Historiography and apocalypse: an intimate relationship?

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ABSTRACT

Apocalypse, often evoking images of fiery judgments and cataclysmic endings, is situated within religious, perhaps especially Christian, traditions. Recent literature analyzing how apocalyptic narratives are leveraged within religious contexts, especially stories of conquest, has emphasized facets of this role, both rhetorically and logically, in their construction and framing. I investigate several of these, in addition to a contemporary, secular example, to show how apocalyptic logic is leveraged within them. Specifically, the discursive and aesthetic constituents of these narratives appear connected to teleologies emplotted within a story-telling framework of prophecy-cum-apocalypse. I argue that this relationship is instrumental as it gives meaning to these stories, *as histories*. Apocalypse's function within historicity has been recognized by such authors as Daniel Reff, Antonis Liakos, and Stephen O'Leary, and my argument leverages their important insights while going beyond them to suggest that apocalyptic historicity trades as much in beginnings as it does in endings, allowing for a more thorough, indeed intimate, integration of prophetic elements within historical narratives.

KEYWORDS

Apocalypse. Historical agency. Narrative logic.

İntroduction

The concept of apocalypse is clearly present within religious, perhaps especially Christian, traditions. Images of fiery judgements and cataclysmic endings are often leveraged to support versions of prophetic fulfillment within narratives of religious conquest. Given its overtly religious connotation in common usage, it might seem odd to claim that apocalyptic form *and content* is integral to historicity as a discipline. I will argue that this is, in fact, the case. Indeed, the 'prophetic' is not limited to Abrahamic monotheism or any future-oriented, mystical or mythological viewpoint. Apocalyptic logic turns out to be performative within diverse genres of historical narrative as an effective tool, or technology, for crafting histories. The specific terms used to describe any apocalypse are then epiphenomenal to the primary goal of crystallizing the account in question by targeting a certain purpose fulfilled using contextualized referents. Put another way, prophetic elements within a history are situated and described from various temporal vantage points that textually look back, highlighting their synthetic role as meaning-makers for religious and secular histories (LÖWITH, 1949, p. 1-19).[1] Indeed, the importance of apocalyptic references within various histories has been noted by such authors as Antonis Liakos (2007), Daniel Reff (2005), and Stephen O'Leary (1994). I will situate my argument in comparison to theirs in what follows. For now, it is enough to say that I will unpack even more temporally and contextually flexible emplotments of apocalyptic logic in these types of contexts.

Historical analysis is constrained, normatively and aesthetically, by the range of possible teli permitted. By normatively, I refer to the ways in which the set of possible instantiations of a candidate history are bounded by the obtaining social-political and, of course, cultural, constructs of power. By aesthetically, I mean the modalities of media available for a history's transcription, representation, and propagation.[2] This is akin to what Koselleck (1985, p. 267-288) proposes when explaining his idea of *Begriffsgeschichte*.[3] He describes this conceptual framework as historical "horizons of expectation," positing the necessity of constituent indicators within any history, pointing towards – either looking back or forward from multiple candidate temporalities – an unveiling of that history's culmination or beginning – where these unveilings are modally

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[1] I refer here to his "modern" histories. This is over and against what he terms "ancient" histories, which feature a cyclical (and inescapable) form and function to their narratives.

[2] There is much more to say about aesthetic valences within historical narratives as either limiting or reinforcing their form and content. While I reference these in what follows, I cannot here attempt a complete analysis of the role of 'the aesthetic.'

[3] Or conceptual history. See also Koselleck's commentary on "historical time" (1985, p. 5-12) in which he uses religiously apocalyptic terms to introduce his project.

enclosed, meaning that histories purport to narrate 'what happened' as no longer open to alternate conditions of possibility whether or not the history in question refers to events as apocalyptic. This reasoning generates questions concerning the centrality of control within historical narrative and how to parse strategies wielded to gain and keep that position of power. For example, whose expectations do these horizons presage, and how, or by whom, are the boundaries of possible endings or beginnings within these histories delimited?

