these visions were directly linked to Thatcherism, and, especially, how these visions were the result of the “crisis of the left” provoked by the rule of the Thatcher and Major administrations.
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--Vancouver, September, 1997
This project has come out of a long-standing interest in apocalypticism, millenarianism and antinomianism that was initially prompted by reading Greil Marcus' *Lipstick Traces* (1989), and Norman Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millenium* (1957) soon afterwards. Numerous thematic pathways have radiated out from this point of origin over the years, and these pathways have led in a tremendously wide variety of directions. Indeed, there have been times when I have had a hard time getting away from these themes, when everywhere I looked I ran across them. In addition to this, from 1990 to 1992 I lived in London and had an opportunity to view the state of Britain under Thatcherism first hand. With its homelessness, its hooliganism, its terrorist bomb attacks, its pronounced divisions of class and race, its police brutality, its filth, and so on, London appeared to be perpetually on the brink of collapse, and at times it seemed a miracle that every morning it was able to pick itself up, and dust itself off somehow. Later, I began to pick up on a pattern of apocalypticism in contemporary British films. And during 1994 it seemed like every British film I came across contained an apocalyptic strain of some kind. This thesis is the fruit of this thematic progression.
This, too, he said to me, ‘Do not keep the prophecies in this book a secret, because the Time is close...’

--Revelation 22: 10-11

I have often been asked whether I believe in the impending Apocalypse. Well, I do and I don’t. Will the world actually come to an abrupt end on 18th August 1999? Who can say? I think it’s on the whole unlikely, myself. But like my despondent friend Johnny, I do worry about the future...Should I be optimistic and hope that things will somehow improve? Or is that unbearable recurring apocalyptic nightmare to be heeded?

--Mike Leigh
Introduction

The study of apocalypses and of apocalypticism, a field which for many years had been a rather rarefied one, has been an area of intense and wide-ranging interest over the last 40 to 50 years. This has led to a massive number of enquiries into these areas, and ones related to them (especially millenarianism), from a large number of different perspectives, including literary, sociological, rhetorical, and theological studies. One can point to works such as Cohn's *The Pursuit of the Millenium* (1957), Frank Kermode’s *A Sense of an Ending* (1964), and Eric Hobsbawm’s *Primitive Rebels* (1965) as being works that served to open up these areas to larger acceptance and closer scrutiny. The reasons for the tremendous interest in the study of apocalypticism and its related fields are perhaps not so difficult to imagine in the wake of World War II: the Holocaust, the Third Reich, Stalinism, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Cold War all spring to mind as possible catalysts. Whatever the reasons, the amount of literature in books and journals that has focused on this field of study has been voluminous, and debates amongst academics have been heated.

Apocalypticism has similarly held a firm grip on the popular imagination in recent times. And again many of the reasons for this do not seem terribly mysterious: the Cold War and the prospect of a Nuclear Holocaust, the coming end of the millenium, the growing strength of the Fundamentalist Right in the United States of America, President Reagan’s widely-reported belief in the imminence of the Day of Judgement, the Chernobyl incident, the formation of Israel and the ongoing Middle East crisis (which many have seen as being fulfillments of Biblical apocalyptic
prophecy), and the Branch Davidians and the Waco incident, again, all come to mind immediately as possible spurs to this fascination. Not surprisingly, as a result, the world of film has been filled with apocalyptic visions during this same period, towards a number of different ends. Some films have reflected the sense of a looming End of Time, others have tried to make sense of the surrounding world through the use of apocalyptic visions, still others have used apocalypticism strictly as a selling-point, playing on the public's continued fascination with this ages-old topic. Films which have turned on the theme of apocalypse have included everything from *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, 1955) to *The Seventh Seal* (Ingmar Bergman, 1957), *Dr. Strangelove* (Stanley Kubrick, 1964) to *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), *The Day After* (Nicholas Meyer, 1983) to *The Seventh Sign* (Earl Schultz, 1988), *The Rapture* (Michael Tolkin, 1991) to *Seven* (David Fincher, 1995). In addition to these films, there have been countless films which have been based on so-called post-apocalyptic scenarios--either vaguely or explicitly--such as *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) and the *Mad Max* and the *Terminator* series. Usually, these post-apocalyptic films are situated in some kind of dystopic future, understandably, but in some cases--notably *The Day After*, which is apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic--they take place in the "here-and-now."

Generally, the "apocalyptic genre" in film has not been terribly political in nature. Even when their narratives have been closely linked to the political realm at face value--as in certain Cold War apocalypses--these films have tended to handle political matter in only the vaguest manner, using politics as an excuse for an
apocalyptic scenario, rather than keeping apocalypse and politics closely tied. Of course, there have been exceptions to this statement, and *Dr. Strangelove*, which fuses Cold War politics and nuclear armageddon together within an absurdist, black comic narrative mode, provides a good example. In most cases, however, apocalypse has been treated mainly as a lure towards high ticket sales. One film which provides a good example of the employment of apocalyptic themes towards the creation of a (perversely) titillating, de-politicized narrative is David Fincher’s *Seven*. This film is ostensibly a slick, moody 90s take on the detective film whose narrative focuses on a couple of detectives’ pursuit of a serial murderer whose killings are thematically linked by the Seven Deadly Sins, but the film is steeped in a sense of apocalypse. This is achieved principally through its depiction of the City (New York City, apparently, although the film’s final sequences appear to have been shot in California’s golden hills) as having run its course, as being some kind of Babylon overrun with stress, pollution, noise, and senseless and horrific crimes, as being a sure sign of civilization at its End. This characterization is then linked to (1) the number seven (a major Biblical motif, but especially in the Book of Revelation) in a number of different ways (the action takes place over seven days; the Seven Deadly Sins), (2) canonic literary tours of hell, such as *The Divine Comedy* and *Paradise Lost*, (3) “apocalyptic” weather (there is an incessant “Biblical” downpour during all of the city sequences), (4) an eschatological temporal framework (the film builds up the idea that “something BIG is going to happen” on the seventh day [an inversion of Genesis?], and so on. This link having been made, the serial murderer’s crimes (he performs grotesque and
spectacular murders of representatives of the Seven Deadly Sins) take on the resonance of being the seven signs announcing the End of the World, a series of final judgements against a sick society. Potentially this scenario could have been highly politically charged--for instance, if the murders had been pointedly "purposeful" in nature, singling out individuals in order to severely disrupt the social realm and/or make a provocative statement about the state of things. However, the film chooses to simply monstricize "John Doe" (the killer), over and over again, even as one of the detectives is constantly arguing that he must not be scapegoated in this manner. For instance, the film has Doe choose only the tritest targets for his crimes (an obese man for "Gluttony," a model for "Pride," a high-profile "amoral" lawyer for "Greed," a prostitute for "Lust," a drifter/deadbeat for "Sloth," etc.) which has the effect of underlining the innocence of the victims and the arbitrariness of the crimes, and, therefore, makes these choices come across as pathetic. Furthermore, one gets the sense that the narrative is simply providing an excuse for the film’s elaborate sets, instead of having the sets complement the narrative. Thus, the killings become merely an excuse for "set dec fireworks," for grisly titillation of the most spectacular kind. In the end, Seven’s take on apocalypse is insubstantial, convoluted, and sensationalistic, not much more than a cynical marketing ploy.

That being said, the films that will be discussed in this thesis utilize apocalyptic visions in a much more complex manner, often pairing them with allegorical, metaphorical, and metonymic configurations which frequently have political ramifications. As shall be discussed later, some scholars, such as Neil Forsyth (1987),
consider the apocalyptic genre to be a non-political genre, claiming, among other reasons, that apocalypses transform the world-historical into the cosmological. Others, however, note that although the apocalyptic genre is far from inherently revolutionary (as Augustine’s re-allegorization of the Book of Revelation attests to), the genre holds a tremendous amount of potential for carrying revolutionary material, and time and time again apocalypticism has been linked with social upheaval and even social revolution. The films that will be discussed later appear to be well aware of the apocalyptic genre’s radical political potential, and utilize this potential towards an engagement with the present day world. Although, to my knowledge, there are not many cases in film history of a similar type of political engagement, there are some. For instance, Carl Dreyer’s *Day of Wrath* puts to use apocalyptic language (principally through the film’s title and through the lyrics of the song which gives the film its title) and apocalyptic imagery (chiefly, the film’s witch-burning sequence) in order to transform a narrative about 16th century witchhunt trials in Denmark into an allegory on Nazism in modern-day Denmark. More recently, Hungarian filmmaker Bela Tarr’s last two feature films, *Damnation* (1987) and *Satantango* (1992), have been so heavily apocalyptic in both tone and imagery that even though both films are focused on incredibly localized groups of people (similar to *Day of Wrath*) the films have a way of making one feel that all of mankind is also immediately threatened. Even though Tarr has stated that *Damnation* is the more apocalyptic of the two, to this writer it would seem to be the opposite. One of the reasons for this is that in spite of the fact that both films are intensely localized compared to most feature films, *Satantango* is not as

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1 in a public address at the Pacific Cinematheque, Vancouver, B.C. on March 23, 1997
localized in that it contains more relationships, covers a greater amount of terrain (although the action takes place primarily in one rural setting, there is movement to other settings both rural and urban), is significantly longer (over 7 hours long!), and generally has more scope and is more complex. Both films, as mentioned above, give one the sense that the End is near—with *Satantango* this sensation is absolutely definite. *Satantango* is also more overtly apocalyptic: the film features a “second coming” with a false messiah figure; the film begins and ends (more or less) with a supernatural occurrence—the tolling of a largely-destroyed church’s belltower that hasn’t contained a bell in over 40 years—which seems to be an announcement of the End; as well as a number of openly-articulated references to apocalypse and the Book of Revelation (one segment of the film, for instance, is entitled “The irrevocable judgment is coming soon”). What lends these intimations of apocalypse their credibility is that Tarr sets them in a seemingly hyper-realist text. Tarr, like Dreyer, works with an aesthetic that is based on the long take (in *Satantango*, very few, if any, shots last less than three minutes, and most are in the five to ten minute range), and his films tend to concentrate on the everyday cruelty and brutality of the lives of the dispossessed, with “no” artifice. And similar to some of Dreyer’s work, Tarr takes a realist aesthetic (hyper-realist, actually) and slowly, subtly conflates it with the supernatural, at times. In *Satantango*, the film’s overt apocalypticism and brutally bleak hyper-realism teamed with its oppressively dark skies and unrelenting stinging rain (conditions that provoked Stéphane Bouquet to comment that here, “the weather is the new prisonguard of being” (58)) converge to create a sense of Doom that is
immediately palpable. And, finally, interwoven with this complex whole is a wry tale of political corruption and betrayal that suddenly, sharply transforms much of the narrative into an intensely black comedy—one so black it hurts. Interestingly, Tarr’s vision seems to have become harsher and more apocalyptic, more far-reaching, after the fall of the “Iron Curtain,” suggesting that Tarr is far from just an embittered anti-Communist. Satantango provides a stunning example of how apocalypse and politics—in this case, both interpersonal and national—can be combined to create an immensely powerful film.

Similarly, the films that will be discussed later in this thesis—films by Derek Jarman, Peter Greenaway, Patrick Keiller, and Mike Leigh—unite apocalyptic themes and visions with a sense (sometimes explicitly, sometimes obliquely) of the socio-political conditions of Britain under Thatcher’s and Major’s administrations. And, as we shall see, these apocalyptic themes and visions act, both, as representations of this transformed Britain, as well as an attempt to contest this new Britain and to call for change. What this thesis seeks to do is to illuminate the connections between the apocalyptic genre and radical/left politics in ancient times, during the English Revolution, and in the films of Jarman, Greenaway, Keiller, and Leigh, during the Thatcher/Major era, thereby demonstrating why the apocalyptic genre is useful to such politics and how it becomes manifested. With this in mind, this thesis will: (1) investigate the apocalyptic genre closely in order to elaborate upon the relationship between apocalypse and sectarian, anti-establishment, and radical politics, and apocalypse and crisis, drawing examples from Judaic and early Christian apocalyptic
texts; (2) examine how millenarianism, radical politics, and crisis combined and resulted in apocalypticism at times during the English Revolution, as a sort of “case example”; (3) provide an overview of the Thatcher/Major years and the crises, both perceived and real (especially the ‘crisis of the Left’), that characterized this period; and (4) elaborate upon the relationship between the Thatcher/Major years, the crisis of the Left, the abovementioned filmmakers, and many of the apocalyptic visions that showed up in their work time and time again between 1987 (when Thatcher won her stunning third election) and 1997 (when “new Labour” was voted into power after 18 years of Conservative rule).
CHAPTER 1: Apocalypse/Crisis/Sectarianism

Although it immediately conjures up notions of impending doom, the word apocalypse involves a much more complex set of concepts. Indeed, many academic works on apocalyptic thought warn against reductionism and essentialism when regarding this subject:

Apocalypticism, from its origins, is a highly complex phenomenon. Single-minded interpretations are immediately suspect. To reduce apocalypticism to a clear and distinct idea may well be to sacrifice understanding for illusory clarity. Apocalypticism throughout its lengthy and rich history fused together a variety of interests and was invoked for various purposes; the historian’s task is to capture, to the best of his ability, the full range of the phenomenon under investigation. This, of course, does not excuse one from trying to set down, as clearly as possible, the components of what we have been calling apocalypticism, it may not even exclude a provisional or “working” definition, or list of characteristics; but it does provide a caution against too easy solutions to the issues involved. (McGinn 3)

With this in mind, this chapter will be considering a number of academic texts dealing with apocalypse and apocalypticism in order to come up with a “working” scenario for the apocalyptic genre in relation to socio-historical setting and politics. Therefore, this chapter will provide a version of the apocalyptic genre, a particular version that makes no claims on the entirety of the genre, but a valid version nevertheless.

The root of the word apocalypse comes from the Greek word *apokâlypsis*, which, many would be surprised to hear, simply means to uncover, reveal, or disclose (Zamora 10). This explains the title of the Book of Revelation, and it explains the interchangeability of the terms “revelation” and “apocalypse” (i.e. “the Revelation of John,” “the Apocalypse of John,” etc.). Thus, according to a strict definition of the word, an apocalypse is a revelation of the ways of God to man, with a prophet or seer
as interlocutor or mediator. These “revelations” typically come in the form of a dream or vision, or some other kind of visitation. Apocalypse, as Lois Parkinson Zamora rightly points out in her book *Writing the Apocalypse* (1989), “is not merely a synonym for disaster or cataclysm or chaos” (10). So even though apocalypse is inextricably linked with destruction, “it also envisions a millenial order which represents the potential antithesis to the undeniable abuses of human history,” it is always tied to the belief that, “historical crisis will have the cleansing effect of radical renewal” (10). The destruction and disasters associated with apocalypse, therefore, are not merely critical, they are “eschatological in nature,” they are “concerned with final things, with the end of the present age and with the age to follow” (10). These basic qualities of apocalypses—an eschatological view of history, a sense of historical crisis, a belief in the cleansing properties of this crisis leading to a glorious epoch—are echoed time and time again in academic work on the subject. For instance, Amos Funkenstein cites the Ezra apocalypse from the Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament as being emblematic of the genre. He writes:

Written about a generation after the catastrophic end of the first Jewish revolt against Rome (A.D. 71), the vision restates the motifs common to all apocalyptic visions: the end of the world is very near; only a few will survive it to see the outbreak of a new, magnificent eon. The old world is full of “sorrow and pain;” it will crumble under the weight of its own wickedness. (44)

Thus, the Ezra apocalypse states: “Quoniam festinans festinat saeculum pertransire” ("Our world hurries towards its end") (44).

However, in spite of the popularity of readings in the Zamora/Funkenstein vein, readings such as these are not undisputed. Whereas both of these writers root their
versions of the apocalyptic genre firmly in a social setting, there has been a counter-
tendency within certain academic circles studying apocalypses to move away from
social readings (Thompson 24). In his book *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and
Empire* (1990) Leonard L. Thompson describes how the study of apocalypse has in
recent times been frequently broken down into three distinct subdivisions:
“apocalypse,” “apocalyptic,” and “apocalypticism,” which roughly amount to “literary,
religious, and socio-historical inquiries,” respectively, with each of these areas being
regarded as “so complex as to require at least a temporary separation of form and
content from social situation” (23-4). This, according to Thompson, has led to a
situation whereby apocalypticism is treated as an entirely separate “issue.” Thus,
when the Society of Biblical Literature drew up a definition of the genre “apocalypse”
their definition only dealt with issues of form and content—“those who formulated this
definition deliberately left out the issue of apocalypticism” (24).

Despite “several good reasons” for maintaining this separation between “social
setting” and issues of form and content, Thompson nevertheless attempts to find a way
to maintain the socio-historical’s place within the study of apocalypse. He notes that
there is general agreement, as we have seen, that apocalypses arise out of times of

The notion of crisis may be defined in different ways—[including] persecution,
culture shock, injustice, and the inevitability of death—but a situation of crisis
is seen as fundamental to the rise of an apocalypse. (26)

However, he also points out that any attempts to link crisis situations and apocalypses
conclusively are doomed to failure because of the fact that crisis situations do not
necessarily result in apocalypses (27). But whereas someone like Walter Schmithals would “[sever] connections between apocalyptic and social settings,” Thompson instead mentions a compromise: one developed around the notion of “perceived crisis” (27):

What then does perceived crisis signify? It is a way of saying that (1) the author of an apocalypse considers a situation to be a crisis but (2) that the crisis dimensions of the situation are evident only through his angle of vision. . .that is, the crisis becomes visible only through the revealed knowledge in an apocalypse; prior to that knowledge there is no crisis. (28)

This last phrase seems problematic as is: it seems that Thompson mistakenly uses the word “no” where he should have used “limited.” Nevertheless, in this framework, the apocalyptic serves the social task of persuading the community to consider the present age as one of crisis--of eschatological proportions. Thus, apocalypses can be seen as being agitational or instigative tools in addition to other scenarios where they have been described as acting as a (social) balm of sorts. Thompson then proceeds to argue forcefully for the continued inclusion of apocalypticism within any thorough study of apocalyptic on the grounds of the social basis of language itself, on the grounds that language is a social exchange. He states:

The social dimensions of language may be located (1) in the language itself, which includes both what is said and its illocutionary point; (2) in the situation occasioning that language; and (3) in the consequences or effects of the speech activity on further social intercourse. (30)

Thompson also asks his reader to consider the social dimensions of apocalypse as a genre. He points out that,

genres are not literary structures isolated from a social context, nor are they constituted by purely idiosyncratic linguistic forms; they are a part of conventional social exchange involving speakers, writers, hearers, and readers who recognize their communicative force. (30)
This being the case, the apocalyptic genre is one that is especially well-rooted in the socio-historical:

...it needs to be understood that an apocalypse does not reveal another world, it reveals hidden dimensions of the world in which humans live and die; that is, an apocalypse is not world-negating but, rather, world-expanding: it extends or expands the universe to include transcendent realities, and it does this both spatially and temporally. (31)

Thus, again, the "seer" is one who has a very particular view of his/her historical context and is attempting to persuade his audience to adopt his vision. He employs the apocalyptic genre in order to, "[communicate] a certain knowledge and understanding of what the world is like" (31). Key to this process is the use of "metaphorical and symbolic language," language that is capable of performing these expansions while remaining intelligible all the while (31). Through this elaborate language,

here-and-now earthly institutions, powers, and social relations are located properly in the larger, expanded world—for example, by being linked through metaphor and homologue to appropriate suprahuman worldly powers that are both presently locatable somewhere in the expanded universe and eschatologically impinging on the here and now. (31-2)

It is along these lines that Thompson seeks,

a framework for integrating literary, conceptual, and social aspects of apocalyptic so that the language, religious sensibilities, and social and political experience of the writer, readers, and hearers of the Book of Revelation can be seen as aspects or dimensions of an order of wholeness. (34)

And it is according to this pattern that Zamora, Funkenstein, and, more elaborately, Thompson have all utilized, with apocalyptic’s form and content closely linked to its social setting, that this thesis will proceed. In order to draw out these connections a little less abstractly, we will now turn to some concrete examples of this process of
“social exchange” in action, with examples drawn from Judeo-Christian scripture itself.

In spite of the trend towards subdividing the study of the apocalyptic genre, often involving the exclusion of socio-historical analysis, as has been mentioned, there is nonetheless an extensive body of work in this field that stresses the socio-historical, even to the point of making it a defining feature of the genre. Thus, where someone such as Thompson argues that the historical “should not” be excluded, others argue that it “cannot” be excluded. One such voice is Amos Funkenstein:

For the sake of clarity, I wish to introduce the (ideal) distinction between apocalyptic imagery and apocalyptic knowledge: the significance of apocalypticism lies not only in the fact that the apocalyptician envisions the end of the world in very vivid images; no less important is the manner in which he proves the veracity of his visions, convinces himself and his community that the end is inevitable and inevitably close. Only with the aid of this distinction can the paradox of apocalypticism be understood--that it enhanced at one and the same time a sense of myth and a sense of history as a distinct unity. (45)

Indeed, it is hard to imagine even attempting to exclude the social setting from the study of apocalypse. The Jewish apocalyptic tradition is centered principally around the Book of Daniel and a number of books from the Pseudepigrapha, such as the Book of Ezra and the Book of Enoch. In addition to these texts, many other authors include the Book of Ezekiel, the Book of Isaiah, the Book of Jeremiah [which provided the root of the word “jeremiad”], and occasionally other Books of the Prophets. This tradition is widely believed to have begun in the 2nd century BCE. And in the manner of the scenario described by Funkenstein earlier in this chapter, apocalypses served as some kind of response to threats against the Jewish nation. Thompson writes that chapters 7-12, if not all, of the Book of Daniel, “arose in the situation of political
conflict between the Jews and Antiochus Epiphanes after 187 BCE” (21). And the resultant set of visions is appropriately bleak, “unveiled” yet somehow still shrouded in mystery. Within the section dedicated to Daniel’s Vision of “the ram and the he-goat” the Book states:

’Son of Man,’ [the angel Gabriel] said to me, ‘understand this: the vision shows the time of the End...’ ‘Come,’ he said, ‘I shall tell you what is going to happen when the Retribution is over, about the final times.’ (8:17-19)

Later, during “The Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks” Gabriel announces:

The end of that prince will be catastrophe
and, until the end, there will be war
and all the devastation decreed...
and on the wing of the Temple will be the appalling abomination
until the end, until the doom assigned to the devastation. (9:26-7)

One interesting corollary to the topical nature of an apocalypse such as the Book of Daniel is its pseudonymity, a trait characteristic of the Jewish apocalyptic tradition. Whereas Daniel was supposed to have been written in the 6th century BCE, it was actually produced in the 2nd century BCE, and as Thompson indicated above, contained “recognizable details of recent history under the guise of prophecy” (McGinn 7). Thus pseudonymity allowed for a claim on authority: “in the pre-modern world, written revelation was sacred not merely because it was written, but also because it was written long ago, ages before its accomplishment by someone famed as a favorite of God” (7). Another trait of the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, according to Neil Forsyth, was the move from explicitly and directly political language to the metaphorical, even cosmological language that came to define the form (143). Forsyth sees the roots of this development as having formed in the 6th century BCE,

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specifically around the time of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE (143). In the tradition of Isaiah and others, Ezekiel understood the adversaries of Israel to be, “a sword in the hand of Yahweh, punishing Jews and foreigners alike for their rebelliousness” (142).

But in Ezekiel, Forsyth also notes a move away from the earlier prophetic tradition:

The fall of Jerusalem and the terrifying physical and psychological experience of the exile seem to have stimulated a new kind of visionary, of whom Ezekiel. . .is genuinely representative. It had always been characteristic of prophetic eschatology to claim a direct witness of events transpiring in the divine council of Yahweh and his heavenly court, to see the divine plan and then to translate that plan into the terms of “plain history.” But now the events of plain history had become both so awesome and so incomprehensible to the canny but ordinary mind that only the visionary language, not its political translation, made any coherent sense. . .It would not be long before the Jewish eschatological vision became almost entirely cosmological--and apocalyptic. (143)

Thus, in Ezekiel one finds rather pointed passages directed towards contemporary enemies of the Jewish state such as Egypt and Tyre alongside passages that are much more open-ended, much more allegorical, and as Forsyth puts it, cosmological, such as the passages concerning “Gog, King of Magog”:

The day Gog attacks the land of Israel--declares the Lord Yahweh--my furious wrath will boil up. . .That day, I swear, there will be such a huge earthquake in the land of Israel, that the fish in the sea and the birds of heaven, the wild beasts, all the reptiles creeping along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will quake before me. Mountains will fall, cliffs crumble, all walls collapse, and I shall summon every kind of sword against him. . .and each will turn his sword against his comrade. I shall punish him with plague and bloodshed, and rain down torrential rain, hailstones, fire and brimstone on him, on his troops and on the many nations with him. I shall display my greatness and holiness and bring the many nations to acknowledge me, and they will know that I am Yahweh. (38: 18-23)

For Forsyth this shift in language is unfortunate for he sees it as one that, “would eventually choke the real sense of human and political possibility” (144). Without a
firm "historical anchor" this visionary language became merely "mythological speculation" (146). However, it would appear that Forsyth overdramatizes the issue and fails to acknowledge the fact that this move from specific to general allowed apocalyptic texts to have a flexibility that texts made up of more specific and less evocative language could not hold. The very fact that the language of the apocalyptic genre was looser made it possible for its political use-value to be picked up on over and over again in the future. To be sure, there was a tightrope walk to be walked when using apocalyptic’s allegorical language—it could not be too abstract (Whitman 2)–but those texts that performed this feat successfully have enjoyed seemingly perpetual relevance. Clearly Forsyth’s emphasis on the interrelationship between apocalypses and the milieu from which they came results in him downplaying their lasting political value.

Whereas the Jewish apocalyptic tradition had been quelled by the rabbinical establishment by the 2nd century AD because its sectarian and messianic associations had become a threat to the quest for national unity, Christianity, “was born apocalyptic, and has remained so” (McGinn 11). The Christian apocalyptic tradition is dominated by the Book of Revelation, “the Apocalypse of John,” but also includes the Synoptic Apocalypses, or “little apocalypses.” These Synoptic Apocalypses include Mark 13, Matthew 24-5, and Luke 21, and they express Jesus’s pleas that his disciples stay alert and “keep [their] eyes open,” for “before this generation is up” the end times will be upon them. The Synoptic Apocalypses are characterized by their use of the “apocalyptic discourse,” “a speech telling what to expect when the end actually
comes” (Forsyth 250). Their tone is severe yet restrained. The Book of Revelation, on the other hand, is a full-blown apocalypse, characterized by a rich, complex and imaginative use of language with tremendous scope. It has been described by McGinn as being the major source for the entire Christian apocalyptic tradition (13), and as “the apocalyptic book par excellence” (14). The Book of Revelation is made up of seven letters to early Christian communities in Asia Minor, and then a series of visions leading from the coming of Doomsday to the establishment of the New Jerusalem. Its language is highly symbolic, horrific, cosmological, obsessed with numerology (especially patterns based on the numbers 7 and 12), and allegorical. Revelation has commonly been read as being, in part, a political allegory inspired by the oppression of early Christian communities by the Roman Empire (especially under Nero and Domitian), with its cataclysmic battles, its plagues, its graphic descriptions of destruction, and, finally, its notes of triumph when the Kingdom of Heaven finally succeeds in defeating its adversaries: “The curse of destruction will be abolished. . .And night will be abolished. . .” (22:3-5). Funkenstein writes that, “the Apocalypse of John, the first genuine Christian apocalypse, was written close to the end of the first century AD, probably to fortify and comfort the community under the persecution of the Roman Emperor Domitian” (54). Zamora notes that although the eventual triumph of the Kingdom of Heaven is an essential part of Revelation’s apocalyptic form, it is Revelation’s visions of the Day of Wrath that are crucial:

The narrator’s eye may be caught by the static, ideal realm at the end of the historical upheaval, but it is held by the dynamism of the upheaval itself. John’s description of the chaotic turmoil of the present is much longer and more compelling than the set piece, the description of the New Jerusalem, which concludes his Revelation. . .The plagues and cataclysms also represent
the apocalyptist’s metaphoric expression of God’s actual engagement in the present time, and suggest ways in which historical renewal may proceed from historical disaster. (16)

Thus, John’s visions of the coming of the end of the world grip one’s imagination not only because of their vivid and terrifying language, but also because these sections represent an engagement with the present that Revelation’s finale does not. The reason for this has to do with the fact that Revelation’s end times are described as being situated in the near-present whereas the coming of the New Jerusalem is at least 1,000 years (and then some) away, and because Revelation’s allegorical language within its Doomsday sections was rooted rather explicitly in the socio-historical reality of the day, according to some. Among the most commonly cited allegorical figures within Revelation are the “two beasts”:

Then I saw a beast emerge from the sea: it had seven heads and ten horns, with a coronet on each of its ten horns, and its heads were marked with blasphemous titles... The dragon [previously described as “the primeval serpent, known as the devil or Satan, who had led all the world astray...” (Rev 12:9)] had handed over to it his own power and his throne and his immense authority... (13:1-3)

&

Then I saw the second beast, emerging from the ground; it had two horns like a lamb, but made a noise like a dragon. This second beast exercised all the power of the first beast, on its behalf making the world and all its people worship the first beast... (13: 11-12)

Both of these beasts are “allowed” to amaze and control the people of the world with free rein, that is, all those whose names do not appear in “the book of life.” This section introducing the ways of the beasts (Rev 13) finally concludes with the infamous “mark of the beast” passages whereby clamps are put on all commerce:
It compelled everyone—small and great alike, rich and poor, slave and citizen—to be branded on the right hand or on the forehead, and made it illegal for anyone to buy or sell anything unless he had been branded with the name of the beast or with the number of its name. There is need for shrewdness here: anyone clever may interpret the number of the beast: it is the number of a human being, the number 666. (Rev 13: 16-18)

These lines exemplify Revelation’s fascination with numerology, but they also provide an example of its ability to guardedly reveal, maintaining an air of mystery, as well of John’s interest in linking the cosmological with the political. Forsyth provides an example of the common allegorical reading of these passages:

They have a patently allegorical and historical function. They represent the Roman Empire and its emperor (one beast deriving its power from the other), whether Nero or Domitian. Thereafter in Revelation there is only one beast, who is the Antichrist, the earthly representative of Satan as Christ is God’s. The Antichrist means generally the Roman Empire, or its specific emperor...

Although Revelation is strikingly non-anonymous when compared with the Jewish apocalyptic tradition, in it one sees a similar belief in the power of the scribal tradition, and a similar attempt to gain validity by tapping into this tradition, in that it employs hundreds of allusions to the Old Testament and especially to the Books of the Prophets. Thompson, for instance, remarks upon the inventiveness and cleverness of the seer’s use of the Old Testament within Revelation:

Revelation shares with all apocalypses the importance of Scripture as a source for its language. The seer, however, rarely quotes the Old Testament directly. Rather, he alludes to it, paraphrases it, and combines various passages from it in order to accommodate the meaning of the Old Testament to his own vision.

(Thompson 50)

This helps to lend it an almost palimpsestic quality (Forsyth 251). Thus, in the same passages cited directly above, the beasts and their relationships with the dragon are
clear allusions, "to Job's Leviathan and Behemoth but mediated by the apocalyptic tradition, as found in *Enoch* 60:7-8 or in *2 Baruch* 29:4 where the two beasts are anticipations of the last days and where they serve as food for the faithful during the general destruction" (Forsyth 255). Despite Revelation's apparent response to political oppression, its pointed political allegories, its potent harnessing of Scripture, and its pleas for resistance, Forsyth downplays Revelation's political stance much as he downplayed Jewish apocalyptic's politics. As noted earlier, Forsyth believes that the apocalyptic style was marked by a shift from the political and the historical to the cosmological and the mythological, a shift he describes as being unfortunate, and he describes Revelation as remaining true to this apocalyptic form: "again we are confronted with the common apocalyptic tendency to substitute cosmology for politics" (255). This characteristic defuses Revelation's political content, in his mind, putting the world-historical, "well out of human reach" (257).

Interestingly, in spite of Forsyth's arguments for the relative impotence of Revelation, not to mention the apocalyptic genre, the Book of Revelation soon became a threat to the Church of the Patristic era which, in a move similar to that of Rabbinical Judaism, sought to remove any threats to unity—and which, rightfully, feared Revelation's possible sectarian applications (such as millenarianism) and was embarassed by its thinly-veiled anti-Roman rhetoric (McGinn 12). It was among the last books of the New Testament to be admitted into the canon (even though it was among the first to have been written) and, as Frank Kermode has aptly put it, "it has always been something of a powderkeg in the basement of an institution that was no
longer as willing as it formerly was to think of itself as existing on the very brink of the end, an institution tending to grow conservative” (“Apocalypse” 87). Indeed, Revelation’s visions of replacing the existing order with a “New Jerusalem” were anathema to a Church which had become that existing order (Zamora 17). It is more than likely that Revelation would have been kept out of the canon altogether (like so many other “apocryphal” and Gnostic works) had it not been for the case that there was still debate within the Church over whether Revelation’s “John” was John the apostle (it is now generally agreed that John of Patmos was a different person, and many of the Patristic elders believed [wanted to believe?] so too), and, paradoxically, if Revelation had not been useful in some ways toward the establishment of the Patristic order. Revelation is the only book that equates the Serpent and Satan, without which, “the identification of Genesis’ serpent with the adversary would have stood on much shakier ground”; and it provides a sense of narrative closure to the Scriptures for it discusses the end of time as Genesis deals with the beginning of time, and much of its imagery creates strong parallels with Genesis’ (i.e. Genesis’ “the tree of knowledge” vs. Revelation’s “the tree of life”), thereby bolstering its legitimacy (Forsyth 305). Thus, instead of dismissing Revelation, the Church Fathers chose to include it within the canon but set about reinterpreting it to suit their needs. The most notable example of this reinterpretation was that of Augustine who utilized an interpretive allegorization to “re-allegorize” Revelation, which henceforth came to describe conflicts within the soul of man, the inner battle between the forces of good and evil, as opposed to political oppression (Zamora 17).
Although the Church’s incorporation of Revelation served to largely contain its potential for fueling anti-establishment sentiment, Revelation has indeed remained a “powderkeg.” One of the principal reasons for this has been because of the fact that Revelation 20 made millenarianism a very firm part of the canon. Revelation did not contain a precise timetable but it did contain references to “1260 days” and “one thousand years”, and because these references were canonical, and therefore divine, many felt that they had to be accounted for. This created an ongoing game whereby authorities would establish an end-date sometime in the future (but not too distant future, because of the immediacy of the language used by Jesus and John of Patmos) only to find this delaying technique eventually transformed into a countdown (O’Leary 48-9). This created frequent occasions for re-dating, for countdowns tended to create states of social disquiet. Not surprisingly, Orthodox Christian historians adamantly avoided these timetables, “not only because of their desire to see events in terms of the thematic unity of narrative, or because they did not know how to calculate in this fashion, but also because such calculations carried subversive apocalyptic implications that they specifically aimed to suppress” (50). Nonetheless, Revelation remained and has remained an inspiration for millenarian beliefs--both establishment and anti-establishment, and taking various forms--right until the present day. From time to time it has even inspired renewed apocalypticism, meaning active creation and/or application of apocalyptic texts to a socio-historical situation as opposed to merely holding the belief that the world will end on an appointed day. And when renewed
apocalypticism has occurred it has often been a powerful force (i.e. the Taborite revolt in Bohemia; the Anabaptist revolt in Munster, etc.).

One final note: it must be pointed out that although the “crisis reading” of Revelation whereby John of Patmos is responding to a political crisis with the use of highly-charged political allegory is a commonly held reading, as was noted earlier, it is not the only “crisis” reading of Revelation. Within the standard “crisis reading” the early Christian communities that John is addressing inhabited the following scenario:

Early Christians are characterized demographically as an oppressed minority who belong to the powerless poor. Christians have no part in non-Christian urban life, for that would require them to go against the faith and practice of Christianity. The civic and imperial machinery in the province of Asia works to persecute those Christians, bringing them into the circuses and games to fight with wild animals and skilled gladiators. According to this portrait, mad Domitian is emperor, a “second Nero,” who exiles or kills anyone who does not fall down and worship him as “god and lord.” (Thompson 7)

Thus, amongst this demographic John’s message is that,

of a blessed kingdom soon to come that will reverse the social status of both Christians and non-Christians: Christians will no longer live in a world of oppression and scarcity, and non-Christians will be made powerless and brought to judgment by the Christian God. (7)

In contrast to this standard reading, Leonard L. Thompson builds his thesis in The Book of Revelation upon a revised demographic portrait of these early Christian communities. According to Thompson, these early Christians were far from necessarily a socially and economically oppressed minority, but instead were very much an integrated part of their communities in Asia Minor, occupying positions at every level of the social ladder and sharing, “the attitudes and style of life of their non-Christian neighbors” (7). Now, if this was the case, how does one account for the tone
and the metaphorical language of Revelation? Thompson’s claim is that Revelation is a sectarian work which rails not only against the Roman establishment but also against the Christian community’s comfortable position within that establishment.

The seer...does not reflect a world in conflict, but tries to enforce one. He is not an observer, but a potential creator of crisis and conflict. He is not distressed because Christians were not allowed to live in peace, but because most actually lived peacefully--participating in Roman urban life, instead of abandoning it, condemning it and fighting for its demolition. (Kyrtatias 135)

This pronouncement, as we shall see, is far from damaging to the present thesis; in fact, it serves to further strengthen it. For one thing, Thompson is not driving a wedge between apocalypses and crisis, he is driving a wedge between Revelation and crisis, putting the notion of the “perceived crisis” to work. Thompson himself argues that Jewish apocalypses such as Daniel represent a direct involvement with crisis situations. Furthermore, Thompson’s version of Revelation provides an anti-quietist stance that will be useful in later sections. And finally, as we all know, the Thatcher/Major years were far from a period of crisis for many Britons, and even amongst those who associated those years with crisis in some form, few described these crises in terms of apocalypse or strove for a “radical renewal.”
CHAPTER 2: The English Revolution/Crisis/Apocalypse

It is a widely known fact that 17th century England was a country teeming with millenarian beliefs. Often what is not acknowledged is that this period in English history was also marked with apocalypticism: this was a period when many not only believed the End was nigh, they actively strove to create the End of the World, paradoxically enough. And this urge manifested itself both socio-politically—in the form of a social revolution—as well as literarily and rhetorically with very distinct political ramifications. This chapter will take a look at millenarianism and, more specifically, apocalypticism in relation to the Cause, and then it will look at how apocalypticism, in turn, became paired with the “experience of defeat” that plagued the most active revolutionaries during the Restoration, with special attention given to how this pairing became a key component of Milton and his late poems.

The amount of unrest that characterized England in the 1640s and 1650s is astounding, to the point of being hard to imagine. This was a period when severe political tension, based largely on economic problems, a crisis of leadership, and a push for greater levels of democracy collided with a massive public demand for religious reform and widespread religious heterodoxy, making for incredibly volatile social conditions. Like so many upheavals of that epoch the socio-political and the religious became inseparable, and here millenarianism played a key role as well.

When reading some accounts of millenarianism and its social influence, one can get the mistaken impression that millenarianism is necessarily revolutionary, but as has been indicated, in reality millenarianism has more often than not been associated with
conservatism and orthodoxy. Likewise, although this chapter will be focusing on radical factions and their ties to millenarianism and apocalypticism, it is important to stress that belief in the imminence of the millenium was generally held in England during this period. Christopher Hill mentions that during the 17th century everyone from King James to Sir Walter Raleigh, and John Milton to Robert Boyle believed firmly that the Day of Judgement was coming shortly (Hill, *Experience* 52 and *World* 77)--in other words, all sorts of minds with all sorts of political affiliations. Similarly, Nigel Smith points out that individuals from either end of the political and/or religious spectrum often shared millenarian beliefs, even if these beliefs revealed political convictions that were clearly opposed to each other (268). Thus, a conservative such as the poet Henry Vaughan could employ apocalyptic imagery in his “Day of Judgement”:

When through the North a fire shall rush  
And rowle into the East  
And like a firie torrent brush  
And sweepe up South, and West,

When all shall streame, and lighten round  
And with surprizing flames  
Both stars, and Elements confound  
And quite blot out their names.

much in the same way that an Independent, Fifth Monarchist (an expressly apocalyptic faction which tried to usher in the “Fifth Monarchy,” that of Christ) minister such as Morgan Llwyd did:

Before one houre before day is darke  
That great Ecclypse is neare  
One fierce and farewell storme & then  
The evening will be cleare . . .
...Sing on a brittle sea of glasse
Sing in a furne of fire
In flames wee leap for joy and find
A cave of singing quire. (qtd. in Smith, Literature 268-9)

However, that being said, millenarianism when paired with socio-political and religious discontent created much more dramatic results during this period than did its conservative other. One of the reasons millenarianism was particularly dangerous during this period had to do with the fact that there was a move from more or less univocal ecclesiastical domination within English society to the fragmented, multivocal era of the “mechanic preacher,” an era made possible, in part, by the increasing accessibility of the Bible. Thus, whereas formerly the English people had been subject to a church which interpreted, then pronounced the word of God, the rise of the press and the development and dissemination of the vernacular Bible opened the doors to reinterpretation of Scripture and, consequently, heterodoxy. Dissenting religious views had been circulating throughout England for years, but with the dissolution of censorship and the church courts in the 1640s these views became spread far and wide. Thus, as Christopher Hill put it:

...it was one thing for the clergy to allegorize a Latin text whose sacredness was accepted on all sides; it was quite another for mechanic laymen to put their own allegorical constructions on a vernacular text available for all to read, and to do this against the background of a critical Protestant Biblical scholarship, in conditions of free and unfettered discussion which allowed popular sceptical views free rein, and in an atmosphere charged with millenarian expectations. (World 115)

Within times where millenarianism, reinterpretation of the Bible, anti-ecclesiasticism, and anti-monarchism were rampant, and given apocalypticism’s politically explosive potential, it should come as little surprise that many began to apply the Bible’s
apocalyptic texts to the political situation in England. Indeed the literature and rhetoric of the English Revolution is teeming with references to the Antichrist, the Beast, Babylon, the Saints, the Kingdom of Heaven, etc. It is in this way that the Revolution took on elements of apocalypticism and began to be steered by apocalyptic rhetoric. For instance, Hill mentions that,

It was natural for those preachers who genuinely believed that Charles I’s government was antichristian to see the civil war as the beginning of cataclysmic events and to call on their congregations to support the cause of Parliament. They encouraged expectations that Christ’s kingdom was at hand. . .What turned out to be especially dangerous was the wholly traditional view, repeated by many of the preachers, that the common people had a very special role to play in this crisis, that they were somehow more chosen than the rich and the powerful. (World 27)

Fueled by the extreme and severe nature of apocalyptic language—as Derek Hirst notes, the revolutionaries repeatedly cited the Old Testament’s “grimmer texts” (247)—and the conviction these texts lent to true believers, the revolutionaries undertook a far-reaching rearrangement of English society. The next segment of this chapter will examine a few prime examples of apocalypticism in action during the Civil War.

In 1640, soon after the congregation of the Long Parliament, a petition was created in the City of London calling for far-reaching religious reforms. In an indication of public sentiment, this petition received somewhere between 10,000 and 20,000 signatures in a matter of days (Smith, “From Petition” 210). This petition came to be known as the London Petition, or, more famously, the Root and Branch Petition. The radicalism of this title, however, is a little misleading because this document came before the Revolution had caught its stride and therefore is a more cautious set of demands than what came to flourish a few short years later, one that is
more reformatory than revolutionary. Nonetheless, the Root and Branch Petition (and especially its "popularity" (Smith, "From Petition" 210)) managed to shake the power structure and its ominous and uncompromising title indicated the direction the Revolution would soon take. The petition itself is not epochal enough, not revolutionary enough to be considered apocalyptic as a whole by even the loosest standards, but it nonetheless employs apocalyptic language. Most notably the petition displays loathing for all things associated with the Pope (including "Popery" and "Popishness") who it clearly characterizes as being the/an Antichrist (Smith, "From Petition" 213), following a tradition far from uncommon in the late Middle Ages and during the Reformation. This turn provides a perfect example of how John of Patmos’ anti-Roman language could continue to hold relevance hundreds of years after the fact. "Popery" threatens England because, according to the petition’s authors, its ecclesiastic order adheres to its "dangerous books and tenets" and conducts itself according to its ways (213). The petition, therefore, calls for the abandonment of this religious system with its prelacy, its tithes, and its courts, but the petition phrases these demands in the terms of Revelation: "cast the prelates out also as members of the beast" (qtd. in Smith, "From Petition" 213). Although for many years historians downplayed the importance of the London Petition as well as the range of its influence, more recent accounts have indicated that the petition inspired numerous other county petitions all across England which borrowed openly from its content and form, indicating that the petition’s demands and language struck a resonant chord with the general populace. Indeed, David Smith describes the petition as having been the
"tip of an iceberg" (214). Recent histories have also attested to the fact that the petition touched off widespread anti-clerical and anti-hierarchical behaviour, behaviour which rattled the social order and was immediately described in quasi-apocalyptic terms. David Smith writes:

All over England, the petitions against bishops coincided with spontaneous outbreaks of popular iconoclasm, with the smashing of altar-rails and other symbols of 'idolatry and superstition.' Such violence terrified the gentry. Many MPs, like Sir Edward Dering, concluded that root and branch reform was a Pandora's Box which must be closed immediately before the entire social order came crashing down [my italics]. (216)

By late 1641 individuals all across England were beginning to openly question not only the Church of England but the entire state. Charges of misgovernment against Charles I's reign and calls for drastic changes were finally officially voiced after news of the Irish rebellion of 1641 reached London on November 1. This rebellion which had begun as a "preemptive strike against Ulster Protestants," turned into a massacre which, reportedly, left thousands of Protestants dead (Smith, "From Petition" 217). To many in England this tragedy appeared to be a final confirmation of a "Popish plot" to destroy Protestantism in England, as well as the English kingdom. The result of these fears was the "Remonstrance of the state of the kingdom," which became known as the Grand Remonstrance (Smith, "From Petition 217).