I will examine a selection of examples below in order to shed some light on possible answers to these queries.[4] This will be the focus of my initial two sections. My choice of examples, although quite varied, is intentional. My objective will be to examine what I am calling 'apocalyptic logic' occurring within disparate examples that range across religious, secular, ancient, and contemporary historical writing. I begin with a confrontation of apocalyptic themes within a framework of conquest. This example will contrast the ways in which apocalypse can be deployed in a temporally flexible way dependent on the viewpoint, or discursive space, in which it occurs. My second example aims to unpack how layers of apocalypses, or unveilings, can be wielded to situate a narration-become-history during the process of writing that history. My final example is entirely secular, and contemporary, in nature. I include it to show how current historical analysis and/or methodology uses the same tools or technologies in its construction. Following these, I turn to a more detailed description of what the concept of apocalypse refers to in these contexts. It turns out that it is an aesthetic-cum-discursive *construction* created to support those historical narratives. Liakos describes this phenomenon as the necessity of identifying a future within a past for that past to become a history (2007, p. 7; 20-21; 54-55). More formally, apocalypse is instantiated within a narrative mechanism of prophecy and its subsequent fulfillment. These elements are then constitutively inserted within histories in the service of an intentional, carefully selected purpose. Alison McQueen, analyzing Macchiavelli's frame of reference when looking at historical, and future, events through a political lens, puts it this way:

> The "great variability of things […] beyond human conjecture" in Machiavelli's own times seems to call not for a prudent prince but for a prophet. Such a man seeks not to render the apparent contingency of the [*sic*] world

intelligible, but to discern in it signs of prophetic importance and endow it with a deeper meaning (MCQUEEN, 2018, p. 96).

Hayden White, while explaining both how and why *all* historical narrative is allegorical – literally saying one thing and meaning something else, posits the importance of *allegoresis* as a method for representing plot types such as comedies, tragedies, and farces (WHITE, 1987, p. 45-46). In the words of his title, the form of historical narrative chosen inculcates content into the history being created. Apocalyptic logic clarifies the reciprocal causal vectors of form *and* historical content within historiography. I agree, of course, that the form certainly inserts content of its own, as White compellingly argues. Yet the content itself is often, perhaps nearly always, prophetically arranged such as to entail a certain telos or, less restrictively, bind the story to a selected range of permitted teli. This is the case regardless of the genre of 'form' chosen. Thus tragedies, comedies, farces, and many other plot types might, and I would argue tend to, leverage the same apocalyptic structure. This is in contrast to the view that tragedies offer a more appropriate way in which to re-interpret certain histories, compared to romances in the case of post-colonialism (e.g., SCOTT, 2004, p. 7-14).

Histories create and then deploy a discursive, present and/or future, space emplotted within a story referenced to a specific context and its actors. This mechanism, framing a linearly conceived telos-as-apocalypse, requires a set of prophetic indicators culminating in an unveiling for historical narrative to have meaning and be recognizable as a history. David Scott, while critiquing postcolonial historiographical motivations, asks questions about what kind of present these pasts were being asked to illuminate as well as what hopes and expectations they were supposed to provide (2004, p. 3). I will say a bit more about Scott's work in my conclusion; however, the idea of a past being called upon to illuminate the present with the goal of potentializing selected horizons of expectation seems correct. It also confirms the importance of apocalyptic narrative within historiography as I am exploring it here.

Indeed, the Greek root of the term "apocalypse" is αποκάλυψη, or *apokalupsis*. This refers to an uncovering or disclosure of truth. Another primary meaning points to the revealing of knowledge that might have been hidden previously. Any restriction of the efficacy of apocalypses to religious histories thus seems mistaken. Clear cases of this phenomenon, for example, can be found within conquest-related naming events, to include origin stories in the conquest of the New World and the chronicles of the First Crusade. I will demonstrate how these, deployed in the service of identificational and teleological fulfillment, put the *control* of history front

and center. I then conclude by considering apocalyptic themes alongside certain notions of progress, arguing that apocalypse remains central to secular histories in Löwith's sense when tracing *any* historical progression towards an erstwhile 'better' state of affairs (LÖWITH, 1949, p. 1-19).