The Grand Remonstrance shares much in common, including language and content, with the Root and Branch Petition but whereas the petition calls for reform, the Grand Remonstrance is a more desperate cry, a cry from under siege. As Richard Strier points out, it is an intensely "dualistic, almost Manichean document," where the world is divided along "us" and "them" lines, with "them" being the Enemy (233).
“And,” Strier adds, “the Remonstrance is a profoundly apocalyptic document— at stake is the existence of England... as a distinct national entity” (233). The Remonstrance places its faith in Parliament but stresses that a “present, real and effectual course” must be taken if the enemy’s counter-measures are to be outlasted (Strier 233). In addition to dealing with matters of life and death on a national level, the Grand Remonstrance, in true apocalyptic form, envisions its cause in world-historical terms (Strier 240), claiming that if/when its cause succeeds, “the immoderate power of the council table” (qtd. in Strier 240) and all the other excesses of the monarchical/ecclesiastical enemy will be relegated to the waste heap of history. And similar to the Root and Branch Petition, with its references to “locusts of Egypt,” etc., the Grand Remonstrance invokes the Old Testament’s “grimmer texts.” For instance, at one point, in response to those who slandered Parliament’s calls for change, the Remonstrance makes a scriptural reference: “thus with Elijah, are we called by this malignant party the troublers of state, and still, while we endeavour to reform their abuses, they make us the authors of those mischiefs we study to prevent” (Strier 242). As Strier points out, “it is difficult to estimate the intended scope of this allusion” (242). Clearly the authors are bringing to mind Kings 18:18 where Elijah states, “I am not the scourge of Israel, you... are,” but, as Strier mentions, “were the readers of the Remonstrance... to recall that the prophet’s accuser was the wicked King Ahab?” (242). Thus, within its apocalyptic pleas, the Grand Remonstrance’s authors employ open-ended yet powerful Biblical allusions much in the same way that apocalypses had, effectively raising the stakes of their demands.
One of the most fevered occasions for apocalypticism came with the debates over Charles’ sentence, and, consequently, his execution in 1649. In a struggle where the situation was often perceived and described in strongly dualistic, world-historical, even cosmological terms, and amongst people who not only fully believed in the Scriptures, but believed that the apocalyptic battles (especially Revelation’s) contained therein were occurring all around them, the term “antichrist” held an unbelievable amount of weight. And although from a modern-day perspective it appears as though the term was bandied about somewhat excessively in former times, for those who held firmly to Revelation’s multi-faceted characterization, the fact that the Antichrist and his agents had many heads, so to speak, was purely logical. In addition, as Hill states: “Everybody was against Antichrist; so his name could be extended from Pope to bishops, to the whole hierarchy of the state church, to the king and royalists who defended them. . . (Experience 22). By the late 1640s the king’s slipperiness, his treachery, had earned him full status as an agent of the Antichrist, as an Antichrist figure. Whereas in previous times he had merely been associated with antichristian ways (with “Popery” and “Popishness”), by 1649 his notorious aura had grown to the point that his imprisonment and execution were perceived by many revolutionaries to be on a cosmological level. Indeed, many believed his execution would usher in the Second Coming. As Hill puts it:

The events of 1649 were a great stimulus to millenarian thinking, following as they did on pre-existing expectations of the Second Coming in the 1650s. What more natural than that King Charles should be succeeded by King Jesus? ‘The power and the spirit of our Cause,’ Christopher Feake wrote in 1659, ‘was great and high after the king’s death, more than at any time before.’ The Good Old Cause, which had become a ‘pitiful, dull, dry, lean, barren, ill-favoured
thing,' was transformed by the King's execution into 'the most lovely, lively, growing, sparkling prosperous cause in all the earth.' (Experience 54)

Furthermore, in addition to displaying the lengths the revolutionaries would go with their demands, the king's execution had the effect of changing the very nature of the political debates raging across the land. As noted by Marshall Grossman, the execution eliminated the "king's 'body natural'" from the "political stage," forcing, "contemporary discourse in the direction of a conceptual as opposed to an embodied understanding of the state" (261). "Thus," he continues, "with the act of regicide a set of words...the discourse of republicanism, is thrust decisively onto the stage of London's political theatre" (261). In addition, and carrying this mimetic analogy even further along, many, including Milton, thought of the court that issued Charles's death sentence in terms of "a resemblance and representation of the great day of judgement, when the saints shall punish kings of the earth upon the earth" (Hill, Experience 76).

Thus, the act of regicide was an acting out of the Revolution's verdict against all kings--"every king on the earth has prostituted himself with [Babylon]" (Rev 18:3)--an apocalyptic act. In this way, the king's executioners, acting as a "rod of God," potently combined apocalypticism and radical politics in a single gesture. Years later many of the regicides and their defenders continued to believe in this act with full conviction, even if this act had not ushered in the Second Coming. As Milton phrased it in his Defence of the People of England: "it was not permissible and good to put a tyrant to death because God commanded it, but rather God commanded it because it was permissible and good" (qtd. in Hill, Experience 315)
As noted earlier in this chapter, the religious toleration and freedom of the press and of expression—with the notable exception of the theatre, which was banned—that was in effect during the Civil War years resulted in a society where heterodoxy was rampant, where religious sects sprouted up in great numbers across the countryside, where individuals experimented with religious beliefs of all sorts, and where religious and political publishing, and especially pamphleteering, were tremendously widespread. Interestingly, in the absence of theatre, politics (and therefore religion, given the conflict) became, “widely conceived of in dramatic terms” (Hirst 249), and frequently the tract, the pamphlet, served as a surrogate stage. That being said, hundreds of individuals and numerous sects took to the “stage” in order to voice their opinions, in order to formulate a course for a nation divided. Among the many sects whose legacies have made it to our day are the Levellers, the True Levellers, the Diggers, the Ranters, the Seekers, the Quakers, and the Fifth Monarchists, names which were frequently fabricated out of derision by their adversaries (Hill, World 163). And although these groups shared some loose Puritan and millenarian views without exception, otherwise their views were often vastly removed from one another. Diggers, for instance, practiced an extreme form of communism, while Seekers were those who in the face of the End practiced a studied withdrawal from sectarian debate, rejecting “all sects. . .all organized worship” (Hill, World 154), and the tag “Ranter” was primarily applied to iconoclastic and itinerant individuals who largely shunned organized religion and held no fixed set of beliefs but were linked to one another rather by their extremism and their blasphemous tongues. Thus, whereas the Diggers
are known primarily due to their attempt to establish a purely communistic society in Cobham (which was consequently betrayed by the Army), the Seekers were united principally by their aversion to sectarian affiliation and their disillusionment over, “the future of the Army to bring about a democratic society in and after 1647,” and Hill includes Milton among their ranks (World 154) And the Ranters, on the other hand, were primarily prevalent in London, within alehouses (which frequently served as political/religious meeting houses), and within the Army, which for a number of years protected complete freedom of expression--they are said to have come from the ranks of, “migratory craftsmen, freed by the temporary breakdown of the settlement system during the Revolution, men who were ‘unattached and prepared to break with tradition’” (Hill, World 163). Hill notes that Ranters, like Fifth Monarchists, only began to be reported and/or heard of after 1649, after the act of regicide had been committed, when, it was reported in 1651, “all the world now is in the Ranting humour” (World 164). Ranterism, therefore, was not only millenarian by nature, it was expressly linked to the apocalypticism that surrounded Charles I’s execution. And, indeed, Cohn notes that those who made up the more extreme of these sects, “lived in daily expectation that through the violence of the civil war the kingdom of the saints would be established on English soil and that Christ would descend to reign over it” (288). Interestingly, they were even described in quasi-apocalyptic terms by their enemies:

it is no new work of Satan to sow Heresies, and breede Heretickes, but they never came up so thick as in these latter times: they were wont to peep up by one and one, but now they sprout up by huddles and clusters (like locusts out of the bottomless pit). They now come thronging upon us in swarmes, as the Caterpillers of Aegypt. (Cohn 288)
One of the most celebrated Ranters was one Abiezer Coppe who gave up being a preacher within the ranks of the Army and instead became somewhat of a leader of the “drinking, smoking, swearing Ranters in 1649” (Hill, World 168). As a Ranter Coppe preached an extreme form of libertinism which basically amounted to antinomianism ("sin and transgression is finished and ended" (qtd. in Hill, World 168)), and he coupled this with calls for social revolution (his signature phrase being “overturn, overturn, overturn” (qtd. in Hill, World 168)). He was also a prolific writer who attempted to make full use of the relative (and short-lived) freedom of the press, but whose writings were said to be comprised of “many horrid Blasphemies, and damnable and detestable Opinions” and therefore fell victim to Parliamentary censure (Cohn 317). His two masterworks were the two Fiery Flying Rolls. In 1650 they were publicly burned and Coppe was arrested. In addition, Cohn claims that Parliament’s Act of 9 August 1650 against “atheistical, blasphemous and execrable opinions” was largely the result of Coppe’s writings. This act was a clear indication of the Parliamentarians’ shift towards the Right.

Coppe’s first Fiery Flying Roll is not only heretical, it is highly apocalyptic in the strictest sense--Hill comments that it is, “a powerful piece of writing, in a prose style unlike anything else in the seventeenth century” (World 168). This is no overstatement. Its full title gives a sense of just how apocalyptic Coppe’s text is striving to be:

_A Fiery Flying Roll: A Word from the Lord to all the Great Ones of the Earth, whome this may concerne: Being the last WARNING PIECE at the dreadful day of JUDGEMENT. For now the Lord is come to 1) Informe 2) Advise and warne 3) Charge 4) Judge and sentence the Great Ones. As also most_
compassionately informing, and most lovingly and pathetically advising and warning London. With a terrible Word, and fatal Blow from the Lord, upon the Gathered CHURCHES. And all by his Most Excellent MAJESTY, dwelling in, and shining through AUXILIUM PATRIS, alias, Coppe. With another FLYING ROLL ensuing (to all the Inhabitants of the Earth). Imprinted at London, in the beginning of that notable day, wherein the secrets of all hearts are laid open; and wherein the worst and foulest of villanies, are discovered, under the best and fairest outsides. 1649. (Cohn 319)

Already, in just the title, Coppe displays several key characteristics of the apocalyptic genre: his work is a revelation from God through him, it is a final warning of the Day of Judgement, and it posits London as some sort of Babylon, expanding from London to determine the entire world's fate. The text itself maintains this tone as well, combining all sorts of apocalyptic visions and portents with antinomian proclamations of “UNIVERSALL LOVE,” “perfect freedome,” and “pure Libertinisme,” and revolutionary warnings from a God who is a “mighty Leveller” who is coming to “Levell the Hills with the Valleyes, and to lay the Mountaines low,” and to “overturn, overturn, overturn.” That a text such as this should have been perceived as a threat by both monarchists and an increasingly Rightist Parliament should come as little surprise. Surely one of Fiery Flying Roll's most fascinating passages and one that gives a strong sense of Coppe’s unorthodox style and ideas, of his penchant for rhetorical flourishes, comes at the end of the work’s preface:

The visions and revelations of God, and the strong hand of eternall invisible almightynesse, was stretched out upon me, within me, for the space of foure days and nights, without intermission. The time would faile if I would tell you all, but it is not the good will and pleasure of my most excellent Majesty in me, to declare any more (as yet) then thus much further: That amongst those various voyces that were then uttered within, these were some, Blood, blood, Where, where? upon the hypocritcall holy heart, &c. Another thus, Vengeance, vengeance, vengeance, Plagues, plagues, upon the inhabitants of the earth; Fire, fire, fire, Sword, sword, &c., upon all that bow not down to eternall Majesty, universall love; I’le recover.
recover, my wooll, my flax, my money. Declare, declare, feare thou not the faces of any; I am (in thee) a munition of Rocks, &c.

Go up to London, to London, that great City, write, write, write. And behold I writ, and lo a hand was sent to me, and a roll of a book was therein, which this fleshly hand would have put wings to, before the time. Whereupon it was snatcht out of my hand & the Roll thrust into my mouth; and I eat it up, and filled my bowels with it where it was as bitter as worm wood; and it lay brooding, and burning in my stomach, till I brought if forth in this forme. (qtd. in Cohn 321)

Amidst the near glossolalia of this text, Coppe evokes an altogether harrowing picture of the coming cataclysm, and similar to Revelation, anchors it firmly within the Scriptural apocalyptic tradition through the use of allusions. In this passage, he brings together the Book of Ezekiel, the Book of Zechariah, and the Book of Revelation, drawing upon them for the strength of their language, but also for their validation, for the Fiery Flying Roll is not only emerging from a period of crisis, it is also calling for a radicalization of the Revolution. Thus, Coppe pulls together Ezekiel’s sweet-tasting ("sweet as honey") and heaven-sent scroll (Ez 2: 8-10, 3: 1-3), Zechariah’s ominous heaven-sent flying scroll (Zech 5: 1-4), Revelation’s heaven-sent and sweet-tasting ("sweet as honey") but stomach-curdling ("my stomach turned sour") small scroll (Rev 10: 8-11), and Revelation’s reference to “Wormwood,” the star that falls from the sky upon the blowing of the third trumpet (Rev 8: 11), in order to create a complex and potent vision with a tremendous Scriptural foundation. Likewise, Coppe invokes James 5: 1-7 in Chapter II of his second Fiery Flying Roll, fusing Scripture, visions of apocalypse, and anarcho-communism in a manner which, once again, can only be described as frightening and powerful:

The plague of God is in your purses, barns, houses, horses, murrain will take your hogs, (O ye fat swine of the earth) who shall shortly go to knife, and be hung up i’th roof, except blasting, mill-dew, locusts, caterpillars yea fire your
houses and goods, take your corn and fruit, the moth your garments, and the rot your sheep, did you not see my hand, this last year, stretched out? You did not see. My hand is stretched out still. Your gold and silver, though you can't see it, is cankered, the rust of them is a witnesse against you, and suddainly, because by the eternall God, my self, its the dreadful day of Judgement, saith the Lord, shall eat your flesh as it were fire. . . The rust of your silver, I say, shall eat your flesh as it were fire. . . . . . give, give, give, give up, give up your houses, horses, goods, gold, Lands, give up, account nothing your own, have ALL THINGS common, or els the plague of God will rot and consume all that you have. (qtd. in Cohn 325)

Much like Thompson's account of Revelation's intent, there are strong notes of desperation here, indications that Coppe saw that the Revolution had already become a disappointment, and that without much more far-reaching and fundamental change the Cause was dead. Within a couple of years of these pronouncements Coppe's fears had fully materialized--the counter-revolution was in full sway.

With the final failure of the Revolution and the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the pendulum had come all the way back to the far Right. What ensued was a period where those who had been the most active participants in the Revolution not only saw their Cause disappear but had to reevaluate their entire system of beliefs--and many encountered a period of severe retribution as well. Christopher Hill has labelled this experience the "experience of defeat." Some, such as the regicides, Fifth Monarchists, and others, "who were victims of exemplary punishment after 1660 had to face defeat in its harshest form," according to Hill (Experience 69). Others made a retreat from their former views and adopted more quietist stances or faded into obscurity, sometimes out of pressure, sometimes out of cautiousness. One who very nearly went to the scaffold--Derek Hirst cites his "kicking the king's corpse" with his
vehement Eikonoklastes, as one principal reason (255)--then went on to express this experience of defeat more powerfully and eloquently than anyone was one John Milton.

As Hill has argued, Milton is, “essential for our understanding of the English Revolutions,” for he was, “not only an active and deeply committed participant, “ but he also, “narrowly escaped being executed in 1660” (Experience 17). Furthermore, Hill writes: “properly understood, Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained\(^1\) and Samson Agonistes tell us as much about the Revolution as Parliamentary debates and state papers” (Experience 17). This view has raised cackles from some Milton scholars over the years, scholars who see Hill’s “political” reading as being a reductionistic one. However, Hill has held to his personal/political reading of Milton’s great epic poems, claiming that this reading provides further testament to Milton’s genius: that he could create works of supreme universality, profundity and truth that also addressed the immediate political circumstances of his own life. And furthermore, he states that anyone who fails to acknowledge these aspects of Milton’s work, anyone who considers such a reading “demeaning,” is someone who has, “never experienced political commitment or attempted to produce creative writing under a hostile censorship, and who [has] too little imagination to make good this lack” (Milton 406). According to Hill it would have been remarkable if Milton had not addressed such issues:

\(^1\) While Hill argues strongly that Paradise Regained, too, comments upon the politics of the era--“as in Paradise Lost the Restoration ambience is clear if we remain alert” (Milton 420)--in what follows, I’ve chosen to only discuss Paradise Lost and Samson Agonistes because I’m more familiar with these works, and because these works strike me as being more powerfully apocalyptic than Paradise Regained and of greater relevance to the discussions that follow.
Between February 1659 and April 1660 Milton moved from the revived optimism of Civil Power to the despair of the second edition of The Ready and Easy Way. Later in 1660 he was in prison, in danger of his life. When released he had to live in obscurity and fear of assassination. These are the years in which he was writing Paradise Lost. Even if Milton had been a much less political character, it is unlikely that such events would have left him unaffected. The calm and distanced effect of Paradise Lost is astonishing, remarkable testimony to Milton's art and sense of decorum; but it is also deceptive. Not to grasp the magnitude of the disaster which had overwhelmed the poet would be a serious failure of imagination. (Milton 356)

Indeed, much of the reason that Milton's epic poems are as politically "subdued" as they are is directly attributable to the Restoration's reinstitution of the censorship, as well as the fact that Milton's standing in immediate post-Revolutionary England was very much on shaky ground. The influence of the censorship on Milton's work is something that Hill, for one, stresses:

We must never forget [the censorship's] existence, and how exceptional men felt its brief absence to be. . .Under censorship men restrained themselves from telling the whole truth as they saw it, proceeding by analogy, implication and innuendo. . .From Spenser to Bunyan those with something original to say found it safer to make use of allegory or pastoral; others cited the Bible or the classics to convey unorthodox views without actual commitment. (Experience 21-2)

In Milton we have a writer who couched the truth, his truth, in analogy, innuendo, metaphor, allusion, allegory, classical references, and Biblical frameworks and formulations, a writer who used virtually every tool at his disposal to express everything he wanted to express. As Hill describes in his Milton and the English Revolution and The Experience of Defeat, Milton's epic poems are rooted in Milton's experience of the Revolution and its Fall, but these are, "allegories for his own time rather than histories" (Experience 313), open rather than closed. Paradise Lost, for instance, is allegorical but it is certainly not a pat allegory (Hill, Milton 342), a "roman
à clef" with fixed meanings (Hill, *Milton* 398). Milton instead employs a more complex system based on allusions of all types, which allows him to reference several historical events, several historical characters simultaneously at times (Hill, *Milton* 373). Thus, for example, *Paradise Lost*’s Satan is a particularly complex character: Milton colours him with Royalist characteristics (unsurprisingly), as well as with characteristics of the major generals, whose “avarice and ambition...betrayed the republic,” and the Ranters, whose “irreligious speculations...had diverted and divided the supporters” of the Cause, and, finally, “Satan is also the battle-ground for Milton’s quarrel with himself” (Hill, *Milton* 343). It is certain that the story of the Fall provided a supremely rich text for Milton to work with. For one thing, the Fall had been a major focus of debate and discussion throughout the years of the Revolution. For instance, Gerrard Winstanley, the leader of the Diggers, had “argued that the introduction of private property was the Fall, that from it followed covetousness, social inequality and the state which protects the property of the rich” (Hill, *Milton* 346). While others tended not to follow Winstanley’s communistic line, Ranters, Quakers and other sectarians all “rejected the concept of original sin” (Hill, *Milton* 346). Milton certainly believed the Fall’s story held “social implications”, and he also felt that the Fall’s tragedy was that of England’s in 1659-1660 (Hill, *Milton* 343). And, finally, to use and to tamper with the story of the Fall, with doctrine, was a profound expression of just how shaken Milton’s system of beliefs was—it was an attempt to make sense of an experience that was very nearly beyond comprehension. Thus, as Hill put it:
Paradise Lost tells an epic story which (in Milton's view) is also a true story; but the story sums up the whole of human experience, including the valuable experience recorded in the myths of classical antiquity. It is truth and myth at the same time, and on both counts it has something to say to God's servants who had been defeated in the English Revolution. (Milton 344)

Samson Agonistes, too, dealt with Milton's experience of defeat. The story of Samson was yet another Biblical anecdote which was employed time and time again in 17th century England in order to make sense of the times. For instance, it was frequently used "as a symbol for the New Model Army and/or the Good Old Cause" in the fight against the "Philistinism" of the Royalists (Hill, Experience 311). Later, Samson began to be used in altogether different ways. Samson was commonly regarded as being a "type of Christ" during this period, so when the Cause began to falter, straying from the ways of the Lord, some invoked the wrath of Samson/Christ. For instance, Joseph Salmon in A Rout, A Rout criticized the major-generals for their apostasy, and threatened that, "the Lord, our spiritual Samson... [will] shake you all to pieces and in you the whole edifice of this swordly power shall be annihilated" (Hill, Experience 46). Thus, Samson could be viewed as some kind of great Leveller figure. Later still, Milton turned to the image of a blind and shackled Samson, "an alien in his own country, accepting the rule of his enemies only so long as he must" (Hill, Experience 310), as an allegorical representation of himself and his times. And in much the same manner that he did in Paradise Lost, Milton tampered with his source material in order to address his interests. Thus, Hill cites Samson's "initial weakness of mind" and his emphasis of the fact, "that he was not one of the rulers of Israel," both major deviations from the story in Judges, as only making sense within a
framework that is commenting on the fate of the Cause (Hill, Milton 437-8). But whereas some have seen Samson Agonistes as simply incredibly bleak, Hill contests this view, commenting that, “Milton nowhere mentions the failure of the Israelites to follow up Samson’s coup,” in contrast to the Old Testament’s account. Therefore, in Hill’s view, Samson Agonistes depicts Milton’s acceptance of God’s plan: “like Samson, he must do what he could here and now and leave the rest to providence” (Milton 439).