New World and Crusade 'apocalypses'

> The first bad omen: Ten years before the Spaniards first came here, a bad omen appeared in the sky. It was like a flaming ear of corn, or a fiery signal, or the blaze of daybreak; it seemed to bleed fire, drop by drop, like a wound in the sky. […] The second bad omen: The temple of Huitzilopochtli burst into flames. It is thought that no one set it afire, that it burned down of its own accord. […] The sixth bad omen: The people heard a weeping woman night after night. She passed by in the middle of the night, wailing and crying out in a loud voice, 'My children, we must flee far away from this city!' (LEÓN-PORTILLA, 1962, p. 4-6).

These are samples of the omens described by Bernardino de Sahagún's students in the (1555, rev. 1585) *Florentine Codex*, purportedly a narrative of conquest as told by the conquered Aztecs of Tenochtitlan.[5] That the omens are apocalyptic in form and content is obvious; however, when examined in light of their narrative function, foretelling conquest, their purpose becomes clearer. They are prophecies fulfilled by Cortez' arrival and subsequent destruction of Tenochtitlan (and the eclipse of the god Huitzilopochtli). While it is true that de Sahagún's native informants might have told their subaltern story of defeat neither willingly nor completely truthfully, this only serves to confirm the purpose of (and *desire to control*) the narrative construction of the conquest *as foreshadowed by previously observed portents* of that event (e.g., TOWNSEND, 2003, 659-687). The Aztec narrative can be interpreted historiographically as confronting a competing, Spanish alternative in the hopes of salvaging a vestige of historical agency for the Mexica civilization. The method chosen for this confrontation is fascinatingly apocalyptic in form.

For their part, Spanish accounts of New Spain's conquest are emplotted as constitutive within a grander narrative of the 'kingdom of God.' This way of putting the idea is not strictly correct, in that this latter *topos*, interpreted within the mission of Christian

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[5] León-Portilla uses this codex as his primary source when translating his (1962) account of the conquest of Tenochtitlan. In the second half of his book (and at the beginning of chapters), he summarizes the roles comparative codices played in his research.

Empire, served as rich philosophical grist for the mill of *all* European politico-theological thought (ADORNO, 2007; CAÑIZARES-ESGUERRA, 2001; CARACCIOLI, 2021). Much of the motivation to propose competing narratives of both conquest and governance can be characterized as an attempt to dictate the course of 'New World' history (e.g., ADORNO, 2007; CARACCIOLI, 2018). In short, the objective was to control it by framing narratives to align them with certain concepts of progress referenced to imperial Christianity. Victory in the battle to control the narrative *in the Old World* was necessary (if perhaps not entirely sufficient) to extend that hegemony to the New World.

Another example of this literary conflict is the history of Bernal Díaz written as a first-person account between 1551 and 1584. From the self-avowed perspective of an eyewitness and appealing to juridical norms as supporting his ability to write a 'true' history, Díaz directly engages contemporaneous historical narratives with the objective of wresting control of that narrative away from external perspectives (ADORNO, 2007, p. 148-189). While motivated by the desire to defend *encomienda* as a just reward for deeds performed in the king's service, the way in which his history closes is enlightening. As Adorno puts it:

> His effort to move from the autobiographical and self-referential *relación*, to the illusion of the extra referential *probanza* reveals that the stakes involved were higher than his own self-interest. […] His objective to save the glory of the conquests for posterity was an ever more pressing need as the 1550s and 1560s passed (ADORNO, 2007, p. 179).

Díaz' *Historia verdadera* confronts extant historical narratives, providing an example of this clash over how to cash out the 'punch line' for the story in question. He notably appeals to religiously apocalyptic (in this case *salvific*) frames of reference (justifying deeds during the conquest) when responding to both Sepúlveda and Las Casas (ADORNO, 2007, p. 153-154;158-164).

Apocalyptic logic has also been emplotted in a temporally-layered fashion to justify current, and ongoing, events against a tapestry of both already-fulfilled and yet-to-be-fulfilled prophecy. One example of this phenomenon would be Robert the Monk's sermon-as-history of the First Crusade. His *Historia Iherosolimitana* overtly wields biblical scripture as furnishing prophetic constituents inserted within the events of the First Crusade culminating in the conquest of Jerusalem. He references Old and New Testament prophets (and other scriptural authors) as providing authoritative confirmation of the divine foreknowledge and sanction of that campaign. These are

clearly identified as fulfilled, *and not-yet-fulfilled*, prophecy, leading to Jerusalem's fall and its explanation alongside Biblical events (ROBERT THE MONK, 2005, p. 199-214). Perhaps even more revealing, he fixes the locus of the crusade as originating within scripture, going over and above biblical events to have greater import than all but the crucifixion:

> These [Old and New Testament historians] show how pleasing it is to God that an account should be written for the faithful of any miraculous deed he has brought to pass on earth *which had been part of his plan from the beginning of time*. And indeed since the creation of the world what more miraculous undertaking has there been (other than the mystery of the Redeeming Cross) that what was achieved in our time by this journey of our people to Jerusalem (ROBERT THE MONK, 2005, p. 77).

This is a clear example of how apocalyptic logic functions within beginnings as well as endings. Robert's language of apocalypse, which includes "*terminus*" in this case, turns out to be epiphenomenal to the telos of historiographical hegemony of the discursive, normative space he creates here.[6] His history is also not solely for contemporaneous audiences, as he claims that it "deserves to be publicized through a faithful account for future generations" (2005, p. 77). To achieve this present and future control of history, the *auctoritas* of the biblical canon is used to both justify and give meaning to the First Crusade as divinely pre-ordained and on par with holy writ. As just one example of this mechanism, his stylization of Kerbogha's mother's speech leans heavily on the Biblical books of Deuteronomy, Exodus, Numbers, and Psalms as providing its content, significance, and justification (ROBERT THE MONK, 2005, p. 153-157).

Put another way, the aesthetic 'clothing' of Robert's argument serves to create a historiographical space which reifies both the authoritative and justificatory arguments he deploys. Crucially, these aesthetic elements (namely: its apocalyptic trappings) are tools in the hand of that requisite history's translator-cum-historian. They are, at bottom, merely instrumental to its construction. The central issue is historical control (in the sense of freezing a narrative's allowed meaning), and the agency exercised to gain and maintain that control is found not in any specific instantiation of aesthetically apocalyptic language or its prophetic constituents but firmly in the hands (words? painting? sculpture?) of the historian qua historiographer. Put differently, the historiographical telos becomes the eschaton for that history in the form of a prophesied apocalypse.

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[6] See Rubenstein (2016, 159-160) for the ways in which Urban II's appeal at Clermont traded on this concept.

Here we can begin to see the scope of the aesthetic regarding its application within historiographical contexts.[7]

The mechanism of apocalypse can thus be decoupled from any exclusive relationship with any particular religious framework. It can, instead, reside within *any* historian's toolkit for constructing historical narratives as an agential exercise in identificational autonomy. In a secular, and contemporary, piece Patrick Iber opines on the mission of history within academia. He is specifically concerned with how historians should comport themselves within a culture obsessed with 'fake' news. The way in which he frames the historians' task is enlightening, especially given the privileged levels of agency she enjoys when crafting any historical narrative:

> Learning about history, and learning to reason historically, may indeed affect the politics of our readers and students. We needn't apologize for this. Part of the value of our discipline should be that it produces the foundations of *better* social understanding. It should not only be a burden. *Better* historical understanding may tear down political myths, but it can also offer the *possibility of restorative justice*. We should insist that historical knowledge is an important *ingredient of democratic citizenship* (IBER, 2018, p. 5, emphases mine).

The telos of linear progress, seen as 'better' social and historical understanding, the "possibility of restorative justice," and embodying what it is to be a 'democratic citizen,' permeates this passage. Recall that this is an argument for how historians *should* act. It is a normative claim about the discipline, and it thus rests on a reified concept of progress leading to a better state of affairs in the future. Insofar as this approach to doing history putatively situates past and current facts emplotted within a narrative leading to (possible) future fulfillment, it again trades on the same logic I am exploring throughout this paper.

What is even more striking in this secular example is the temporal perspective Iber's situation of the actor and apocalypse takes here. This is a full-throated call for contemporary action in the form of specific perspectives supporting certain results. A historian's *moral* duty, then, consists (at least partly) in prioritized actions *that become prophetic* within a narrative leading to a set of apocalyptic teli. This is, as I argued earlier,

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[7] See Michelle-Rolph Trouillot (1996, p. 44-68) for how memorials and monuments 'mention' certain events/actors while silencing others. See also Canizares-Esguerra (2001, p. 266-338) for how Mexican material culture was instrumental to competing narratives.

very similar to what Robert the Monk was doing in his *Historia*. Contemporary events are emplotted such that they become either prophetic or lead to prophecy fulfillment. Indeed, recognizing the temporal flexibility of apocalyptic logic seems central to a comparative analysis of different narratives about similar time frames (e.g., GABRIELE, 2016, p. 304-307).