While neither Paradise Lost nor Samson Agonistes is an apocalypse in the same way that Coppe’s Fiery Flying Roll is, both works are certainly apocalyptic in nature. When familiar with apocalyptic literature, it is impossible to read Paradise Lost with its graphic depictions of the underworld (“...on the other side,/ Increased with indignation Satan stood/ Unterrified, and like a comet burned,/ That fires the length of Ophiuchus huge/ In the arctic sky, and from his horrid hair/ Shakes pestilence and war. ... (PL II: 706-11)), its cosmological battles between Heaven and Hell, its “history lesson” in books XI and XII where the Archangel Michael, “explains how ultimate victory will be gained in the war on earth” (Hill, Milton 380), its complex allegorical and allusionary language, without calling to mind Revelation and the apocalyptic genre. To be certain, Milton drew from Revelation 8-11 for his version of the primordial battle in Heaven (Hill, Milton 341). Similarly, Samson Agonistes with its weighty sense of doom and loss, its sense of conquest at the hands of Evil, as well as its final metonymic destruction of civilization (“Manoa: O what noise!/ Mercy of Heaven, what hideous noise was that!/ Horribly loud, unlike the former shout./
Chorus: Noise call you it, or universal groan,/ As if the whole inhabitation perished?/
Blood, death and deathful deeds are in that noise,/ Ruin, destruction at the utmost point.” (SA: 1508-1514), also brings to mind the apocalyptic form. Writing about Samson Agonistes, Hill commented that with this work Milton was expressing his belief, “that the war against Antichrist continued, and that it was the duty of God’s people to hit back when they could” (Milton 442). In both Paradise Lost and Samson Agonistes this apocalypticism is linked to national failure as well as to the failure of the Left, for as much as Milton loathed and resented the Royalists, his bitterest sentiments were reserved for those who had betrayed the Cause, those who had lost their way. And lastly, Milton’s apocalypticism during the years he wrote his great epics is reinforced in one final way: the fact that he viewed himself as being part of the prophetic tradition. Hill writes:

The poet’s blindness brought home to him the apostolic reference to those who won strength out of weakness. This is part of a wider concept of the blind bard, the seer whose blindness brings him closer to his gods and their mysteries. But Milton’s claim to inspiration is not merely traditional: it relates to the specific political situation. Milton was no ordinary poet. He saw himself as one of a line of prophets, of whom Christ was the greatest. He seems to have believed he was inspired in writing Paradise Lost: in the night the Muse brought him lines which he dictated to his amuensis the next morning. (Milton 357)

Clearly, the years of the English Revolution were marked by more than just mere millenarian frenzy. These were years that also saw a strong strain of apocalypticism linked to radical political engagement rear its head, years when, time and time again, apocalypticism was invoked as a means towards bringing about widescale change.
But, then, as the tide began to turn against the radicals, and certainly after the royalists had been reinstalled, apocalypticism continued to hold the imaginations of some: this time as a way of expressing the devastation of political/spiritual defeat, as well as a way of describing what a hell on earth Britain had become in the wake of a rightist victory. It is this version of the apocalyptic form that one sees most clearly in the late epics of John Milton. And it is this version that we shall see informs many of the films of Jarman, Greenaway, Keiller, and Leigh made in the late 1980s and early 1990s, films which arose out of a similar crisis of the left.
CLASS WAR

THE BEST CUT OF ALL
CHAPTER 3: Thatcherism/Crisis/Apocalypse

This chapter is an attempt to provide an overview of the neo-liberal, authoritarian brand of politics that dominated Westminster from at least 1979 into the 1990s, and was quickly labelled “Thatcherism.” Drawing up some kind of definition of Thatcherism is at the very least a difficult task, and many would even argue that it is impossible (because it is uncertain when “Thatcherism” began; because “it” went through so many changes and shifts). This chapter is certainly not trying to give a definitive account of the Thatcherite era. Nor is this chapter trying to suggest that the English Revolution provides some kind of blueprint for Britain’s crises of the last 30 years. What it is trying to do is to put forth an overview which specifically focuses on issues that are of particular relevance to this study, issues which forward this thesis. Thus, what this chapter is primarily interested in is Thatcherism in relation to the general topic of crisis: how Thatcherism rose out of a state of crisis, how Thatcherism sowed crises, both real and “perceived.” It is these crises that provided the impetus for the apocalyptic visions which began to crop up rather frequently in the British cinema of the late 80s and 90s—much in the same way that the apocalyptic visions studied in the last chapter arose out of specific political crises.

As many writers have made a point of stressing, “the radical right [did] not... appear out of thin air” (Hall 44). No, Thatcherism rose out of a crisis which had been ongoing for many years already, and, in many ways, Thatcherism was anticipated by the policies of the governments that preceded Margaret Thatcher’s term of office as prime minister. Colin Leys writes that Britain has undergone two pronounced crises in
the 20th century, one up until 1914, which was more or less curtailed when Britain entered the Great War, and a second one, “which began in the 1960s and is still unresolved” (27). Leys describes these crises as being strangely similar, and therefore pointing towards a recurring trend, a systemic flaw, “a syndrome towards which the whole society is periodically driven by the pattern of forces at work within it” (33).

What Leys is basically describing, here, is the collapse of the “consensus” which was developed immediately after World War II (around the social democratic welfare state), and the terms he uses to describe this crisis are those that Antonio Gramsci devised for an “organic crisis,” or a “crisis of the state”:

A ‘crisis of the state’ occurs when this cement breaks down, when ‘the great masses have become detached from their traditional ideologies, and no longer believe what they used to believe.’ (26)

When such a crisis occurs, the “historic bloc” that had formerly been, “bound together by a unifying ideology under the leadership of a ruling class dissolves and must be either reconstructed or replaced through a fresh political initiative” (Leys 27). Such a juncture provides opportunities for the creation of a new, more egalitarian “historic bloc,” but the old ruling class is generally the first to react to this new situation, according to Gramsci, restoring control, “by means of a new philosophy, new men and new programmes” (Leys 27). According to Leys, this scenario, “[applies] rather well to Britain [in the 1970s],” after a period when, “successive governments had failed to produce the economic recovery for which they had repeatedly sought wage restraints, and imposed deflations” (27). Similarly, Stuart Hall depicts Thatcherism as having risen out of a largely economic crisis that began in the 1960s, years that, “were
marked by the oscillations between recession and recovery, with a steady underlying
deterioration” (43). Hall’s account of these years leading up to 1979 suggests that this
growing economic crisis, and the failure of government after government to turn
around or even slow this slide, acted as a catalyst to a sharp political shift rightward
(43). Thus, by the end of the 1960s Harold Wilson’s “radical programme” had been
“effectively destroyed” by an economy which had tumbled into a “full-scale recession”
(Hall 43). Then these recession conditions—“slumpflation”—created a state of national
tension that helped precipitate Edward Heath’s notorious attacks on organized labour
(which failed, at the time, and helped bring Labour back into power), among other
policies. By the mid-1970s, Britain’s economic crisis was further heightened by a
“capitalist recession on a global scale,” leaving its already besieged economy in even
greater peril (43). Following Ley’s, and Gramsci’s, pattern, this pronounced crisis
generated the need for the creation of a new “historic bloc,” one which would cast
away those social democratic policies that were incapable of functioning given the
present crisis, one that could establish a new and “radical programme.” The Labour
governments of the late 1970s—those of Wilson and Callaghan—failed to create any
such new program, and instead became firmly identified with the heavily-
bureaucratized, social democratic system—the “creeping socialism” and “state
collectivism” (Hall 44-5)—that was by this time synonymous with economic hardship.
For even crises that are largely external (i.e. the Oil Crisis) can become easily
translated into internal crises (i.e. Labour ineptitude) within the public imagination.
As a result, the tide began to turn away from Labour and the “historic bloc” it had been
perched on for so long, and in desperation Labour began to grasp at straws. As Hall put it:

There now seems little doubt that, as we moved through the 1970s, the popular mood shifted decisively against the left. This fact was mirrored in the decline of Mr. Callaghan's government. As Labour lost parliamentary strength, so it has drifted deep into the ideological territory of the right, occupying with panache many of the positions only just evacuated by the right. It was Labour, not the Conservatives, which applied the surgical cut to the welfare state. And there was Mr. Healey's [Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1974-9] not wholly unexpected conversion to orthodox monetarism and fiscal restraint—tutored by the IMF and the oil price. In this climate of austerity, Keynes has been decently buried; the right has re-established its monopoly over 'good ideas;' 'capitalism' and 'the free market' have come back into common usage as terms of positive approval. (40)

Thus, although this would probably surprise many, a number of the "defining characteristics" of Thatcherism—including its dismantlement of the welfare state and its neo-liberal/monetarist economic policies—were not nearly as novel, as revolutionary, as they are often made out to be. Thatcherism was not a radical new program that came out of nowhere, rather it took a number of ideas that had been floating around for some time and stitched them together—but it did so vehemently, radically. For instance, Thatcher's monetarist philosophies—which are practically synonymous with the term Thatcherism—were a rather last-minute addition to her arsenal. As Leys put it:

Thatcher had long subscribed to the individualist, anti-state, anti-union, anti-egalitarian views of her party's right wing. Shortly before her election as leader she also adopted the 'social market' and monetarist economic doctrines to which her friend and counsellor Sir Keith Joseph had recently been converted. (101)

But even though these doctrines, like so many others associated with Thatcherism, were by no means an invention of Thatcher's camp, the Thatcherist method, in part,
was to take such doctrines and radicalize them in a way that had not been done previously. Thus, whereas Thatcher’s monetarist policies shared some similarities with the “competition policy” of Edward Heath, “Thatcher’s vision included drastically curtailing, if not dismantling, the welfare state, as fast as electoral considerations allowed” (Leys 101). Similarly, whereas Heath had staged a confrontation between his administration and labour with his creation of the Industrial Relations Act, one that directly resulted in his election defeat in 1974, Thatcher renewed this attack on labour, with greater vigour, realizing that labour posed a threat to continued election victories (Leys 101). Her government also launched a wide-scale attack on, “any and all institutions seen as representing ‘socialism,’” as well as an ‘ideological crusade’ intent on, “overcoming social and cultural resistance to a new order based on hard work, inequality, and the firm imposition of authority in the workshop and in the streets, by means of ‘firm government’” (Leys 101). As Hall has written, Thatcherism was, “engaged in a struggle for hegemony,” but it distinguished itself from Labour and from the Conservative party’s more moderate wing, in part, through, “the radicalism of its commitment to break the mould and not simply to rework the elements of the prevailing ‘philosophies’” (Hall 44). This radicalism amounted to a direct assault on consensus politics, but Hall adds:

Of course, it aims for the construction of a national consensus of its own. What it destroys is that form of consensus in which social democracy was the principal tendency. This evacuation of centrist territory has unleashed political forces on the right which have been kept in rein for most of the postwar period. (45)
This new consensus was then achieved by marrying radical reform to a strong sense of populism, uniting the people "with, not against the power bloc" (Hall 49). According to Hall:

The language of 'the people,' unified behind a reforming drive to turn the tide of 'creeping collectivism,' banish Keynesian illusion from the state apparatus and renovate the power bloc is a powerful one. Its radicalism connects with radical-popular sentiments; but it effectively turns them round, absorbs and neutralizes their popular thrust, and creates, in the place of a popular rupture, a populist unity. It brings into existence a new 'historic bloc' between certain section of the dominant and dominated classes. (49)

The similarities between much of these descriptions of Thatcherism's rise and Gramsci's theory of the "crisis of the state," or "organic crisis," should be clear.

One of the paradoxes of Thatcherism has to do with the fact that Thatcher's administrations were able to create a new "historic bloc," a sense of a hegemonic order from a heavily contested position—they never won an election with anything close to a majority; they were routinely shown to be severely lacking in public support in opinion polls, etc. Because of this, the use of the term "hegemony" in relation to Thatcherism has been disputed repeatedly over the years. However, in his 1989 introduction to his collection of essays entitled The Hard Road to Renewal, Stuart Hall continued to stick by his use of the term, providing an explanation of his specific usage:

'Hegemony' implies: the struggle to contest and dis-organize an existing political formation; the taking of the 'leading position' (on however minority a basis) over a number of different spheres of society at once--economy, civil society, intellectual and moral life, culture; the conduct of a wide and differentiated type of struggle; the winning of a strategic measure of popular consent; and, thus, the securing of a social authority sufficiently deep to conform society into a new historic project. It should never be mistaken for a finished or settled project. It is always contested, always trying to secure itself, always 'in process.' (7)
Certainly from our standpoint in the late-1990s, it seems indisputable that Thatcherism functioned in a manner that was anything less than “hegemonic” (in Hall’s sense), dictating the new rules of the game, changing the very shape of British society. Of course at times there were hiccups, times when Thatcherite policies were soundly rejected, but these were relatively few given the oftentimes astounding lack of popular support for the Tories. Thus, in 1987, after eight years of “Mrs. Thatcher’s iron tillage,” Dick Hebdige was prompted to describe the new Britain in the following manner: “the soil of the Nation and the ‘British character’ are barely recognizable. . .The landscape has transformed: all changed. . .changed utterly” (339).

Divisions

As has been indicated already and as many have noted, Thatcherism was nothing if not paradoxical, as it made its way through the 1980s. Some writers, such as David Marquand, have even gone so far as to argue that Thatcherism’s paradoxical nature was one of its defining features (see his “The Paradoxes of Thatcherism”). However, Marquand wisely makes a point of distinguishing between those paradoxes which are inherent to Thatcherism, and those which are merely par for the course for a “democratic government, in a complicated mass society, managed through enormously complex bureaucracies” (159). He focuses instead on paradoxes that are more specific to Thatcherism, such as that of the “strong, intrusive state” which simultaneously dismantles the welfare state (169). One of Thatcherism’s chief paradoxes, and one that ties in to the prior discussion of populism and hegemony within Thatcherism, has to do with the fact that Thatcherism was able to manufacture a new “historic bloc,”
was able to shape and transform the body politic steadily and effectively, while not only lacking public support but actually, actively creating pronounced divisions within society all the while. One division that Thatcherism certainly did not invent but which it not only perpetuated but also callously aggravated, was the division between the rich and the poor. Inequality under Thatcher was no longer an “unfortunate but inescapable reality,” it was a “virtue” of this new form of rule (Young 535). Hugo Young provides one of many accounts of this facet of Thatcherism in his *The Iron Lady* (1989). He notes:

> The share of total income earned by the top 1 per cent of earners grew by around a quarter, and in 1988 the best-off tenth of the population enjoyed nearly nine times more income than the worst off tenth: in 1979 they were only six and a half times better off. This was the result of escalating earnings, but, to a much greater extent, of income tax cuts. These were massively weighted towards the already prosperous. No less than half went to the richest 10 per cent, and one-third to the richest 5 per cent. (535)

This shift away from a forty-year pattern of increasing equality in earnings was justified by Thatcher’s administrations on economic grounds but, unsurprisingly, its effects on British society were devastating (Young 535-6). The 1980s became a decade characterized by the “bourgeois triumphalism” of the *parvenus*, who made their fortunes taking advantage of the new order and then shamelessly threw their newfound wealth around, as well as the conspicuous growth of a massive underclass (Young 536). Marquand singles out the ascendancy of the “yuppie” within 1980s Britain—which was met with disgust from many camps, both expected and unexpected: even the High Tory *Sunday Telegraph* decried this “rule of vulgarity” (Young 536)—as exposing one of Thatcherism’s oddest paradoxes. As he points out,
Thatcherism appealed to both yesterday's hippies become yuppies and those protectors of traditional British culture who yearned for revenge upon the “permissive society” of the 1960s (165-6). Thatcherism was flexible enough and paradoxical enough to protect High Toryism’s Victorian attitudes and practices, while also engaging the “kulaks” of the 1980s, those who were, “upwardly mobile, economically successful, and desperate to buy the status to which they think their success entitles them,” those “tough, hard, no-nonsense new men” (Marquand 166). One of the reasons for Thatcherism’s appeal amongst these “kulaks” certainly has to do with the fact that much of her cabinet came from similar backgrounds, and shared a similar contempt for Britain’s traditional elites. As W.D. Rubinstein notes, “the social composition of Mrs. Thatcher’s Cabinet was similar to that of the “1922 Committee” of backbenchers which had long been drawn from a lower social cachet than had the Tory ministry” (155). The views of this committee had generally been seen as, “more extreme than those of the postwar Tory front bench” (Rubinstein 155). And, finally, Rubinstein stresses that this new Tory leadership, “who had made their own way up (in their own eyes) by sheer talent, were unlikely to look kindly on either noblesse oblige or the coddling of the allegedly disadvantaged” (155). Meanwhile, the ranks of the “allegedly disadvantaged” continued to swell drastically.

The 1980s also became years associated with the not-so-mysterious appearance of “cardboard cities” across the country, but especially in London, as homelessness increased from, “53,110 in 1978 to 102,980 in 1986” according to D.T. Herbert (266). As Young put it, one of the coups of Thatcherism, “consisted in re-educating the
electorate not seriously to care about unemployment” (502). An issue that just a few years earlier had been a clear indicator of crisis became under Thatcher just an everyday fact of life. By the late 1980s, Thatcherism’s response to the countless reminders that the “trickle-down” effect of its monetarist policies was a myth, that, in fact, the Tory’s economic policies coupled with their attack on the welfare state was expressly leaving much of the nation in a terribly exposed condition, was to disavow the social realm altogether: Margaret Thatcher’s “there is no such thing as society” quote became one of her most famous and notorious utterances (Young 536). And as Young noted:

[Thatcher’s statement] supplied the text for an individualist age, in which the family became the largest unit of mutual assistance and the role of government as agent of a wider social collective, providing help to each according to their need, was decisively challenged. When this in turn came under attack, from churchmen and others, the prime minister’s characteristic response was not to qualify but to embellish what she had said. In May 1988, she devoted an entire speech, to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, to asserting the link between Thatcherite individualism and Christianity. Religious faith ordained the making and keeping of money, she said. This caused a row, but it wasn’t greeted with incredulity. Repetition of the thought helped to establish a new social norm, if not universal approval for it. It was now fashionable to be rich not poor, to consume rather than to ‘care.’ (535-7)

Interestingly, while her governments systematically went about uprooting much of society as it had existed, one of the factors that created cohesion around Thatcher and enabled Thatcherism to function “hegemonically,” was her very severity, her conviction, her inflexibility. As Hall put it: “Paradoxically, she does raise hearts and minds an inch or two because, vile, corrupt, awful as her vision of the future is, we know what it is” (209). Similarly, Leys suggests that much of the reason for Thatcher’s successes in 1983 and 1987 had to do with her inflexibility: “her insistence
on the necessity of her policies ensured that however nonpopular they were, the debate took place on ground chosen by her” (107). At times this inflexibility, this severity, could be absolutely frightening in action—for instance, Leys cites Thatcher’s stand-off with ten hunger strikers in Northern Ireland in 1981, where the strikers, “were allowed to die rather than be granted any concessions” (107). And it was this inflexibility that helped Thatcher make her term between June 1983 and June 1987 years where Thatcherism was “consolidated” (as Leys has put it (114)), in spite of the fact that these years were replete with government errors and scandals—most notably the Westland affair1. As Leys notes: “what is striking about these years is that a series of government errors, and the emerging impression that its reforming impulse was spent, failed to redound to the advantage of the opposition” (115). Thatcher’s “greatest achievement” during this term, and testament to the (disturbing) strength of her conviction and its rewards, was her battle with the miners that came to a head in 1985. As Overbeek has stated, “the importance of the miners’ strike can indeed hardly be exaggerated, because it represented the culmination of many elements of the Thatcherite strategy” (189), including some of its most ruthless. Characteristically, the miners were goaded and antagonized with great shows of force—they, “were forced to respond to violence with violence and were then labelled as extremists” (Burns 101). Then the government, aided by Labour leader Neil Kinnock, “used [denunciations of

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1 The Westland affair basically consisted of a conflict between Michael Heseltine, with his leanings towards Europe, and Thatcher and her cabinet, with their anti-European/Atlanticist leanings, over the Westland Corporation’s merger plans: Thatcher and company were encouraging Westland to go ahead with their desire to merge with the American-owned Sikorsky Corporation, Heseltine was trying to encourage Westland to look towards Europe, warning that a U.S. merger would hurt future arms deals with the Europeans. This conflict—in retrospect, one that looks as though it should have been easy to resolve—soon escalated into a battle of press leaks and a major power struggle: one that nearly brought Thatcher’s prime ministership to an end.
the miners' violence] to drive a wedge down the middle of the labour movement which diminished support from other national unions, and gradually broke the miners unity” (Burns 101). As Hall has argued, this destruction of labour unity was particularly disappointing when it came to these miners’ strikes of 1985: the Labour party refused to truly support the strikers and, thus, truly challenge Thatcherism, it refused to “transform the struggle,” opting instead for “damage limitation” (205). He writes:

The strike was thus doomed to be fought and lost as an old rather than a new form of politics. To those of us who felt this from very early on, it was doubly unbearable because. . .the miners’ strike was in fact instinctually with the politics of the new, it was a major engagement with Thatcherism which should have marked the transition to the politics of the present and future, but which was fought and lost, imprisoned in the categories and strategies of the past. (205)

The miners’ strike, with its pronounced tensions and its vitriol, divided the nation particularly acutely, with many people expressing outrage towards the government’s actions--for instance, Dr. David Jenkins, Bishop of Durham, who made himself an “enemy of the state” with his impassioned criticisms of Thatcher’s cruel handling of the strike (Young 417)--but, ultimately this stand-off provided a victory for the Thatcher camp, which had all but broken the back of the labour movement through this decisive blow and others by the late 1980s. Thus, Leys notes that, “by 1985 total union membership had fallen to 10.7 million from 13.2 million in 1979,” and according to a Gallup poll in 1987, only 1 per cent of the population, “considered union power the chief issue facing the country, compared with 73 per cent in May 1979” (120).
London has always held a central place within Britain’s national affairs that few other cities elsewhere have been able to approximate. As Rubinstein has stated:

London’s place in the structure of British life...is unique among comparable countries. Perhaps nowhere else is the Metropolis equal to that of London, a fact which has been true since Elizabethan times. (158)

But during the Thatcher/Major years London’s importance within Britain still managed to grow. Among other reasons, “the South” continued to be favoured over “the North” in most every category--economic, cultural, etc.--during the Thatcher/Major years, a continuing trend which obviously centralized London’s influence; and Britain’s economic strength became increasingly focused in the City of London, whose worldwide importance as a financial hub continued to be enormous, even though Britain’s decline in most other sectors continued unabated. As Rubinstein states:

In direct contrast to this progressive decline [in industrial and manufacturing sectors], while in 1860 the City of London was the pre-eminent financial centre of the world, and while in 1910 New York and, conceivably but not certainly, Berlin were second-running rivals to London’s continuing pre-eminence, in 1990 London was still unarguably one of the three great financial centres of the world, along with New York and Tokyo. By 1981 [and by all accounts, the City’s power grew significantly during the 80s] it was estimated by one study that financial institutions situated in the City of London had ‘at their disposal the massive treasury of some 562 billion [pounds sterling],’ over which ‘they exercised the power to dispose of as they please.’ (35-6)