This demonstrates how the logic of apocalypse, instantiated by situating prophetic elements that are then fulfilled in a way that culminates in a chosen telos for that account, is fundamental within historicity, both religious and secular. Iber's example is even more intriguing for an extremely nuanced employment of this technology, as compared to erstwhile 'Armageddons.' It further demonstrates that historiographical perspectives stemming from and/or supporting a particular vision of progress, religious or not, tend to leverage an apocalyptic technological framework in their construction. This also is a clue, as I will briefly mention in my conclusion, as to how this historiographical technology can be used as effectively in accounts purporting to unveil utopias as often as it supports 'end of the world' imaginaries.

This should be sufficient to demonstrate how the logic of apocalypse can give meaning to, and control, a history's content and objectives. That prophetic elements within them are often couched such as to be easily recognizable to both historical actors and intended audiences is thus unsurprising. Indeed, these narratives tend to be inherently political as well, in that they crystallize any given interpretation of the past such as to normatively close the allowed (or permissible) ends/futures of those histories. In the next section, I explore a more fine-grained description of the concept of apocalypse within history, seen within the role of naming and origin events along with end-of-history characterizations.

Apocalypse: Creating, naming, and changing from alternate perspectives

> Peru as a name and as a social fact…does not appear modestly or imperceptibly… [She] was…born of blood and tears in an abyss of history, with a loud crash that shook the world (BASADRE, 1947, p. 104-105).

It seems natural to associate apocalypse with a kind of death. There is a timbre of finality in the word, perhaps akin to a recognition that certain possibilities are closed. Its instantiation within physical death is undeniable, on a communal or personal scale. In *Plagues, Priests, and Demons* (2005), Daniel Reff analyzes the ways in which

Christianity co-opted certain disease epidemics in order to construct, and then control, new discursive spaces. His focus is exemplary as it not only provides a clear case of the instrumentality of apocalypse but also sheds light on how the concept can be defined in these contexts.

Reff's work does not fit neatly within the historian's guild. In this case, he makes an ethnographical intervention proposing a way of parsing causal valences constitutive within Christianity's rise to (western) religious hegemony. Reff's analysis (2017, p. 16-34) might better be described as ethno-political, in that his thesis and argument center on a comparative analysis of Old and New Worlds, showcasing the ways in which Christianity manipulated tragedy in order to situate those physical events within a metaphysical context (tied to a certain ontology). It is hard to imagine a clearer example of the instrumentality of apocalypse, both personal and corporate, deployed to create and control (religiously-cum-politically) contemporary and historical discourse for social construction purposes. Despite this disciplinary breadth, his use of apocalypse (as disease leading to widespread death) is uniquely instructive as it highlights the impact 'on the ground' of this mechanism, both contemporarily to historical actors and structurally within histories. In this, Reff reminds us that "real things happen to real people" in history (REFF, 2017, p. 14).

In this work, he looks specifically at certain disease outbreaks that caused widespread death and upended extant socio-economic structures (REFF, 2005, p. 35-205). These events exposed the latter's inability to cope with these epidemics. The Church, represented here by its Mendicant and Jesuit orders, stepped into the gap created by these events to construct a discursive and aesthetic space normed not only by physical realities but by *metaphysical* logics and ontologies. These provided both meaning and purpose (definition and telos) to individuals and communities (and entire continents) for these widespread 'death events.' Importantly, the apocalyptic logic leveraged to provide epistemological support and ontological justification for the epidemics controlled historical discourse in these ethnographic contexts for both contemporary actors and their translators-cum-historians to follow.

Though ostensibly about disease and death, this analysis reveals the inherent processes of creation, naming, and change within apocalyptic discourse. Providing a comprehensible reason for these epidemics required creation on both physical and metaphysical levels of existence. Creation necessitates the subsequent naming event for the thing(s) created including, importantly, *re*naming of *re*created entities. It is no accident that the author of Genesis describes one of Adam's first acts as that of naming the things within creation (GENESIS 2:19-20, ESV). Change, entailed within

the processes of creation and naming, follows incontestably. As a result, *any change involving a significant epistemological and/or ontological shift* such that either historical actor or historian interpret it as impacting the former or the latter's worldview can be defined as apocalyptic. I think it fitting that the term's original interpretation (which is, as a reminder, *apokálypsis*) is that of an unveiling or uncovering, a *revealing of knowledge*. What is (re)creation or construction of ontological existences and their associated epistemologies if not a revealing of knowledge? And what does history purport to do?

Liakos (2007, p. 21) has argued that this knowledge revealed within respective narrative histories includes, as a central ingredient, visions of the future. This is what I am referring to as the 'prophetic' emplotted within those past events *as referenced to idealized imaginings within them*. As he puts it, "From this point of view [the horizon of long-term social expectations in writing history], ideas about the future are part of the deep structure of which *forms our understanding of what is historical thinking*" (LIAKOS, 2007, p. 21, emphases mine). He also argues that idealized concepts of the future have to be emplaced within historical narrative for that narrative *to be a history*. It is a narrative with a plot, 'fall and salvation; desperation and hope' (LIAKOS, 2007, p. 22). It thus embodies a stylistically *messianic* narrative trope—one that contributes to the content of history together with its explanation. Indeed, he aptly notes that this way of describing the phenomenon originates with Walter Benjamin, in that messianic valences permeate historicity (1940, XVII, A-B). This perspective also aligns with Agamben (2005) in his formulation of the future-within-the-past constituent necessary to historical narrative.

Apocalypse, as a historiographical technology, is intimately connected to crafting histories, both during those narratives' creation and their deployment as histories, in order to give them meaning and make it comprehensible to both historical actors (whose actions, words, and artifacts form the corpus of Trouillot's "historicity 1") and historiographers (re-constructing constituents of "historicity 1" into "historicity 2").[8] The results are future-within-the-past stories, constructing frameworks for those histories' empirical and interpretive elements.

This methodology can be highlighted within a series of questions. What is needed to: 1) make a history *accessible* to both actor and eventual reader/hearer; 2) situate

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[8] See Truillot (1995, p. 2, 22-29, 106, 115) "Historicity 1" refers to empirical fact (for him, "social process"), personifying what has happened of past necessity. "Historicity 2" refers to the ways in which the first variety is interpreted by the second.

the resultant narrative in a *recognizable* context; 3) fix the story's loci, both physical and 'spiritual;' 4) identify the history's topoi, reifying what counts as being 'important' and included; 5) connect with recognized and comprehensible ontologies and the epistemological frameworks that accompany them—in short, how to connect the history with an understood worldview; and 6) crucially, situate the narrative such that actor, translator, and consumer resonate with a central *identificational* valence? I will focus in what follows on this last question, as the previous five have been briefly addressed within the examples canvassed earlier. This concern, that of locating and fixing identities within historical narratives, highlights the *temporal flexibility* of apocalypses manipulated within historiography. It will additionally help clarify the methodologies of creation and naming as historical changes-cum-apocalypses.

Thurner (2009, p. 46-49) refers to these moments of apocalypse, these blendings of death and rebirth, as *naming* or origin events. They are 'abysses,' moments in time that concatenate present identities such that a space of "immediate non-being" is opened. Thurner uses three terms to describe this process. The first is the "abysmal event," which he characterizes as the ontological fissure, or destructuring, of what existed prior to this concatenation. The second he refers to as the "baptismal event." We should note here that in Catholic liturgy, baptism is coincident with naming the infant or convert. During this phase, the historian 'christens' the historical subject, creating a new ontological and epistemological framework for it. The final phase is the "inaugural performance" of the newly (re)created subject within the myth-making apparatus of apocalypse. The ontological erasure of a new naming event results in a vacuum, one that requires filling in terms that justify and explain it to actors, historians, and future readers of these histories. The opening epigraph of this section describes the implosion of former existences combined in a 'bloody' rebirth of new ones. The described historical seam, like a spatial black hole, creates vacant interstices that are opportunities to construct *different* narratives, stories that prophesy and then bring to fulfillment their requisite apocalypses. For pre-existent and subsequent narratives to have meaning for their intended audiences, the abysses revealed within these creation-cum-naming events must be situated as telos and eschaton. If we grant that a narrative requires a beginning, middle, and end to be a 'story,' then what I am describing here seems to be beginnings and endings created and then named by contested discursive space comprising the 'middle' of these narratives.