However, London was also the site of many of the Thatcher era’s worst sores and most pitched conflicts: the city that was home to a number of financial booms during the 1980s, was also the site of massive homelessness, urban decay, and rioting. One of the greatest struggles of the Thatcher years was that between the Thatcher administration...
and the Greater London Council. This conflict was basically a show-down between Thatcher’s “neo-liberal and ideologically conservative administration” and the Labour party-run GLC. Here, as elsewhere, the Thatcher government attempted to enforce its market-based approach which basically amounted to, “reduced national aid to distressed municipalities, and the pursuit of policies which attempt to activate market processes in the urban economy” (King 224), but whose “trickle-down” was generally minimal at best. Meanwhile the GLC was in the process of, “developing and pursuing socialist strategy at the municipal level more systematically under the Thatcher administration than at any period in its history” (King 224). The inevitable clash between these two approaches helped raise, “central-local relations. . .[to] a level of conflict and salience in political consciousness unparalleled in British twentieth century political experience” (King 224-5). Indeed, writing in 1984, Hall saw this clash as providing, “the most important front in the struggle against Thatcherism,” because of its, “impact on the popular classes,” and because it,

cuts the whole nation in its fundamental political culture into two camps: the camp of the profit motive and possessive liberalism, which Thatcherism represents, and the camp of collective social need and the public interest, which the labour movement, even in its most degenerated form, has always represented. (233)

Furthermore, Hall argued that the GLC “[represents] a direct obstacle” to Thatcherism’s plan to utterly transform the shape of British society:

Public expenditure cuts are the ‘cutting edge’ of the whole monetarist doctrine. Privatization is a key instrument of ‘radical’ social and economic reconstruction. Both have bitten deep and directly into local democracy because local authority spending parallels and overlaps with the structure of welfare support. (234)
Finally, Hall also saw hope in the policies and practices of the GLC, which he saw as having, “mobilized some of the most innovative political talent in radical politics and unleashed a stream of new political thinking,” in sharp contrast to a Labour party that he described as being stagnant and out of touch (236). Earlier in the 1980s the Thatcher government had initiated rate-capping as a first major blow against the GLC and other “upstart” councils. This had the effect of putting already strained local governments (especially urban ones) into an even more dire set of circumstances. As Dearlove and Saunders reported in 1984:

The imminent demise of local government as a democratic and reasonably accountable system has been forecast many times before. Rate-capping makes such forecasts a reality, for it totally constrains a local council to follow the line being laid down at the centre by removing its one autonomous sphere of revenue. Effectively stripped of the power to raise taxes beyond a level determined by the centre, local authorities cease in any meaningful sense to function as systems and are reduced to the status of local outposts for the government in Westminster. (qtd. in Hoggart 55)

Here, once again, was the paradox of a government that was fighting a war against “big government,” yet steadily centralizing power in its own hands. In typical Thatcherite fashion, however, as crippling a blow as rate-capping was to a body such as the GLC, it was not a decisive blow. Thus, in April 1985 the GLC and six other Metropolitan County Councils were abolished by Westminster (King 225). With this feat accomplished, the Thatcher government was able to implement its “urban policy” with virtually no obstacles, “[shifting] public resources away from cities,” depriving local authorities of their basic needs (Herbert 289). The central government was able to save face somewhat because, “between 1978 and 1987 over 2 million [pounds sterling] was spent on inner cities with partnerships, programmes, powerful new public
agencies, and development corporations,” but the “benefits” of these expenditures
were negligible at best to local communities, as they generally catered to interest
groups (corporations, foreign investors, etc.) outside of these communities (289). For
instance, Brownill and Sharp indicate some of the negative effects associated with the
major development projects that swept across London during the 1980s:

Responding to changes in the London economy the speculative property sector
has proposed a number of large-scale major developments on the fringe of the
city. Called ‘mixed-use,’ they are largely commercial developments with some
retail, leisure and residential elements. Docklands, Broadgate, Spitalfields, and
King’s Cross are all examples of existing or proposed developments. These
developments threaten the working-class housing in these areas through direct
demolition, gentrification and the increased incentive for tenants to buy; land
values increase, thereby making the provision of affordable rented housing
under present subsidy regimes impossible. (20)

Similarly, Herbert notes that the most “successful” of these projects, “have capitalized
on the potential of large cities as places of consumption, involving tourism or
recreation,” but that on the whole, in spite of such projects, conditions in the innercity
areas surrounding these complexes have worsened significantly, citing the
Birmingham Partnership area as an example, “where only 17 per cent of newly created
jobs went to residents of the most disadvantaged inner areas” (290). And, Coupland
states that at best these development projects were often short-sighted, reporting that
by 1991, “vacant office space in the City of London had soared to 18 per cent,” and
that the Docklands project was faced with whopping 40 per cent vacancy rates, with
rent levels halved (“Every Job” 29). Development projects such as these provided
testament to the destructive power of the Thatcher administration’s “urban renewal”
programs, monuments, "to how 'regeneration' can become a disaster in less than a
decade" (Coupland, "Docklands" 161).

By the late 80s and early 90s accounts of the "Thatcher decade’s" effects on
London and predictions for London's future under Thatcherism, with or without
Margaret Thatcher herself, were nothing if not gloomy. In 1991 Michael Hebbert
described the situation five years after the destruction of the GLC in the following
terms:

Back in 1985 many thought, and some even hoped, that the decapitation of
metropolitan government would cause urban chaos. There was a hint of
disappointment in County Hall when a GLC-funded forecasting project found
that the most likely scenario was not a breakdown of services but a gentler
process of 'policy drift' in which standards slipped and new problems were left
unsolved. Six years later it might seem that the pessimists were right and the
[London School of Economics] forecasters wrong. The message of this book
[The Crisis of London, ed. Thornley] is not slippage but crisis. (134)

Hebbert notes that this sense of crisis filled the journalism of the times—everywhere
London was being depicted as "teetering on the brink" (134). Certainly this sense of
危机 was prevalent within the scholarly literature of the period as well. Conditions
were such that Brian Robson in 1989 pronounced his "gloomy scenario" on Britain’s
large cities: one of a growing underclass "contained" in an atmosphere of urban
decay, with no end in sight to this decline (22-3). Likewise, Andy Coupland in 1991
stated that, "London. . .looks to be set for a very difficult and potentially disastrous
decade," with conviction ("Every Job" 36). And, finally, Brownill and Sharp, also in
1991, predicted that, "this situation can only get worse until radical reforms are
implemented" (23). Times were grim indeed: "London is in a mess" (Thornley 1).
“The Crisis of the Left”

One of the other principal crises associated with Thatcherism throughout the Thatcher/Major years was that of the left, which not only found itself consistently under attack, but also found itself incapable of strongly challenging the Tories throughout most of this era. The Labour party proved itself to be particularly ineffectual, holding on to political notions and practices that Thatcherism had rapidly made anachronistic, failing to capitalize on even the greatest Thatcherite blunders, and often serving to aid the Thatcherite cause by refusing to seriously engage the Tories on new ground and instead successfully splitting the opposition. As Rubinstein points out this is not all that surprising considering Labour’s historical conservatism:

In its foreign policy the [immediate post-war] Labour government was instrumental in founding NATO, containing Communism, building a British atom bomb, and entering the Korean War as a matter of course. It retained conscription in peacetime and still vast Commonwealth responsibilities. Its domestic social policies had virtually nothing to say about such matters as feminism, sexual reform, abortion, environmentalism, privacy, restrictions of government secrecy, and other social issues later so important a component of the left-liberal agenda; indeed, its attitudes on these issues appear to be nearly identical to those of previous Tory governments. Anthony Houard remarked that ‘the overwhelming Labour victory of 1945 brought about the greatest restoration of social values since 1660.’ (83)

Similarly, the Wilson and Callaghan governments show only the most superficial relationship to true socialism, and, “can in virtually no sense whatever be seen as anti-business or anti-capitalist” (Rubinstein 83-4). Thus, as Britain entered a period of prolonged crisis in the 1960s one can see a rather significant fracturing of the political realm: with a “new left” distancing itself from Labourism and, later, a radical right distancing itself somewhat from post-war traditional Toryism. This “new left” merged
a more radical critique of society, that was oftentimes openly Marxist, with wider interests such as race, and especially from the 1970s on, feminism. The preferred form of expression of this “new left,” and especially those who had emerged on the scene from the “turmoil of the late 60s and early 70s,” became the critical journal, which was “generally produced on the edges of the academy and against it” (Anderson 44). It was within this milieu--one which included figures such as Stuart Hall, Tom Nairn, and Terry Eagleton--that Thatcherism found many of its most vocal and articulated critics, but as Thatcherism’s “hegemony” settled in and successfully fabricated a new “historic bloc,” this milieu also became one of Britain’s most frustrated, and most desperate.

One of the reasons for this frustration and desperation had to do with the Labour party’s previously-mentioned ineffectuality. In spite of the fact that Thatcher’s administrations regularly held disapproval ratings in the neighbourhood of 57% (and more), according to polls, the Labour party was never able to capitalize upon this and really challenge the “Thatcher revolution.” As Leys has pointed out, one of the reasons for this was because the Labour party was so deeply divided itself: “Following its defeat in 1979 the Labour party entered on an acute internal struggle between its left wing, led by [Tony] Benn and supported by a majority of the party’s constituency advocates, and the centrist social democrats in the parliamentary party’s leadership” (108). This split within the ranks of the opposition was perhaps never more acutely obvious than during the anti-Poll Tax movement of the late 80s and early 90s. In fact, the imposition of the Community Charge--which became popularly known as the Poll Tax “because of its similarity to a tax introduced in 1381” (Burns 10)--was one of the
few examples where the Thatcher government was successfully rebuffed, but this was achieved in spite of continued failings on the part of Labour. The Poll Tax--a flat-rate tax that was not based on one’s ability to pay--was one instance of the Thatcher government’s open promotion of inequality that went too far\(^2\): in practice it was preposterous. Examples of its sheer injustice were rampant, filling newspapers. One story in *The Guardian* reported:

The Duke of Westminster, who used to pay 10,255 [pounds sterling] in rates on his estate has just learned his new poll tax: 417 [pounds sterling]. His housekeeper and resident chauffeur face precisely the same bill. (qtd. in Burns 10)

Not surprisingly, the imposition of such a tax met with open and active resistance, including a massive non-paying contingent, whose numbers at the height of the movement stood around 17 million (Burns 184). In spite of the obvious potential here for Labour to truly contest the Thatcher government, and in spite of the fact that given the fact that only 11 million people had voted Labour in 1987, Labour continued to discourage non-payment and Labour-run councils across Britain continued to not only collect the tax, but also deployed bailiffs and sheriff officers to harass those who could not or would not pay (Burns 184). Similarly, in 1990, police provocation of a massive anti-poll tax rally in London led to one of the most extensive riots London has seen in the 20th century, but after the riot the government denied the charges of provocation and quickly labelled the rioters as “extremists,” and Labour “quickly fell into line,” agreeing that the rioters should be treated as criminals and tried. As Kinnock put it: “I regard them and treat them as enemies of freedom” (qtd. in Burns 104). Needless to

\(^2\) As *Class War* put it: “the Poll Tax is the most ambitious attack the Tories have made on the working class since they came to power” (Bone, et al. 70).
say, Labour’s actions vis-a-vis the Poll Tax had a way of splitting their ranks. In any case, the Labour party was so divided throughout much of the Thatcher era and into the Major era that at times Britain had the feel of a one-party state. Young phrased it the following way:

It seemed at times as if parliamentary democracy had gone into suspension. . . The failure of Labour, [the Conservatives] thought, was essentially brought about by the power of Conservative ideas. Thatcherism in action had relentlessly proved that there existed no conceivable basis for another sort of politics. (531)

And as Leys ominously reminded his readers, countries such as Chile and Uruguay had also held long democratic traditions before they slid into military authoritarianism (23).

One of the most important and impassioned “new left” writers of this period was Stuart Hall. As a result, his *The Hard Road to Renewal*, which collects essays written between the late 1970s and the late 1980s on the subject of Thatcherism and the “crisis of the left,” makes for a fascinating document not only about these years but from these years. As one moves through these essays one can see Hall’s optimism and his disappointment ebb and flow in relation to the events of the Thatcher 80s: the struggle over the GLC, the miners’ strike, the 1987 election (“Thatcherism’s third term was not unexpected, but the reality of it is devastating and it will take some time to think through properly” (259)). One of the points Hall made time and time again throughout the 1980s was that the left, and especially the Labour party, had to cast away all of its time-worn conceptions and face up to the new times that were the result of the crises of the 60s and 70s, and of Thatcherism. Hall repeatedly invoked Gramsci towards this
project: “I believe, with Gramsci, that we must first attend ‘violently’ to things as they are, without illusions or false hopes, if we are to transcend the present” (14). One of Hall’s most critical observations along these lines, was that class could no longer form the foundation of the left’s critique, for under Thatcherism class, like many other things, had been severely dislocated. Whereas previously Labour might have been able to “rely” on the working class vote, this was no longer the case. Throughout the 1980s the Conservatives made great gains within working class ranks, largely on the back of jingoistic rhetoric and posturings and promises of a “return to greatness” (most notably, this was demonstrated by the Falklands/Malvinas crisis, and especially the Belgrano affair, although the “Murdoch story” is also highly of interest here). As Hall put it:

We have to confess that socialist ideas have come and gone among working people in our own society throughout recent history. A significant proportion of the British working class has consistently voted the other way... We have to acknowledge that though, of course, material conditions may predispose working people to think in the direction of the reform and reconstruction of a system which exploits them in so many ways, they do not guarantee that economic and social position will always be translated into a political project or will in and of itself--without political organization and education--give birth spontaneously to socialist ideas. (179)

This, of course, did not mean that class had “disappeared”--“indeed, nowhere is it so powerfully etched as in the class distribution of illness, types of health care, and death”--but it was certainly no longer a “unified political force” (Hall 281). Similarly,

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3 The sinking of the Belgrano by the British (which killed 368 sailors) escalated a conflict that previously had been largely without casualties, and later was met with charges that Thatcher had intentionally sabotaged the peace process in search of a politically useful military victory, as opposed to a more sedate, less glorious diplomatic victory, at a time when her administration was suffering hugely.

4 As Class War put it in a piece entitled “Rich Bastards Beware”: “At all events on the social calendars of the rich they expect to be left in tranquility to enjoy themselves. We’re [the working class] supposed to suffer in silence, know our places, keep well away from them. After all that’s what they give us beer, bingo and the Sun for” (Bone, et al. 15).
Hall argued that within the divided society that Thatcherism had created out of Britain, ideological configurations had become of tantamount importance:

Appealing to the 'real experience' of poverty or unemployment or underprivilege won't do the trick. Even poverty and unemployment have to be ideologically defined. A young unemployed person may interpret this experience to mean that you should work and vote to change the system. But it could equally be defined as a sign that you should throw your fortune in with the winners, climb on the bandwagon, earn a fast buck and look after 'number one.' (262)

Thatcherism was winning battle after battle because it was successfully deploying ideology, opposing "'real' majorities" with "(equally real) 'symbolic majorities'" (Hall 262). As Hall explained:

Mrs. Thatcher's 'symbolic majority' includes all who identify ideologically with the enterprise culture as a way of the future, who see themselves in their political imagination as likely to be lucky in the next round. They form an 'imaginary community' around Thatcherism's political project. (262)

Engaged in a battle of this sort, the left had to revamp its approaches towards politics and realize that, "politics does not reflect majorities, it constructs them" (Hall 266)--in other words, the Labour party could not wait for the public to make "the right choice," it had to give them a reason to make this "right choice" by offering a new vision, not just a piecemeal, defeatist reaction to Thatcherism. By 1988-9 Hall and others tried to give the left a shot in the arm--after the cruel reality of Thatcher's third term victory--through the creation of the "New Times" project in Marxism Today, a project whose goal was to create this new vision, determine just what exactly it would look like. Again, the argument here was that the world had gone through "epochal changes"--"in terms of the break-up of the old postwar settlement and the creation of a more fragmented and variegated society and culture" (Hall and Jacques 15)--and that the left
had to realign itself with these new times. As Hall had argued elsewhere, given such a realignment and the development of suitable new visions, the new times could become ones where the left could truly lead, creating a new, more egalitarian “historic bloc.”

But even amongst this enthusiasm and optimism Hall expressed some eerily prescient fears:

But there is another... danger: that the Left will produce, in government, a brand of New Times which in practice does not amount to much more than a slightly cleaned-up, humanised version of that of the radical Right. Such would be the inevitable consequence of two things: a pragmatic adjustment by the Left to the collapse of its various previous visions and a failure to generate its own new historic project. (Hall and Jacques 16)

And if the left failed to align itself with these New Times and create a vision for these new times, Hall had his own “gloomy scenario” to pronounce: “what is certain is that if the Left cannot win the struggle for New Times, more regressive and reactionary political forces certainly will” (Hall and Jacques 18).

Apocalypse

Finally, by now it should be clear that the Thatcherite program, as it made its way through the 80s and into the 90s left an apocalyptic imprint on Britain--tearing up roots, creating pronounced divisions, spreading crises. To be sure, these times were often addressed in apocalyptic terms, from those on the left and on the right. For instance, the “Thatcher revolution” was often described in terms that were epochal, world-historical, even millenial. Thus, someone like Roger Taylor, taking the nearly-messianic language often used by the Tories in order to describe their goals and accomplishments and playing with it, facetiously described the new society that Thatcherism was in the process of building as a “New Jerusalem,” suggesting just how
vast these changes were, as well as the zeal with which they were being carried out (92). Similarly, Hugo Young captured the almost millenial repercussions of Margaret Thatcher's 1987 election victory:

...it would be a violation of the truth to deny that the 1987 election marked a decisive moment in British politics. It did not end the Thatcher era but did something rather more telling. It locked the Thatcher era into place, as a phase in Britain’s political evolution of which the end was not in sight. (518)

Furthermore, Young described this victory as reinforcing the parallel between the Thatcherite program and the establishment of the New Jerusalem, the creation of a beacon for all the world to see:

[Thatcherism] was in place, as it seemed, unchallengeably. And so, without question, was its leader: confirmed in her luxuriant conviction that she had carried Britain, by the only honest policies available, towards the destiny her people desired and the world would strive to emulate. (524)

To those on the left, for whom Thatcher was frequently regarded as some sort of Antichrist figure—"a totemic hate-object to rally their devotees" (Young 542)—this same victory had the feel of the End itself. Thus, it is not hard to see why this victory would soon prompt many on the left to try and match it with their very own apocalyptic political project, a project of radical renewal, the New Times project. As Hall and Jacques described their cause: "New Times, in short, is about making a new world" (20). And it is not hard to imagine the continued (growing?) desperation of the left as even after the New Times project, even after Thatcher had been dislodged from power, the program which bore her name continued to rule over the land—and win elections.
Enter John Major

Although some have gone as far as to argue that John Major and his prime ministership “differed” significantly from his predecessor, and that, “in his political beliefs he was not a Thatcherite” (Norton 64), it is clear that despite his more “pragmatic” views, his steps back from Thatcher’s post-1987 radicalism, his eschewal of confrontation (at least on Thatcher’s scale), and his blander, more sedate public persona, John Major, at the very least, was a defender of much of the Thatcher legacy, and, some may argue, his lack of vitriol masked the fact that his government continued to successfully extend the influence of many of Thatcher’s most damaging policies. Indeed, in spite of certain dramatic (yet unsurprising) changes from Thatcher’s rule, such as his scrapping of the community charge, and his much softer position regarding Europe, John Major’s government, “retained many of the policies of 1979-90, refusing...to reflate the economy to reduce unemployment, and continuing the commitment to privatization, use of markets in the welfare state, and lower income taxes [for the rich—AK]” (Seldon 62), as well as continuing Thatcher’s war on labour, most notably through “its policy of closing most of Britain’s remaining coal mines” (Norton 65). Furthermore, even though John Major’s attitude towards Europe was much less rightist than Thatcher’s had been, he continued to maintain Britain’s Atlanticist foreign policies. Of course, the most dramatic evidence of this came early into Major’s reign with the Gulf War, Major and Bush’s “good war”—a war which provided a wave of renewed nationalism that was instrumental in generating public confidence in him, helping Major to win the 1992 election in the face of massive
public discontent with the Tories (much in the same way that the Falklands/Malvinas crisis had aided and abetted Thatcher’s government in the early 1980s). Finally, John Major may have learned from some of Margaret Thatcher’s mistakes, but he also realized that many of Thatcher’s battles had been won on ideological grounds, and he continued to engage in many of these same battles himself. One striking example of this ideological rhetoric came during the Welsh Conservative Party Conference of 1991, when Major essentially tried to efface the Tories’ recent legacy of divisiveness:

> Our distinctive Toryism is the polar opposite of Socialism. It rejects their policies based on envy. It rejects their attitudes which foment class division. For our belief—our Tory belief—grows from the commonsense instincts of the British. From their fair-mindedness, their sense of what is right and their sense of obligation to other people. It builds on the instinctive friendliness of our people. It seeks to unite, and not divide. (qtd. in Baker 95)

Here, again, one can see fascinating ideological maneuverings in this speech: its ingratiating tone, its stunning disavowal of Thatcherism’s schisms, money-lust, and radical individualism, its play on the spectre of Socialism, its naturalization of Toryism (“Toryism is commonsense”), its hegemonic impulse. Another example of Major’s clever use of ideological language, as well as an example of Major’s use of messianic/apocalyptic/salvational language strikingly similar to that which Thatcher had often used, and his ability to obscure Thatcherism’s crises and depict the opposition as a harbinger of doom, came days before his 1992 election victory, at a party rally in Wembley:

> The walls of this island fortress that appear so strong, undermined from within, the United Kingdom untied, the bonds that generation of our enemies have fought and failed to break, loosened by ourselves. But that is what is at risk on 9th April. Labour and Liberal policy could break up Britain...This party, and this party alone, will defend our union. I ask you--go out and tell the people of the danger we face. If I could summon up all the authority of this office I
would put it into this single warning—the United Kingdom is in danger. Wake up, my fellow countrymen. Wake up now, before it is too late. (qtd. in Baker 37)

There had been a changing of the guard, and the face of Toryism had changed somewhat, but clearly for the left and for all those who had suffered under Thatcherism the nightmare continued. And without an obvious enemy at its center, it had quite possibly become even more elusive, harder to combat.
CHAPTER 4: Film/Politics/Apocalypse

Of course, Thatcherism had its effects on British film as well. In fact, in spite of Margaret Thatcher's widely-known aversion to film, because of the centrality of the media to the Thatcherite program of not only re-creating Britain but also re-imagining it—Hall has called this process "imaging" (261)—film often found itself if not at the center of the pitched battles of 1980s Britain, near this center. Generally, Thatcher's governments accorded the film industry the same kind of treatment that the other arts got—they were encouraged to "compete" within "the market" in the same way that other businesses did, without government "handouts" (Quart 23, Elsaesser 58). Thus, in 1984-5 a new Films Bill was passed that deregulated the film industry, completely opening it up to market forces. This Films Bill also eliminated a, "25 per cent tax break for investment in film production," and it privatized the National Film Finance Corporation, the last remaining form of direct government support for the film industry (Quart 23-4). This law left the industry severely crippled, and at a terrible disadvantage within a market where distribution and exhibition was already almost totally dominated by product from the United States of America. British film production for the cinema was put in an unfortunate position, but parallel to this, film made for television (and contemporary British filmmaking that was eventually aired on television, such as Derek Jarman's Sebastiane, which was made in 1976, then bought and aired by Channel 4 in the mid-1980s--to great furor), was placed right in the thick of many of the political clashes of the 1980s because of television's ever-increasing importance within the political arena, and because this trend led the Tories to monitor
this realm sternly. Eventually, much in the same way that had occurred in Germany in the 1970s, the television industry came to be the most important financial supporter of film, not only backing films made expressly for the television screen, but also, picking up the slack created by the government’s absence, financing filmmaking for theatrical release.