While intended as a critique, Furet's (1981, p. 1-17; 36-46; 195) attempt to downgrade the nationally internal significance of the French Revolution showcases the function of these naming events in the way Thurner describes them. While arguing against any unique significance given by the French nation to the revolution as an

origin event for the republic, he notes the ways in which its deployment as apocalyptic fulfillment played out within national discourse as prophecy when applied to extra-national revolutionary events such as the Bolshevik revolution. Particularly revealing is his statement that "The postulate that 'what actually happened' did so of necessity is a classic retrospective illusion of historical consciousness, which sees the past as a field of possibilities within which 'what actually happened' appears ex post facto as the only future for that past" (FURET, 1981, p. 19). His reconstruction of events during the preceding century frames these such that they prophetically indicate the coming upheaval. He then situates them within a narrative for which revolution is both telos and eschaton. The fact that he bridles at Gallic insistence on reifying the event as the moment of creation-cum-identity for the French Republic only confirms Thurner's conclusion. The naming event constituted the immediate non-being of the pre-existing French state, a vacuum that demanded filling in a manner such that *looking back* on the event as both apocalypse *and genesis* generated prophetic constituents within the story that then continued to have identificational significance after the event. These follow-on prophecies continue to define French democracy. Furét rails at these processes in vain. Their course winds up being predictable given the identificational valences required within historical narratives for them to have meaning *as histories*.

All of this highlights the importance of temporal flexibility within any historiographical telos-framing/limiting technology. Matthew Gabriele (2016, p. 308) has recently examined the significance of verb tenses used in crusade histories. He clarifies how Robert the Monk subtly altered prophetic scripture such that foretold events (i.e., the holy sepulchre's glorification mentioned in Isaiah 11:10) were transformed into already fulfilled, and thus apocalyptic, events.

Specifically, the tomb's spiritual condition could be expressed by a juxtaposition of its *eternal* state—one of being always-already glorified as a result of Christ's resurrection—with a temporal state that interpreted the futurity in Isaiah's account as having been accomplished in a *re*-glorification of that tomb (GABRIELLE, 2016, p. 307-310). This temporal flexibility allowed Robert to situate the events of the First Crusade within historical *and* ongoing narrative both reifying recent events as physically-cum-metaphysically significant as well as giving them a specific and understandable meaning. Able to be flexibly emplotted in time as apocalypses, they could be wielded either as a canonization of their contents or a prophetic call to energize new ones. Sweetenham, in her introductory chapter to Robert the Monk's history, also seems to argue for this kind of narrative emplacement strategy (SWEETENHAM, 2005, p. 4-8).

It should be clear that I am resisting the notion that prophecy and apocalypse are best seen from the perspective of 'looking back' at the events in question accessed through source data, to include translational impurities. This is, I think, mistaken. A temporal perspective of 'looking forward' to apocalypse and situating current events as prophetically positioned to culminate in that 'future-past' seems indispensable to both religious and secular histories. This is, of course, if there is even such a thing as secular history. Löwith (1949, p. 201-203) claims that all secular history is theological in form, perhaps even more fundamentally as it divorces itself from theological content. That Robert's text is identified as a historical 'sermon' probably does not seem strange, not least for his parochial position and role in the events chronicled. Yet if I am right, *many more histories* might also be sermons, complete with holy text and prophesied apocalypses even in the case of secular narratives. Does all history qua historiography then reduce to all and only *religious* historiography? In my conclusion to follow, I offer some thoughts on this perhaps shocking suggestion.

Conclusion: Is all history religious history?