Because of market forces, namely American interest and investment, one type of filmmaking that did quite well during the 1980s, was the British “heritage film,” as Higson has labelled it. These films are costume dramas that generally represent Britain, “at home” or “abroad,” as “everyone would like to remember it,” prior to the devastation of World War II and the crises of the late twentieth century, fading perhaps, but nonetheless still resplendent, still glorious. As Higson and others have noted, these films generally, though not always, represent a conservative reaction to the present, refusing to look at the present at all (“violently,” or not), fetishizing period detail, rendering “history as spectacle, as separate from the viewer in the present, as something over and done with, complete, achieved,” creating a sense of a national past that is “purged of history” (Higson, “Re-presenting” 113). Furthermore, Higson states that the heritage film is a “fantasy of conspicuous consumption, a fantasy of Englishness, a fantasy of the national past” (Higson, “Re-presenting 113). Given this notion, the heritage film performs an interesting link between Thatcherism’s appeal to its new vulgarians, and their urge to consume, and its appeal to High Toryism’s upholding of tradition and the “English way.”
On the other hand, the British "art film" found itself on extremely difficult ground during the 1980s, a condition which had the effect of politicizing this art cinema. British art filmmakers--most famously Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway--were, generally speaking, "left of centre" (to borrow Mike Leigh's self-description), but even if they were not necessarily politically radical, they found themselves working within a medium which was under severe attack, whose funding had been largely eliminated, and which, now more than ever, had to prove its market value. By and large, directors within Britain's art cinema became virulently anti-Thatcher--if they had not been so already. These art filmmakers found their "freedom of expression" placed within rather severe constraints, economic and otherwise, and therefore they had to face up to the task of determining what "the possible areas of action" were, as Sylvia Harvey put it, from within "dependency" (qtd. in Whitaker 89). Furthermore, Harvey argued that such a filmmaker must also avoid ghettoization and instead take into account his/her audience in order to transcend being merely alternative and instead become oppositional, attempting to transform social relations (Whitaker 90). Interestingly, within similar circumstances--chaotic times, rapidly disappearing government funding of film, etc.--British art film took a similar direction to that taken by the New German Cinema in the 1970s: it cultivated an auteur-based identity. This goes especially for someone such as Derek Jarman who attained a certain level of stability within his career only after he had developed a public persona, one based on the controversy that accompanied the television broadcasts of Sebastian and Jubilee (1977), on his homosexuality, on his outspoken disgust for Thatcher and
her health care policies, and, sadly, on his contraction of the AIDS virus. But this also
goes for someone like Peter Greenaway who developed an auteurist arthouse
following, based on the audaciousness and the obsessiveness of his films, which then
exploded into a full-scale, but short-lived, phenomenon upon the release of his
controversial *The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and Her Lover* (1989). More recently,
Mike Leigh has become Britain’s auteurist export *nom du jour* due to the critical and
financial successes of *Naked* (1993) and *Secrets and Lies* (1996), as well as the
public’s interest in his unusual working method, with its ritualized improvisation.

Another characteristic which linked much of the “New British Cinema” was that,
as Elsaesser phrased it, it “broke with the consensus idiom par excellence: realism”
(54). Whereas the British “New Wave” of the late 1950s and early 1960s had been
defined by its cult of realism, with what Higson has labelled its “surface realism”—its
iconography of British “authenticity”—and its “moral realism”—its iconography of
“ordinary people”, of the working class (“Space” 136-7)—the New British Cinema
largely scrapped the realist mode and its insufficiencies (Eaton 33), and instead opted
for “anti-realism” (in the case of Jarman, Greenaway, and possibly even Terence
Davies, as Tony Williams argues (247)) and “heightened-realism” (in the case of
someone like Leigh). Interestingly, in some cases this led to denouncement from
certain camps on the left, on the grounds that anything other than hard-edged realism
represented an adoption of the “bourgeois high art position” (O’Pray 185). But by
avoiding realism’s conventions these directors escaped the pitfalls of searching for
“authentic images” of Thatcherism, which as Elsaesser has argued, would mean a
realist iconography of, "misery and degradation, of unemployment and urban blight, of pollution and police harassment, of violence and racism" (64). Certainly these issues and visions have appeared frequently within the British cinema of the 1980s and 1990s, but the best of these films have found ways of avoiding resorting to rigidity, cliché, and demagoguery in relation to the Thatcher/Major years.

One approach that has avoided such demagoguery but nonetheless has made for some very potent, politicized filmmaking, was the merging of apocalypticism with "anti-realism" and/or "heightened-realism" in the depiction of Thatcher/Major era Britain. What follows is a discussion of such apocalyptic visions in the work of four New British directors--Derek Jarman and Peter Greenaway, who represent an "anti-realist" school, and Patrick Keiller and Mike Leigh, who represent a "heightened-realism" school--from 1987 onwards. The aim of this chapter is to establish firmly the connections between these apocalyptic visions and the crises sown by the Thatcher/Major governments--and especially that of the crisis of the left--thereby fitting this work within the apocalyptic genre's radical political tradition in a way similar to some of the radical Nonconformists discussed in the previous chapter. The reason for having chosen the date 1987 is that, as far as I can tell, 1987 was the year films "about" Thatcherism became openly apocalyptic as opposed to merely dystopic (I am thinking specifically of Jarman's *The Last of England*), and this date corresponds nicely, if maybe a bit too conveniently, to the year Margaret Thatcher won her third term election, and, arguably, began to further radicalize her program (as evidenced by the creation of the Poll Tax soon afterwards). The following discussion is a thorough
examination of apocalyptic visions within British film of this period, but it may not be an exhaustive account of the subject—there may very well be films that slipped through the net. Nonetheless, the films which will be discussed represent some of the finest films to have come out of Britain, or anywhere else, during this period—as Elsaesser puts it (if somewhat comfortably), these were “interesting times” in Britain, times when Britain was perhaps the “most colourful country in Europe,” and, therefore, inspiring times (53, 68)—and their apocalypticism is illuminating.

PART I: “Anti-Realism”

Derek Jarman

. . . When people ask ‘why are your films so gloomy,’ it is because of this [his homosexuality within an aggressively homophobic society]. In a certain sense I buried all of this in the 1970s because things were getting better, but now in the 1980s with AIDS it has opened my eyes and I see the most appalling things happening. But it’s all anaesthetized by the media, so no one really notices.

--Derek Jarman (Hacker 255)

As has been mentioned, 1980s Britain had a way of politicizing its populace, including its filmmakers. After having made somewhat of a splash in the mid-to late-1970s as the enfant terrible of British film, the 1980s were nothing if not a difficult decade for Jarman. Because of funding cuts and other shifts in the film industry, Jarman found himself unable to make another feature-length film until the late 1980s (his Caravaggio (1986) project, was the greatest victim of these times, originally envisioned as a film that would be shot in Cinecitta’s studios, it ended up being put on the backburner for six years before finally being shot in London); he witnessed the AIDS crisis tear across Britain (and take many of his friends) as Thatcher’s government made its cuts to the National Health Service; and in the late 1980s he
himself was diagnosed as having AIDS (he tested positive for the HIV virus in December 1986 (Quinn-Meyler 127)). Jarman became one of the most outspoken critics of Thatcherism and its health care “reform” (which became law in 1990 when the NHS and Community Care Bill was passed—a law that offered doctors, “the chance to manage their own budgets and hospitals the opportunity to abandon the NHS in favor of a self-governing status,” thereby sowing division within the realm of health care (Lippard and Johnson 279)). He was also singled out by the Thatcherites as some sort of example of the “permissive society’s” lingering evils—most notoriously in Norman Stone’s 1988 “Sick Scenes From English Life” article for the Sunday Times, which focused much of its venom on The Last of England, decrying its “two-dimensional ideology,” its “homosexual and sadistic” content, its lack of plot and sense of tradition (Lippard and Johnson 281). By the end of the decade he was arguably the most famous gay man in Britain. Even though, not surprisingly, Jarman’s work shows a fixation with the plight of homosexuals and the AIDS crisis within Thatcherite Britain, his vision was by no means “limited,” for Jarman developed a filmic critique of Thatcherism that was broad, addressing issues of national decline, national identity, political betrayal, militarism, state terrorism, and environmental destruction, among others. And he did so utilizing an unorthodox, idiosyncratic style of filmmaking that used everything from jarring anachronisms to tampered Super 8 imagery, and that strongly associated Thatcherism and apocalypse throughout much of his work from The Last of England onwards. As Jarman’s friend and colleague Simon Watney stated in eulogy,
With the late Angela Carter, Jarman was the greatest poetic visionary of Britain's Thatcher era. He captured with unerring accuracy the sense of inexorably developing corruption and cruelty that since the late '70s has increasingly characterized everyday life here. (84)

In spite of the fact that Norman Stone denounced *The Last of England* on the most petty and ridiculous grounds (i.e. lack of plot), it is nonetheless not very difficult to see why a conservative such as he would have been put off by this film, for it is an absolutely scathing and disturbing vision of Britain under Thatcher, and one that is altogether apocalyptic. *The Last of England*'s message is sinister, to say the least:

Where's Hope? They murdered her? Tomorrow's been cancelled due to lack of interest. You saw the graffiti years ago on the Euston Road and didn't believe it. What proof do you need? The world's curling up like an autumn leaf. The storm's coming to blow it into the final winter.

As this narration makes clear *The Last of England*'s vision is world-historical in true apocalyptic fashion, but the film is not addressing the sins and calamities of the world (with the exception, perhaps, of a strange segment shot in New York City--although this may be Jarman's way of identifying the "capital" of this "new world order"), it is addressing those of Britain. And thus, the film itself stands as this very "proof" that Thatcherism is ushering in the End. The film is composed principally of footage shot in industrial wastelands, hollowed-out factories and warehouses, and desolate and devastated docklands--all in London--scenery which suggests the state of the nation, and which calls to mind the collapse of the industrial sector, and of labour. The film is organized in collage form, featuring among other things: Jarman himself feverishly writing in his studio; ripped, torn and disaffected young men wandering the ruined landscape, lighting flares, smashing objects; balaclava-wearing and gun-toting
“terrorists” rounding up victims, guarding them, performing executions; strange, off-kilter dance and wedding sequences; footage depicting colonial Britain’s overseas military presence--footage which, in relation to the film as a whole suggests the vicious recoil of Britain’s 300 year colonial history; home movie footage of children, innocence, flowers and bees, from a consensus-era “paradise lost”; a wide array of music; and fire, lots and lots of fire.

The overall effect of these combinations and juxtapositions is to suggest that Britain is the victim of a war, that Britain is at war with itself, and that this state may be irremediable. Jarman’s collage style is chaotic and jarring, to be sure--it comes across as an attempt to depict the times “violently,” in order to deeply affect its viewers, radicalize them, destroy public apathy. It is a desperate film, seemingly using every technique, every style at Jarman’s disposal to turn the tide. And it is a “mute” film, consisting of no dialogue and very few monologues (given its duration)--it comes from a point of desperation beyond words. As Jarman put it in The Garden:

I have no words.
My shaking hands cannot express my fury.
Sadness is all I have.

Thus, the dock-side “terrorist sequences” can be seen as an attempt to take one of the depressing clichés of the period--the balaclava-adorned, machine gun-carrying, “IRA-style” terrorist--and “push the envelope” with it, for these sequences in no way suggest victimization at the hands of some “outsiders.” Instead, these sequences suggest the victimization of the British people--Jarman makes a point of featuring a wide demographic as his “prisoners of war”--at the hands of the state, thereby turning this
cliché of the extremist/terrorist on its ear. Furthermore, Jarman cleverly stages these sequences in the desolation of some abandoned portions of London’s docklands—“supposedly Mrs. T’s capitalist New Jerusalem” (Kennedy, “Two Gardens” 30)—in this way linking this vision to Thatcher’s “monetarist miracle,” and its ill effects.

Jarman’s fixation with fire in *The Last of England* is not nearly as simplistically “apocalyptic” as it may seem at face value. For one thing, his “recurrent imagery of a blitzed and burning London”, not only recalls his childhood, “during and in the shadow of World War II,” with its “somber, Goyaesque” skies, it is a suggestion that Britain is suffering a self-inflicted return to such carnage (Wollen 46, Watney 84). Moreover, Jarman, through the inclusion of a travelling shot along the Thames which draws attention to Thatcher’s “new London,” its Docklands developments and its booming City, creates a subtle resonance between this “growth” and enterprise and the fiery destruction of much of the rest of the film, by making a point of catching the monument to the Great Fire of 1666, a monument which stands in the heart of the City not far from St. Paul’s. The Great Fire not only thoroughly devastated the City of London, it was one of the great millenial moments of the 17th century, for it fell on a year that many had predicted would be the End, it being 666 years after the first millenium following the birth of Christ. Thus, in an incredibly deft gesture Jarman creates a link between fiery holocaust, Thatcherite economics, and millenial fears.

Finally, the film’s closing sequences which feature a bizarre “wedding” with cross-gender touches amongst the destruction of the docklands, and then Tilda Swinton’s “pyrotechnic danse macabre,” a lengthy and harrowing sequence where she
rips, tears, chews, and cuts her wedding dress apart (in anguish over the execution of her lover?), brings the film to an end on a terribly disturbing and highly suggestive note (Kennedy, “Two Gardens” 30). Firstly, much in the same way that Christopher Hill reads the “marriage” of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*, with all its tensions, as representing the political contract between king and people (*Milton* 376), these sequences suggest the dissolution of a political contract that had somehow bound Britain (post-war national consensus?). Secondly, this sequence, given the film’s heavy apocalyptic overtones, calls to mind the wedding sequences within the Book of Revelation, where after the conquest of Babylon, Jerusalem prepares itself as a bride in anticipation of the Second Coming, “[dressing] herself in dazzling white linen” (*Rev* 19: 8-9).

Then I saw a *new heaven and a new earth*; the first heaven and the first earth had disappeared now, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride dressed for her husband. (*Rev* 21: 1-3)

However, in this case, this allusion is made with a sense of bitter irony, for Thatcher’s New Jerusalem was established at a terrible cost, with no renewal in sight, only devastation, within Jarman’s vision. Hence, the facade is destroyed; the pristine white dress is reduced to tatters.

*The Garden* also uses a collage style in order to convey its messages. And while it is not as apocalyptic as *The Last of England*—it chooses instead to create a parallel between the plight of the homosexual in Thatcher’s Britain and the Passion of Christ—it is nonetheless very bleak and very apocalyptic, and it makes a very good companion piece to *The Last of England*. Again, Jarman’s aim here is to provoke his audience,
but whereas *The Last of England* is more of a plea of desperation, *The Garden* tends to be more of a “work of mourning”: mourning the loss of friends and lovers to AIDS, mourning the loss of England as he had known it. As Lippard and Johnson put it: “The British society that Thatcher has crafted is one that doesn’t care, a garden that has not been tended, a ‘piss-stained’ country of the small minded” (289). *The Garden*, too, features scenes of post-industrial devastation, bonfires, flares burning, candles being extinguished, “Goyaesque skies,” and shots of a “feverish” Jarman at work, struggling, but *The Garden* also plays around with some of *The Last of England*’s motifs. In one of the most interesting examples of this, Jarman again includes balaclava-wearing individuals, but in this case they brandish cameras and flashes, not machine guns: England suffers at the hands of the terrorism of the media and its fixation on the image. *The Garden* is replete with a sense of a “paradise lost,” but whereas *The Last of England* posits Thatcherism as some sort of scourge, in *The Garden* there is a greater sense of agency conveyed, and therefore a greater sense of failure: “I want to share this emptiness with you...I want to share this wilderness of failure.” At other times *The Garden* links this sense of culpability to a sense of apocalypse as severe as anything in *The Last of England*, transforming the crises of Britain into the crises of the world, and employing language that could very well be Biblical:

[shots of burning fields]
This year the winter never came.
The sun rose blood red...
Eggs soured in their shells.
The sky, pierced and torn, no longer sheltered the naked earth...
Men burrowed deep to hide their shameful poisons...
Jarman continued to make politically-charged and disturbing films after these companion pieces—films such as *War Requiem* (1988) and, perhaps most impressively, *Edward II* (1991)—but by and large he avoided pairing his political visions of Britain with apocalyptic visions. One exception to this statement comes in *War Requiem*. This film is ostensibly a prolonged elegy to the British servicemen who had fought and died in the Great World Wars, one inspired by and matched with Benjamin Britten’s *War Requiem* (Opus 66), but the film develops into a rather broad anti-war plea, addressing all nations through an elaborate montage of dozens of gruesome war clips from around the globe, finally ending with shots of atomic and hydrogen bomb blasts. At one point during the film Jarman chooses to superimpose flame imagery on top of shots depicting some city that was the victim of World War II saturation bombing—a superimposition that would seem to be redundant except for the fact that it clearly resembles similar instances in *The Last of England* and *The Garden*. Clearly a link is being established between the apocalypticism of those films and the war and devastation of *War Requiem*. And this connection becomes even more interesting after one learns that Jarman shot *War Requiem* in a Kent hospital which had been recently abandoned, a victim of Thatcherism’s “health reform,” thereby expressing materially the idea that these “reforms” have created war conditions (of apocalyptic proportions?) in Britain, especially vis-a-vis AIDS (Lippard and Johnson 289). But aside from these points *War Requiem* focuses rather specifically on the Great Wars of the past.
On the other hand, *Blue* (1993), Jarman's final film, represents a return to a full-blown apocalyptic style—and this in spite of the fact that it is visually the most minimal of films. *Blue*, as is well known, was made at a point in Jarman's life where his battle with AIDS had taken a sharp turn for the worse, leaving him in a very unstable condition, heavily-dependent on drugs, and with rapidly-deteriorating vision. Because of these health conditions Jarman decided to make a film that consisted strictly of a continuous, unchanging (royal) blue screen and a complex, collage-style soundtrack. This collage puts *Blue* closer to works such as *The Last of England* and *The Garden* (as opposed to the Brechtian anachronisms and cabaret-esque flourishes of *Edward II* and *Wittgenstein* (1992)), his previous two apocalypses, and similar to these two films—and somewhat paradoxically--*Blue*’s evocative soundscapes and its dense text create a visionary experience. As Harlan Kennedy put it: “The movie doesn’t so much move forward as swell around us. It’s about an artist’s vision intensifying with failure” (“Two Gardens” 29-30). Kennedy’s description readily brings to mind Milton’s late work which famously contained his greatest visions, even though it was produced after he too had lost his eyesight. Interestingly, there is also a parallel here with Milton’s later experiments in language. According to Marshall Grossman, Milton’s later works, but especially *Paradise Lost*, display a move towards the use of anti-mimetic language. Thus in Book I of *Paradise Lost*, as Milton provides a tour of hell,

the hell we are given to ‘see’...is mediated by Satan’s ‘baleful eyes,’ which view not a place but a ‘dismal situation.’ This situation is illuminated by no external light, but rather, in perhaps the most celebrated Miltonism of all, by ‘darkness visible.’ If what Satan sees in the darkness visible is ‘Regions of sorrow’ where ‘hope never comes/ That comes to all,’ then he is what remains
when all has been subtracted: an empty set, no one situated in no place.
Milton's narration of Satan's fall and recovery cannot be concretised outside of
a conceptual—as opposed to a visual—signification. (280)

Furthermore, Grossman argues that this "self-consciously anti-mimetic use of
language" on the part of Milton allowed him to avoid simple allegorical readings of
his text (i.e. evil Satan = evil King), and instead handle concepts such as evil with a
sense of ambiguity and contradiction (281). Similarly, by featuring virtually no
visuals, Jarman challenges his audience to follow the conceptual grounds for his film,
instead of reducing his concepts to visual association. This marks Jarman's most
extreme stance in his ongoing struggle with the image in the Thatcher age, the age of
the rule of the image over the word, the age of the "Saatchi effect" (Elsaesser 57).
And it creates another interesting parallel with Milton, whose move towards
"disembodied language" reflected a call for republicanism as opposed to monarchism,
with its embodied concept of rule (Grossman 281). Whereas previously Jarman had
contested the cult of the image under Thatcher, by filling his films with disturbing,
counter-images of Britain and Thatcherism (such as The Garden's "press-terrorists"),
he now stepped away from the image for political as well as practical reasons. Thus,
one of Blue's narrators states:

For accustomed to believing in image, an absolute idea of value, his world had
forgotten the command of essence: Thou Shall Not Create Unto Thyself Any
Graven Image. . .From the bottom of your heart, pray to be released from
image. . .The image is a prison of the soul, your heredity, your education, your
vices and aspirations, your qualities, your psychological world.

Jarman ties this anti-mimetic set of visions to a sense of apocalypse that is very
specifically related to AIDS, that modern-day plague—in excruciating detail. One of
the film’s most lasting visions is that of the waiting room, which linked with the overall sense of impending doom, transforms this waiting room into a metaphor for a world facing the (inevitable?) apocalypse under Thatcherism (and in the age of the image).

Here I am again in the waiting room. Hell on Earth is a waiting room. Here you know you are not in control of yourself, waiting for your name to be called: “712213.” Here you have no name, confidentiality is nameless. Where is 666? Am I sitting opposite him/her? Maybe 666 is the demented woman switching the channels on the TV.

Later, the sense of impending doom, world-historical doom, is made even more explicit:

Ages and Aeons quit the room
Exploding into timelessness
No entrances or exits now
No need for obituaries or final judgments
We knew that time would end
After tomorrow at sunrise
We scrubbed the floors
And did the washing up
It would not catch us unawares

Throughout the film the colour blue acts as some kind of balm within these desperate times. Blue had always held a fascination for Jarman because of its associations with the sea, specifically the Mediterranean, and, therefore, freedom, youth, and passion. In Blue, the colour blue is the only thing left that can give Jarman any peace of mind, thus he makes it central to the film, and lovingly envelops his audience in its glow. Ironically, blue is also the colour of the Conservative party, and thus the film can also be seen as Jarman’s apocalyptic vision of a world gone Blue, the apocalyptic vision of a most passionate critic of Thatcherism who went to the grave
without the certainty that the Thatcher/Major era might actually ever end. As Simon Watney phrased it, Derek Jarman’s death was “a political death” (84).

Peter Greenaway

Of the directors being discussed in this chapter, the associations between the work of Peter Greenaway and the world of politics are perhaps the most elusive. Greenaway’s films generally inhabit a realm somewhere parallel to the material world, a realm that, at face value at least, is oftentimes as far removed from Britain of the 1980s and 1990s as the average heritage film, if necessarily less recognizable and intentionally more obscure. One notable exception to this “rule” is Greenaway’s 1989 cause célèbre, The Cook, the Thief, his Wife and her Lover, which has found popular acceptance as an “allegory of Thatcherism” (to borrow Michael Walsh’s phrase). This notion has been further bolstered by Greenaway’s own comments on the film. Thus, Walsh notes: “Greenaway is not obviously or instinctively a political filmmaker, but he often speaks of The Cook, the Thief, his Wife, and her Lover as dealing with Thatcherism” (260). So what prompted Greenaway to turn to “political invective” with The Cook? Peter Wollen suggests that,

Greenaway’s antipathy toward Thatcherism stems from an ethical and aesthetic dislike for the philistinism and vulgarity of her regime, her exaltation of the profit motive, her determination that art and scholarship should only be supported if they served an economic function, her authoritarianism, her social philosophy of frugality and order for the poor combined with greed and license for the rich. (47-8)

And, indeed, in spite of Greenaway’s famous distance from the “real,” “political” world, it is not hard to see why Greenaway—filmmaker, aesthete, intellectual—would have been moved to lash out against Thatcherism. Thus, in spite of non-believers such
as *New Yorker*'s Terrence Rafferty who baldly stated that, "the notion...that this movie is some kind of political allegory is absurd," *The Cook* transforms a revenge tragedy, in the Jacobean style, into an allegory on the consumerism, vulgarity, authoritarianism, anti-intellectualism, desperation, and cruelty of the Thatcher decade.

Or as MacNeill and Burczak put it:

For Greenaway the eighties represented a very dangerous form of hedonism, one in which pleasure was sought primarily through consumption by conquering the external worlds and others—a pleasure that was acquisitional rather than sensual. Consumption in the eighties was not merely conspicuous, it was malicious as well: the hyperconsumption of the elite beneficiaries of right-wing economics would not be possible without the massive (and violent) shift (theft) of social resources away from the poor and working people. *The Cook* chronicles the transition from hedonism to despotism; it records the intemperance of the eighties. (118-9)

The film achieves this somewhat far-reaching political scope even though its narrative is rather economical, based largely on the juxtaposition between Albert Spica, the cruel, vulgar, thief/entrepreneur, with his transparent claims on high culture, and his band of vulgar, moronic thugs, and Georgina (the Wife), Michael (the Lover), and Richard (the Cook), who represent passion, intellectualism, and creativity—all of which are severely threatened within the order ruled over by Albert. This scenario inhabits a rather enclosed world, which, aside from the book depository, consists only of a car park, a kitchen, a dining room, and two restrooms. These distinct limits, combined with the film's skewed decor and costumes, and the "flatness" of the characterizations, have the effect of stressing the allegorical aspects of this film, turning the film's characters and scenarios into metonymic stand-ins for British society.
The film achieves a degree of apocalypticism in a couple of different ways. First of all, whereas the film’s kitchen and dining room sequences, not to mention its book depository sequences, are highly “anti-realist,” occupying some kind of fantastical parallel world, the film’s car park sequences are much more realist, stylized and “heightened,” but familiar nonetheless, composed as they are of contemporary cars and trucks, office buildings, asphalt. Greenaway then lends these sequences a dystopic, “inner city,” almost nouveau-noir (as Richard bitterly professes: “thanks to Mr. Spica’s generosity, it is dark everywhere”) feel by drawing attention to the bleakness and desolation of these scenes, and by including the cliché of the flaming oil barrel, with its “cardboard city” connotations. Greenaway then pushes these sequences even further away from the realist mode by introducing roving packs of crazed dogs to this scenario, in a gesture reminiscent of Bela Tarr’s use of dogs in Damnation, and dogs, cows, horses, etc. in Satantango—with similarly apocalyptic results. This shift from the recognizable to the barely recognizable has a pronounced effect: this isn’t just some depressing, inner city environment; something is terribly wrong here, the whole world is falling apart before our eyes. The Cook also calls to mind the apocalyptic genre through Albert’s cruel and vindictive murder of Michael in the book depository. When Albert learns of Georgina’s affair with Michael, he becomes incensed, having already found Michael’s intellectualism and “jewishness” offensive. He therefore vows to exact a violent and spectacular revenge upon Michael. He then carries out this revenge murder by having his henchman ram pages of Michael’s beloved books down his throat. As Michael’s character acts as a stand-in for intellectualism and the
academy, his brutal murder—and its method—suggest the utter destruction of culture and the life of the mind under a Thatcherite regime. But this murder also calls to mind a number of apocalyptic texts, from the Book of Ezekiel, to the Book of Revelation, to *The Fiery Flying Roll*, through its inversion of the “consumed scroll” motif. Whereas in these other texts the consumption of the scroll leads to revelation, here, in a world reduced to consumerism, this punishment, and the “cannibalism” it leads to, is a sure sign of the End.

*The Baby of Mâcon* was far from being a *cause célèbre*. Very few people saw this film, and even fewer considered it a “political” film. The film is nonetheless immensely intriguing, and it quite possibly marks the highpoint of Greenaway’s obsession with the theatre. *The Baby of Mâcon* is constructed in a “Russian-doll” manner (as Greenaway describes it (10)), with layers buried within layers. Thus, the film ostensibly depicts the boisterous production of an elaborate theatrical production before an audience consisting of everything from nobility to peasantry, one that takes place in the “1650s in northern Italy” (Greenaway 5). However, this theatrical space is frequently overtly transformed into a filmic space, as Greenaway often chooses to “lead” the action into areas that could not possibly exist under the roof of a theatre and still have performance value: a beneath-the-scenes basement/dungeon, a cathedral setting, a banquet hall, etc. Furthermore, Greenaway chooses to blur the lines between fiction and reality, between what is being performed and what is “really happening,” over and over again. This blurring of these distinctions is at its most perplexing and disturbing during the three scenes involving violent deaths (those of the Bishop’s son,
the Daughter, and the Baby of Mâcon), but especially during the gruesome rape scene.

In this scene the murders of the Bishop’s son and the Baby are pinned on the Daughter, but a local law forbids the execution of any woman who is a virgin (which she is, apparently). Therefore, the Bishop—after having been prompted by a member of the audience (the nobleman Cosimo de Medici)—condemns the Daughter to a horrific ritual rape courtesy of a few hundred militia men—a punishment which eventually kills her. After the sentence is issued, Greenaway, perversely, makes a point of taking his filmic audience behind the curtains of the designated bed, where the Daughter is being held prisoner by a couple of the soldiers.

Daughter: (She screams in character for the audience’s benefit and then, dropping the role of the daughter, she whispers) Alright—you oaf, you don’t have to act anymore—the audience cannot see you, fool!

1st Soldier: (Urgently whispering) You wanted this role so badly—you ought to see it through.

2nd Soldier: (Urgently whispering to the young soldier) Get on with it lad! You’re privileged to be the first.

They then proceed to “really” rape her.

2nd Soldier: (Speaking into the ruffled sheets) Imagine—surrounded by an audience of three hundred—and no-one knows you’re not acting!

Finally, Greenaway closes the film with a riddle, by having the camera pull back from the theatre setting to reveal that the play’s audience was “actually” just acting the whole time. And then the camera pulls back even further to reveal that this second audience is also an audience of actors, for he has them take a bow. As Greenaway puts it: “stage, audience and the audience’s audience are all in the deceit—as indeed we too are, sitting in the cinema” (10). This might seem like an unnecessarily lengthy
description of *The Baby of Macon*’s nebulous diegesis, but it is crucial to have a sense of these many layers in order to understand the film’s impact.

Greenaway gives the whole set of proceedings an apocalyptic air in a couple of different ways. First and foremost, the film begins and ends (nearly, just prior to the film’s final unveilings) with the disturbing sight of a thin, naked man with an ill, ravaged countenance perched on a swing. This character is Famine and he belches, stutters, and pukes the following:

- The crops are feeble,
- The animals barren,
- The orchards meagre,
- The grass is scorched,
- The water low.
- Men and women have ceased to play...
- ...in bed...
- Copulation is a serious business...
- ...and little results
- but sickness and sadness.

This apocalyptic vision of famine is one that Greenaway, in a manner strangely similar to Jarman (given their respective aesthetics), associates with the AIDS epidemic:

> In Jacobean times, syphilis was the new sexual scourge; we now have AIDS. There’s a certain comparison in that sexuality has become complicated, so there’s a similar spirit of melancholy. (qtd. in Wollen 48)

Soon after this ominous introduction a miracle occurs: a child is born to a haggard old woman, and forces (the Daughter, the Bishop) soon try to position themselves in such a way as to capitalize upon the messianic potential (is this the Second Coming?) of this miraculous occurrence. This whole scenario is very apocalyptic, with its famine, its miracle, and its messiah figure; all the more so when one takes into account Revelation’s similar combination of famine, miracles, false prophets, and messianic
visions—such as Revelation 12: 1-6, where a vision of a woman gives birth to a “boy, the son who was to rule all nations with an iron sceptre, and the child was taken straight up to God and this throne” (the Baby is much less fortunate). Finally, although this scenario ostensibly takes place in Italy, one should never take these things too literally in Greenaway films. Just in the same way that while some criticized Greenaway’s portrayal of Albert Spica in The Cook as being anti-working class, when Albert’s accent and manner more than likely had more to do with his criminality (this was a Jacobean-style drama after all), one should not make too much of The Baby of Macon’s “Italian” setting. Given Greenaway’s nationality, the strong British accents of his actors (even the American Julia Ormond puts forth a convincing English accent), the film’s Russian-doll structure, and the similarities between the apocalyptic tone of this film and that of The Cook (whose national setting no-one questioned), it would be difficult to see how this parable could be directed at any country other than Britain.

PART TWO: ‘Heightened-Realism’

Patrick Keiller

In a number of different ways Patrick Keiller is the outsider amongst the group of directors being considered here. By the mid-1990s, he had only one feature-length film to his name. He works in a mode of filmmaking often labelled “documentary.” He is the youngest of the lot. He is by no means an auteur (yet).

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1 He now has a second feature film--Robinson in Space--which has just been released, and is therefore beyond the scope of this thesis.
With financing from the British Film Institute and Channel 4, in 1994 Keiller made an “experimental documentary” called London. London is the story of a man who returns to London after a seven year absence when he gets word from his friend Robinson, a permanent Londoner, “that he is on the verge of a breakthrough in his investigations and that I should come as soon as possible, before it is too late.” What ensues, ominously enough, is an eleven month “journey to the end of the world,” whereby the narrator and Robinson traverse the city and its environs, back and forth, engaging in seasoned flanerie, unearthing secret histories, and trying to come to terms with the “problem of London” in the early years of the Major era. One is never sure how much of this narrative is truth and how much is fiction—for instance, the audience is never sure that the film’s protagonists, its only two characters, even exist, as they never appear before the camera, and their dialogue is itself narrated (by Paul Scofield). The film, nevertheless, is firmly rooted in the documentary mode by its camerawork which consists strictly of static documentary (i.e. “un-choreographed”) shots of modern-day London and its environs—its sites, events, and moods—shots which are synchronized with the film’s narration. Keiller’s film has an extraordinary amount of depth, and one of the reasons that he is able to cover so much ground so efficiently, has to do with his two protagonists: the Narrator, a former Londoner who is not only seeing London with new eyes, he is also seeing the effects of Thatcherism on London; and Robinson, an eccentric university reader who is intimate with London’s history and lore, as well as its recent political history, and as a London “lifer” is desperate to find a solution to the “problem of London.” These two together make an ideal team
for Keiller’s project: together they thoroughly probe Britain’s political climate, the crisis of London, and the crisis of the left, with wit, and without resorting to demagoguery. And they also link these political crises to a very tangible sense of decline, chaos, and apocalypse.

One of the earliest segments of the film takes place near Westminster weeks after the Narrator’s arrival. It is one of the pair’s earliest excursions and it creates a historical foundation for the film (and for Robinson’s project), and sets the tone for the rest of the film.

Robinson is a supporter of constitutional reform [misty shot of Westminster Hall from the South Bank]. On January 30th we took the bus to Whitehall [shot of a statue of Charles I]. It is the 343rd anniversary of the execution of King Charles I by the revolutionary government of 1649 [camera pulls back, revealing pedestrians and cars in front of statue]. Every year groups of Anglo-Catholics and other ultra-monarchists lay wreaths at his statue before holding a ceremony at the Banqueting House where the king was beheaded on a scaffold set up outside of the windows [ceremony in front of stone doorway]. “The failure of the English Revolution,” said Robinson, “is all around us: in the Westminster constitution, in Ireland, and poisoning English attitudes to Europe.”

The wreaths remained for several weeks, during which I gradually renewed my familiarity with the city.

As the Narrator reacquaints himself with London he finds it to be barely recognizable, “changed utterly.” The pair make a visit to Lincoln’s Inn Fields, site to one of the largest concentrations of London’s many, many homeless citizens. The narrator is shocked by the increase in the number of people “sleeping rough” on the streets of London, but remarks that Robinson seems “accustomed to it.” Robinson informs him that Thatcher’s cuts to the welfare state are among the reasons for this increase, and that, “many of the homeless who sleep out in Central London are ex-servicemen and
women or former psychiatric patients.” Later, the Narrator and Robinson come across the site of an IRA bomb explosion, the first of dozens that will go off during the course of the 11 months. Again, the Narrator is shocked by the astronomical increase in bomb attacks on London, as well as with the public’s relative apathy towards the subject:

When I asked him, Robinson could remember the mortar attack on Downing Street in February the year before, but not the eight or so devices since. He seemed to have become conditioned to the idea that what was happening in Ireland did not have much to do with him.

As the couple continue their excursions across London, the Narrator is appalled by the overwhelming sense of decay surrounding London—a fact reflected in everything from its raggedy public transportation system, to its pollution. One day Robinson takes the Narrator to the Thames and they sit and watch the river traffic, noting that with the exception of the steady flow of garbage disposal barges, the river’s traffic has nearly disappeared. Sitting by the river the two share a recollection:

We remembered what we used to think of as the future: sophisticated engineering, low consumption, renewable energy, public transport. But just now London is all waste without a future.

By this point the Narrator is utterly convinced that London is in a profound state of crisis, a result of years of economic crisis, the dissolution of London’s local government, the dismantlement of the welfare state, and the mismanagement of London’s affairs at the hands of the Tories and “their friends in the City.” The two visit the river again, and standing on a bridge they look westward along the Thames,
observing Westminster to the north and County Hall to the south, the narration
summing up the state of London since the abolition of the GLC:

On one side Westminster, on the other County hall, the former seat of
London’s city government, soon to be sold to a Japanese hotel consortium, and
St Thomas’ Hospital, under threat of closure or amalgamation. On the South
Bank the whole district was threatened with commercial reconstruction.

Together, the two anxiously await the coming general election, noting that the crisis of
London had become a national issue in the last year, and hoping for the sake of
London, and for the sake of the nation, that the Tories are finally defeated. As the
election draws near, public opinion polls continue to give Labour the lead, but this
lead diminishes considerably over the weeks. Robinson, having lived through the
heartbreak of the 1987 general election first hand, is far from convinced by these polls,
and therefore tense; the Narrator, on the other hand, still expects a narrow Labour
victory. When the results finally come through, the film’s protagonists are devastated.
They stay up almost all night wandering the streets in disbelief, before making their
way to Downing Street to watch the Tory victory celebration. As the camera fixes its
gaze on the podium where John Major and his wife greet their enthusiastic supporters,
the Narrator delivers a monologue which catches the crisis of the left in all its anguish:

It seemed there was no longer anything a Conservative government could do to
cause it to be voted out of office. We were living in a one-party state. It is
difficult to recall the shock with which we realized our alienation from the
events which were taking place in front of us. Robinson’s first reaction was
one of Spleen. “There were,” he said, “no mitigating circumstances: the press,
the voting system, the impropriety of Tory party funding. None of these could
explain away the fact that the middle class in England had continued to vote
Conservative because in their miserable hearts they still believed it was in their
interest to do so.” Robinson began to consider what the result would mean for
him: His flat would continue to deteriorate and his rent increase; he would be
intimidated by vandalism and petty crime; the bus service would get worse;
there would be more traffic and noise pollution, and an increased risk of
getting knocked down crossing the road; there would be more drunks pissing into the street when he looked out the window, and more children taking drugs on the stairs when he came home at night; his job would be at risk and subjected to interference; his income would decrease; he would drink more and less well; he would be ill more often; he would die sooner. For the old or those with children it would be much worse.

The general election strikes a blow to Robinson and the Narrator from which they never really recover. At times their optimism for London and for the nation appears to grow--usually buoyed by one of their peripatetic excursions--but for every instance of renewed optimism there comes a reason to lose faith: the unveiling of a statue of Britain's architect of World War II saturation bombing; the construction of a tunnel beneath the Thames between MI5 and MI6 which will cost 240 million pounds sterling: “equivalent to that of eight general hospitals”; frequent encounters with the monarchy's “spectacles of 19th century reaction” enacted over and over again “for television”; continued terrorist bomb attacks, etc. At times, the two seem to grasp at straws in desperation, making excursions into London's suburbs, into its outlying shopping malls and IKEAs, in search of culture and camaraderie. Even a series of massive protests in support of a miner's strike--the first such show of labour strength in years--fails to really renew their hopes, largely because of the continued “reticence of middle class support.” Near the end of the film, the pair visit a massive bonfire on Guy Fawkes night. The tone here is somber, and the camera moves in and out of the flames, which at times consume the entire screen. In league with the film's tangible sense of crisis, and its numerous references to the End, and given the holiday's connection with revolutionary terrorism, this sequence of images (which might otherwise be rather harmless) serves to indicate, apocalyptically, just how extreme the
situation is for London and for the left. Soon afterwards, Robinson goes as far as to
deliver a eulogy for London/Babylon: “The true identity of London,” he said, “is in its
absence. As a city it no longer exists. . . . London was the first metropolis to have
disappeared.” These sentiments might otherwise be written off as being merely left-
wing melancholy, but matched with Keiller’s “documentary” portrait of London, these
bleak visions make for a terribly persuasive combination, a “revelation” of the effects
of Thatcherism on London and on the left.

Mike Leigh

Although Mike Leigh himself prefers to consider Meantime (1983), Four Days
in July (1985), and High Hopes (1988) as a trilogy about life in Britain under
Thatcherism (Fuller xix-xx), High Hopes, Life is Sweet (1990), and Naked (1993) not
only represent Leigh’s first three feature films since his 1971 debut, Bleak Moments,
but they also make a fascinating trilogy on the effects of Thatcherism on Britain in the
years after the 1987 general election. Together they explore the divisions, the clashes,
the ennui, the frustration, and the devastation that characterized these times with wit,
pathos, insight, and courage.

Mike Leigh’s “rising star” status of the last few years (in other words he has
become recognized in North America) on the heels of Naked and Secrets and Lies, has
been the occasion for an enormous amount of articles on Leigh, his films, and his
working method. Secrets and Lies’s release, in particular, created a veritable media
blitz. What is interesting about much of this literature is that it has focused so much
attention on Leigh’s improv/workshop filmmaking style, and the fact that his projects
evolve without a script (!) over the course of months and months of pre-shoot rehearsal. Thus Leigh and his actors construct characters, right down to the most intimate details (i.e. “what would be in this character’s purse?”), then construct scenarios whereby these characters would get the opportunity to encounter one another, to interact, etc. In this manner, his scripts materialize over time.

Furthermore, actors are only allowed to know “what their characters would know.” Therefore if one of the script’s characters meets another character at a party, for instance, those two actors would not be allowed to meet and interact whatsoever until the day of the shooting of this particular scene. Over and over again, the slant that is most commonly put forth by these articles is that Leigh’s peculiar method of making films is a way of approaching high naturalism. Because so much time is being spent on creating these characters complexly, and because so much rehearsal goes into the shooting of every scene, Leigh’s films are necessarily that much more realistic.

However, in spite of Leigh’s working method, these sorts of accounts miss the mark. Indeed, one of the reasons Leigh’s work is so fascinating is precisely because of the fact that is is so anti-realist, because Leigh constantly employs a form of “heightened realism.” Certainly in *High Hopes*, *Life is Sweet*, and *Naked*—if not as obviously in *Secrets and Lies*, which is somewhat more naturalistic, at face value—one can see Leigh constructing his films out of stereotypes, stereotypes which are then frequently (but definitely not always) “filled in,” given an extraordinary depth through Leigh’s workshop method. As Watts indicates, because these characters are recognizable as stereotypes but nevertheless hold complicated psychologies, “the social typology they
offer is of a more mobile kind than such a term [stereotype] would imply" (272). This process is what Kennedy calls Leigh’s “passionate flirtation with caricature” (“Mike Leigh” 22), and it allows him, “to demonstrate that there is indeed a reality behind the baffling improbability of other people’s lives, to bring even monstrous Otherness into intense and startling focus, to draw the tritest of human gestures out by the roots and shake them in our faces” (Adair 64). During times of increased divisions, when understanding went “out of vogue,” such a display was of crucial importance. But more importantly, this strange duality that Leigh has consistently installed into his characterizations has allowed him to access allegory, to have characters that are very “realistic,” very individualistic, also stand in for larger concepts. Although such allegorical readings of Naked were not uncommon--largely due to the fact that many found David Thewlis’s characterization of Johnny very hard to classify otherwise--they were less common in relation to High Hopes and Life is Sweet, but equally important.

A good portion of the articles on High Hopes have focused on the polarizations between the three couples who are at the center of the film’s narrative: Cyril and Shirley, the film’s leftist protagonists who, despite their frustrations (economic, political, familial), continue to be committed and caring; Cyril’s sister Valerie and Martin, the film’s vulgar, nouveau-riche, suburbanites; and Laetitia and Rupert, the “new Tory” yuppies who live next door to Cyril’s mother (Mrs. Bender), and who Leigh uses, “as venomous comic caricatures to send up gentrification and Thatcherite social callousness” (Quart, “The Religion” 30). To be sure, Leigh creates
magnificently telling clashes between these parties, and it is clear which couple Leigh sides with, even if Cyril and Shirley aren’t portrayed entirely sympathetically.

Whereas the other couples are used primarily for counterpoint, Cyril and Shirley allow Leigh to plumb the crisis of the left in incredibly down-to-earth terms: Is it ethical to bring a child into this world as it is? Where did our idealism go? Have we lost our way? What often gets pushed to the side is the way that some of the film’s other characters round out this picture of British society. One of the film’s most quizzical portrayals is that of Wayne, the hapless young lad who winds up on Cyril and Shirley’s doorstep, so to speak, at the beginning of the film, then returns to them like a stray repeatedly during the film’s first half, before the couple finally ship him off whence he came. This character could be written-off as just a quirky “turn” on Leigh’s part, but it is important to remember that it is Wayne’s exit from King’s Cross station that begins the narrative. And in the context of the rest of the film, Wayne takes on the importance of being a representative for those souls who stand somewhere in between the polarities of Britain in 1988, those who didn’t necessarily support the views and programs of Thatcher’s Tory party, but who repeatedly failed to vote against the Conservatives. When it comes time for Wayne to leave Cyril and Shirley’s flat after his first visit, Cyril and Shirley give him opposite directions to King’s Cross station. Cyril tells him to turn left, then left again. Shirley tells him to turn right, then right again (the station is directly behind their building). As Wayne makes his way down the stairs the couple wait to see which direction he’ll choose. Tellingly, Wayne starts left then turns right. Similarly, the portrayal of the frail, aged Mrs. Bender allows
Leigh to add resonance to the clashes between Cyril/Shirley and Valerie/Martin by placing her in between, as well as providing him with a stark juxtaposition to his camp portrayal of the yuppies next door, but she also holds allegorical value. Not only is Mrs. Bender a representative of consensus Britain—her council housing and frugality are final vestiges of a bygone era—but, in a sense, she embodies this consensus, which in spite of its conservatism (which Cyril rebelled against through his interest in Marxism, his pot smoking, his motorcycles, etc.), was nonetheless more humane than the new world that Valerie/Martin and Laetitia/Rupert represent (ironically, Cyril and Shirley are convinced that she voted Tory in 1987). And, furthermore, there is a sense in which her decline is that of Britannia’s. In his essay “Come on Down,” Dick Hebdige described the state of Britannia in the following manner:

Britannia here [in the late 1980s] appears as a psychotic bag lady shuffling through a ruined city muttering to herself, her bags stuffed with old books, rusting heirlooms, priceless paintings. (360-1)

In *High Hopes* she appears as a frail old woman, threatened by gentrification and health care cuts, plagued by ignominy, fallen from glory, stricken with Alzheimer’s and losing her memory rapidly.

Regardless of Leigh’s lampooning of the right and his obvious sympathies for the left, *High Hopes*’ vision is nonetheless rather bleak. And any peace of mind that Cyril and Shirley may have reached by the film’s end, comes at the cost of a certain amount of resignation to the “way things are.” Unbelievably, some critics missed this point altogether. Adair, for one, writes that, “Cyril and Shirley both have and are the high hopes of Leigh’s title, which is absolutely not ironic [!]; and theirs is a story of
grace under pressure” (65). As likable and oftentimes admirable as Cyril and Shirley are, and as funny as High Hopes is, it is hard not to agree with Kennedy when he states, “In High Hopes the broad comedy seems all-of-a-piece with the warnings of social apocalypse” (“Mike Leigh” 25).

Life is Sweet has generally been considered as a “lighter and sunnier,” more innocuous film than High Hopes, one that, in spite of its pathos, more or less holds to the comic mode (Fuller viii). Whereas High Hopes puts Thatcher’s Britain on display for all to see, in Life is Sweet Britain’s divisions and its class conflicts are nowhere near as evident. Interestingly, from our point of view, one could read this shift as almost predicting the shift in Toryism from Thatcher’s leadership, with its strong sense of authority and its painfully clear divisions, to Major’s more understated, “gentler” brand of Thatcherism (and the apathy it generated). In any case, aside from Nicola’s constant slew of -isms, hurled forth with utter derision, and Aubrey’s ridiculous “restaurant grand opening,” which many viewed as a spoof of Thatcherite enterprise culture (and which creates an interesting point of comparison with The Cook’s “Le Hollandais” restaurant), most saw Life is Sweet as shying away from political commentary. Kennedy argues that Life is Sweet’s obsession with food is a take on consumerism, much in the same way that The Cook was:

Life is Sweet attempts to consume the consumer society. But the symbolist dinner-gong (?) sounds too loudly. We get—we overget—the point. Everyone is gobbling; everyone is hungry for more. And the “midnight feast” ethos—secret, self-regarding, orgiastic—is runaway greed plus runaway guilt: the legacy of the yuppie Eighties. (“Mike Leigh” 20)
But given that the head of *Life is Sweet*’s central household is a chef and Leigh himself is a self-professed gastronome, and that this “midnight feast” ethos is being practiced by a young, unemployed leftist, this aspect of the film hardly seems as simplistically symbolic as Kennedy makes it out to be—instead, there seems to be some kind of link between food and trauma running through the narrative. Kennedy gets closer to the mark when he discusses the solipsism that Leigh embodies in the character of Nicola, a characterization that moves from hilarity and absurdity, to outright pathos (“Mike Leigh” 20). What makes Nicola’s so fascinating is that Leigh makes a point of associating her solipsism with a certain position on the left, through her scabrous flow of -isms, her slogan-bearing t-shirts (“BOLLOCKS TO THE POLL TAX,” “The Smiths,” etc.), and her reliance on the dole. And furthermore, Nicola, is bulimic, a condition which not long ago put her within two weeks of death. These characteristics in combination suggest rather subtly a continued crisis of the left. The left here is traumatized and solipsistic, and in terrible need of new visions and a real critique of the present situation, as well as a true understanding of itself. And, again, this reading is not to diminish Nicola’s characterization in the non-allegorical world, which is honest and all-too-painfully “real”—it only goes to show Leigh’s deftness of touch in moving between these worlds. Even within *Life is Sweet*’s apathetic, suburban milieu, Leigh’s vision still contains a sense of Britain’s critical condition.

By the time one gets to *Naked* there is absolutely no doubt as to the severity of Britain’s condition. Leigh openly characterizes Britain as being in the grips of an apocalyptic set of crises. The film takes place largely in London, and although this
establishes a firm association, the sense of crisis is not limited to London’s limits—it is total, enveloping Britain as a whole, to say the least. The action begins in the streets of Manchester where Johnny rapes a woman then flees in terror, stealing a car and “escaping” to London. By beginning *Naked* in this manner, Leigh not only provides a shocking introduction to his film’s protagonist, he also shrouds the world outside of London with the spectre of crisis. This concept is then furthered by the fact that Leigh’s version of London is filled with non-Londoners: Archie and Maggie from Scotland, the café girl from the North, Louise from Manchester, etc. Here, London is a city of refugees who have found themselves in Babylon. Later, even Louise and Johnny’s nostalgic reminiscences about Manchester manage to come across as somewhat false given the vision of Manchester that *Naked*’s audience has been presented with. And even though Leigh goes to lengths to anchor Johnny’s apocalyptic declarations to London/Britain, Johnny’s language is by no means limited to a British context; it encompasses the entire world, yet somehow Leigh’s vision of London is so brutal that one does not find it hard to believe that London might be the world’s Babylon, not just Britain’s.

Leigh’s rapidly-deteriorating London is a cruel environment: dark, decaying, and threatening on the outside; its “shelters” replete with depression, frustration, misogyny, and violence. Graham Fuller writes that *Naked*’s setting is a, benighted modern London. . .a rat-infested necropolis of flats full of desperate females, state-of-the-art technodromes full of nothing, and shadowy wastelands that invoke the Blitz but are more emblematic of the post-Thatcher recession. (viii)

And, similarly, Gavin Smith comments that,
Leigh's vivid, fragmented nightworld of potential victims, seemingly bereft of
civil authority, suggests A Clockwork Orange out of Eliot's The Waste Land... (72)

There is no question that Leigh, here, creates a sense of London that keeps pace with
Johnny's incessant apocalyptic ramblings. And one gets the feeling that Leigh's
London in Naked lies somewhere between that of Jarman in The Last of England and
Keiller in London, with a dash of Greenaway's car park from The Cook to boot. In
Naked, London's cataclysmic state is more concretely associated with the effects of the
Thatcher/Major years than in The Last of England (where as strong as this connection
is, it is developed evocatively) and The Cook, but it is certainly a more stylized,
heightened version of the city than London's largely banal imagery. This aspect of
Leigh's portrayal of London is most convincingly attested to by the film's
“homelessness segment,” the scenes just after Johnny storms out of Louise and
Sophies' flat, when he encounters Archie and Maggie on the streets of Soho. The first
portion of this segment is shot on location in Soho in documentary style, with David
Thewlis making his way through Soho's throngs and Leigh's camera (manned by Dick
Pope) catching the action "as it happens." Thus capturing all kinds of unsuspecting
passersby. Soon afterwards Thewlis/Johnny is perched on a step somewhere in Soho
when he encounters Ewen Bremner/Archie, a homeless Scottish youth who has made
his way down to London because Scotland is "fuckin' shite!" Again, Leigh begins this
scene by having his two actors go about their business on Soho's streets "as it
happens," amongst pedestrians who are none the wiser to these goings-on (Fuller
xxxviii). And this ploy works--coming right off the heels of the previous sequence of
images, this initial encounter feels "like a documentary"—all the more impressive
because "homelessness" is a difficult concept to capture on film convincingly. This
sequence sparkles, and it allows Leigh to draw a connection between Thatcherism and
homelessness/dispossession, in this post-Thatcher era, with the utmost subtlety:

Archie: Maggie!
Johnny: She's gone, mate!
Archie: Eh?
Johnny: (slight laugh) Those days are over.

The camera then proceeds to move in tighter, and Leigh "reasserts control" over his
filmed environment, but a gritty tone has been established. Minutes later, after Archie
has gone charging off in a huff in search of Maggie, Maggie returns, makes Johnny's
acquaintance, and they wander off in search of Archie. This search takes them across
all kinds of dark and dingy streets and alleyways before, finally, they wind up in a
moody, atmospheric wasteland area, one that carries a particularly pronounced sense
of decay and decomposition. Here Archie tracks them down. This final setting for
this scene is one of the film's most lasting images; it is both striking and haunting.
But, in stark contrast to the setting of Johnny's initial encounter with Archie, it is an
utterly fabricated environment. As Leigh explains:

It was shot—like a studio set-up—on wasteland adjacent to Brick Lane in the
East End, but very controlled. In other words, it was a theatrical concoction
within the same overall sequence as the Soho stuff. You couldn't create this
kind of urban bleakness otherwise. You had to get quite risky about it, not just
go out and shoot any old thing. We were very daring visually on Naked.
(Fuller xxxviii-xxxix)

Of all of Naked's elements, none has attracted as much attention as David
Thewlis' portrayal of Johnny, the "kamikaze moral wrecking-ball," "the misogynist,
Mancunian motormouth and visionary prophet of millenial doom,” the “sardonic, erudite motormouth” who is the film’s unsettling center (Smith 72, Monk 49, Fuller ix). Johnny is far from a stereotype—although there is a type involved: the bitter, disaffected, autodidactic, unemployed Northerner— but he is nevertheless highly allegorical, acting as a “harbinger of apocalypse” (Eaton 33), an unholy terror, an antichrist (who shares more than a little in common with another “antichrist” named Johnny: Johnny Rotten/Lydon). Johnny makes his way through the film sowing the seeds of conflict, violence, and chaos, but one finds it hard to monstricize him because his logorrhoea bordering on glossolalia, his Ranterism, is so fascinating to watch. There is a sense in which Johnny is a modern-day Ranter—frustrated, dispossessed, extreme—cutting a path through similarly chaotic times in a manner that resembles someone like Abiezer Coppe, who used to take to the streets of London and “[demonstrate] against coaches and hundreds of men and women of greater rank, ‘gnashing with my teeth at some of them, . . . falling down flat upon the ground before rogues, beggars, cripples’” (Hill, The World 170). But, in addition to this, Johnny is a very complex character, and a very human character, one who is even likable (at times), and one whose ability to charm is never in doubt. These characteristics lend his presence a fascinating set of fluctuations between the cosmological and the strictly material, giving his apocalyptic ramblings a tremendous amount of credibility.

Johnny’s scene with the nightwatchman, Brian, is the film’s pièce de résistance in terms of Johnny’s rantings. It is a scene where, having found someone who is also well-read and conversant in the Bible, and who desperately wants to believe in a
future, Johnny has a perfect sounding-board for his Weltanschauung. Furthermore, the scene’s setting—a massive, vacant, but security-guarded office space—provides an ironic juxtaposition to the Soho scenes, and an ideal soapbox, within one of the most recognizable symbols of the “Thatcher revolution,” for Johnny’s fevered harangues.

Johnny: Has nobody not told you, Brian, that you’ve got this kind of gleeful preoccupation with the future? I wouldn’t even mind but you don’t ‘ave a fuckin’ future. I don’t ‘ave a future. Nobody ‘as a future. The party’s over. Take a look around you, man. It’s all breakin’ up. Are you not familiar with the Book of Revelation of St John, the final book of the Bible, prophesying the Apocalypse?

Brian: Yes. As it happens, I’m familiar with all the books of the Bible.

Johnny, a true apocalypticist, then proceeds to “prove” the predictions of the Book of Revelation with references to barcode laser-tattoos (and the “mark of the beast”), the Chernobyl incident (the Russian translation of “Wormwood” is Chernobyl), and so on. Combined with his evolutionary theories, Johnny’s near-monologues are incredibly intoxicating, and at the very least provocative. However, when placed into the context of Leigh’s London/Babylon, and its assortment of “rogues, beggars, and cripples,” Johnny’s rantings become devastatingly immediate, and even lucid. Everywhere Johnny turns there are signs of the End: the drunken decay of the Woman in the Window, with her skull and crossbones tattoo; the suicidal depression of the Café Girl; the monosyllabic rage of the Poster Man; the senseless, brutal violence of the street toughs. The final crowning touch comes when Johnny returns to Louise and Sophie’s flat to find Jeremy/"Sebastian"—whose Thanatos-driven misogyny has been terrorizing Sophie and Louise, as well as others, in a strange parallel to Johnny’s oftentimes cruel ways—roosting there, menacingly. Jeremy is an incredibly “flat” character, and his
yuppie/sadist ways have been met with a considerable amount of disdain from critics (Anthony Lane, for instance, claims that Jeremy “nearly wrecks the film” (86)) because of this “one-dimensionality.” Jeremy, as a character, is far from pointless, however. For one thing, he provides the film with a Satan (made explicit when he threatens one of his victims with a stuffed lizard (or Serpent) during “foreplay”) to Johnny’s antichrist. He, too, is a force of nature, running amok throughout this Babylon. More interestingly, though, Jeremy provides a class opposite to Johnny—he is rich, mobile, slippery, able to commit crimes with impunity and without the aid of self-fulfilling prophesies. Whereas Johnny is a vision of a solipsistic, auto-destructive outsider to Thatcher/Major’s “new Britain” (in a sense, a version of Life is Sweet’s Nicola), Jeremy is a vision of the “new man,” able to wreak devastation without opposition. Having experienced such an Odyssey, not even Louise’s tenderness can sufficiently convince Johnny that there is reason for hope. Beaten and crippled, he snatches a wad of money left by Jeremy for “services rendered,” makes his way to the street and hobbles away into the twilight.

On its own Naked is an immensely powerful and unsettling film, and an effective indictment of the horrific New Jerusalem created during the Thatcher/Major years.

Viewed together with High Hopes and Life is Sweet, one gets an impressively comprehensive vision of this ‘new Britain’ from the bleak standpoint of the crisis of the left. One of the aspects of this vision that is the most troubling is the sense of community that these films depict. In High Hopes, one gets a picture of a highly-

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2 Leigh makes this reference point explicit in two different ways: 1. when Johnny discusses Homer/The Iliad/The Odyssey with the Café Girl; 2. when Johnny is transformed into a “cyclops” by the beating he gets on the streets.
divided, even splintered, society where even the family (that essential societal unit
within Thatcherite ideology) has been shattered, and is at pains to even communicate,
let alone care for its members. *Life is Sweet* makes a plea for healing the division
within the family, but it depicts these divisions as deep and terribly threatening.

*Naked*, in sharp contrast, contains no sense of family and very little sense of
community, every instance of which is either split up or rejected. As Leigh has put it,

*Naked* is a vision of the “uprooted, if not rootless” (qtd. in Dargis 56), a devastating
depiction of the state of Britain’s social fabric in the early 1990s. From this
standpoint, one can see Leigh’s *Secrets and Lies* as being an attempt to encourage the
healing of divisions within the family, once again, as well as across a wider swath of
society: across class lines and even across racial lines.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

How do you grind a sequel out of the End of the World?

--Adam Parfrey

While it is clear that there is no firm cause-effect relationship between crisis, radical/left politics, and apocalypticism, it is nonetheless evident that there is a long-standing pattern which binds these three elements, a tradition wherein they are inseparable. As Stephen O'Leary has put it, “apocalyptic myth functions in our culture as a well of metaphor, a subterranean spring of symbolic resources drawn upon by those who seek to define and construct their own historical epoch” (218). Apocalyptic rhetoric has certainly been used (and continues to be used) as both a foundation and a buttress for many conservative and reactionary ideologies during the course of time, but it has also been paired rather powerfully with radical/left politics on many occasions, and it continues to be a “powderkeg” within our culture. In times of crisis—whether social, political, economic, religious (singly or in combination)—the apocalyptic genre can serve as an ultimate and immediate negation of life as it is, a rallying cry to “overturn, overturn, overturn,” and, in times of defeat and of desperation, a language with which to express one’s sense of limitless horror over what life has become. Indeed, these qualities turn up time and time again as one studies examples of the apocalyptic form that emerged from periods of intense crisis, whether amongst early Jewish and Christian communities, during the English Revolution, or, indeed, during the crises and tensions of the Thatcher/Major era.

Although it carried a somewhat higher profile than most other media, film certainly wasn’t the only artistic realm which turned towards apocalyptic visions
during the Thatcher/Major years in order to make sense of the times and its changes. Martin Amis’ *London Fields* (1989), for all its flaws, is a key example of apocalypticism’s currency in 80s and 90s Britain. *London Fields* is explicitly constructed as a *fin de millenium* work, one that, not surprisingly, shows an obsession with crisis—that of the world, that of London, that of humanity. These crises are certainly an important part of Amis’ “story” here, but they are developed in a most complex and engaging manner through Amis’ elaborate narration, with its direct address of the reader by the narrator/“author,” one Samson Young, a troubled writer who is slowly withering away due to a terminal illness. For instance, at one point early in the novel, Samson states:

I'm ridiculously pleased, in Chapter 4 with that bit about the Emperor Frederick and Baldwin IX, Count of Flanders. . .I stole it from *The Pursuit of the Millenium* by Norman Cohn. Like everybody else I'm finding it harder and harder to pick up a book but I can still manage brief engagements with Cohn, with his fascinated, fully gripped intelligence. . .Even the Old Testament expected the Apocalypse 'shortly.' In times of mass disorientation and anxiety. . .But I am trying to ignore the world situation. I am hoping it will go away. Not the world. The situation. I want time to get on with this little piece of harmless escapism [*London Fields*]. I want time to go to London Fields. Sometimes I wonder if I can keep the world situation out of the novel: the crisis, now sometimes called the Crisis (they can't be serious). Maybe it's like the weather; maybe you can't keep it out. . . (63-4)

Although Amis does not use this apocalyptic scenario to tangle in British politics to the extent that Jarman, Keiller, Leigh, and even Greenaway does, the many resonances between this material and much of this thesis should be clear. On the other hand, in James Kelman’s famously-profane, Booker prize-winning *How Late It Is, How Late* (1994), one finds a startling account of personal apocalypse (sudden blindness due to police brutality, destitution, alienation, and so on) that is intersected sharply with
socio-political critique. And although *How Late It Is, How Late* is a rather singular work, it has its similarities with some of Derek Jarman and Mike Leigh's work (including a shared fondness with Leigh for vernacular culture), not to mention with *Samson Agonistes*. Other examples abound, in all different types of media: video, theatre, music, and so on.

What gives filmic depictions of apocalypse their particular weight, however, is film's ability to bring these visions "to life," and its ability to situate these visions firmly in the historical world, both allegorically and non-allegorically. As Patrick Keiller has noted, film's use of location shooting holds tremendous alterative power:

> If film-making is the construction of other worlds, then film-making on location offers the possibility of the transformation of the world we live in—a reconstruction through poetry or fiction, through photogenie; a fictional politics, a fictional solidarity... (35)

When tied to apocalyptic depictions, as in *London, Naked, The Last of England*, or even *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (where this is done metonymically), this potential can deliver considerable political impact. But in addition to this, all of the films studied in the preceding chapter function allegorically on some level—even *London*, which is certainly the least allegorical of the films (although this is deceiving), and, conversely, the film that is closest to the documentary tradition. Given their apocalypticism this is hardly surprising, for the conventions of the apocalyptic tradition would seem to dictate resorting to allegory (for even the truest of believers). It is important to note, however, that this frequent use of allegorical configurations does not necessarily signify steps away from the realm of "the real," away from political engagement. Instead, these films turn towards
allegory over and over again to draw upon the apocalyptic tradition more fully and to powerfully underscore the urgency of the present situation in the “real world,” in even the most personal of settings, while avoiding demagoguery. In general, allegory—and the world of allusions that is its kin—holds a tremendous amount of potential as a means to layer a text with depth and resonance, but within the filmic medium this is particularly true because of the way film allows one to converge textual forms, at times creating startling fluctuations between planes, and because of the way that film allows one to “fill in” allegory’s “flatness.” The films studied in this thesis attest to the lasting power of the apocalyptic genre, the transformative power of on location shooting, and the (political) impact that allegorical configurations in the filmic medium can carry. These films emerged from a period that for many—though obviously not all—was marked by profound crises, and their subject matter and form provide an indication of just how cruel these times were for some, and just how badly these filmmakers desired drastic changes. While it is likely that none of these directors were/have been anywhere near as committed to struggle as a Coppe or a Milton—lives were not at risk in the same way—these are very different times, times when art’s political relevance is not what it has been at other times, times when art doesn’t generally unleash seismic reverberations that affect the whole of society. Nonetheless, as Adam Parfrey’s quote that leads into this conclusion indicates, the stakes are high when one toys with apocalyptic form, but, then, that’s the whole point of turning to this form: raising the stakes. The films that have been discussed in this thesis represent attempts to depict the Thatcher/Major era in only the bleakest terms,
and in this way contest this era’s dominant policies and ideologies, and their effects, and call for radical transformation (if only symbolically). And, as we have seen, when radical/left political concerns inform the adaptation of apocalyptic form during times of crisis—even in this day and age—the results can be quite brash, quite startling, even breathtaking.
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