If notions of progress inhere within modern histories as essential to their form, then these histories *just are* apocalyptic. Löwith (1949, p. 1-20; 191-203), for one, would seem to argue for this as well. The subjects and 'endings' of these accounts are the apocalypses in question, and their constitutive events turn out to be prophetically indicative of their instantiations. A contextualized interpretation is thus expressed using referents with which the intended audience, to include its historical actors, is familiar. Amerindians, writing the history of their conquest under the gaze of evangelizing friars, deployed images and concepts unique to their culture and history within omens fulfilled by Cortez' conquest seizing, at least for a brief moment, control of that narrative within a prophetic, and certainly apocalyptic, framework. Robert, 'perfecting' the *Gesta Francorum*, clothed his history in the trappings of fulfilled scriptural prophecy, forging links between holy writ, past Crusade events, and possible future campaigns. The terms and language used in specific scenarios turn out to be epiphenomenal at best. They become window dressing for the causally efficacious aspects of the narrative. These are the aesthetic elements created or repurposed to serve the goal of *binding* a given history to a certain telos or teli. This effort selects and organizes certain prophecies that, when fulfilled, result in the selected, apocalyptic telos' fulfillment. As Gabriele (2016, p. 306) stresses, even though individual prophecies might fail due to future contingencies, apocalypse remains inevitable.

Thus far, my argument and Löwith's seem similar. He goes on, however, to lump both religious and secular history together as one and the same project. In his words:

> It is also within this teleological, or rather eschatological, scheme of the historical process that history became 'universal'; for its universality does not depend merely on the belief in one universal God but on his giving unity to the history of mankind by directing it toward a final purpose. When II Isaiah describes the future glory of the new Jerusalem, his religious futurism and nationalism are actually teleological universalism. 'Mankind,' however, has not existed in the historical past, nor can it exist in any present. It is an idea and an ideal of the future, the necessary horizon for the eschatological concept of history and its universality. We of today, concerned with the unity of universal history and with its progress toward an ultimate goal or at least toward a 'better world,' are still in the line of prophetic and messianic monotheism; we are still Jews and Christians (LÖWITH, 1949, p. 18-19).

On this view, all modern history reduces to monotheistic history. As a reminder, Löwith distinguishes the latter from Christianity. In his view, to the extent that a Christian worldview stops current time in the form of the 'last times,' it does not subscribe to a linear characterization of history. I think this reduction is too quick. I agree that apocalypse functions as a crucial arbiter in support of any narrative of progress. Yet I see two problems resulting from a conflation of secular and religious history, one being parochial and the other more substantive.

The parochial concern centers on the import of Augustinian historical theory and its ramifications for human action in the earthly city while awaiting the city of God. I am not convinced that 'true' Christianity cannot inhabit the discursive space of modern historiography without abandoning notions of progress. This seems to be what Löwith is arguing in the case of specifically Christian history. This is, for him, incompatible with a linear conception of history and as such, commonly understood notions of progress are hard to reconcile with a Christian worldview. Augustine would not agree with this characterization, given his emphasis on the comportment of heavenly citizens while living within the earthly city (1951, p. 514). This may seem to be merely a theological debate, but it has larger ramifications, specifically as they pertain to efforts aimed at achieving a more just society in the here and now. Be that as it may, I cannot comment further on this worry here.

We can gloss the more substantive concern in philosophical terms. That histories of all types rely on epistemological boundaries enclosing the acceptable interpretations of

their events is obvious. Fixing the locus of any difference in those terms seems mistaken. Religious and secular narratives, to the extent that they deploy theological supports to construct their histories, then reduce to one-and-the-same kind of epistemological effort. To gesture at where I part ways with Löwith in this matter, I think a fundamental difference exists in the recognized, or allowed, *ontologies* in their respective accounts. Religious historiography must allow an ontological set that goes over and above that of its secular counterpart. As such it remains importantly different. Insofar as these ends and/or beginnings are not merely epistemological claims about better or worse states of affairs, the cosmic stakes seem much higher for religious histories.

Finally, I think it also fitting to consider O'Leary's monograph tracing the rhetorical role of apocalypse *as performative* within historical discourse. The form this performativity takes, according to him, is that of constructing a theodicy that explains and justifies the existence of evil. This requires rhetorical-cum-historical discourse to play a prophetic role, one that not only identifies prescient constituents within the past and present that predict a vindicating futurity but also constructs those elements so that they fit the appropriate description needed. This is cashed out in two ways, the first being that apocalypse is a mythical and rhetorical solution to the problem of evil, and the second that this purpose is accomplished through constructions of temporality (O'LEARY, 1994, p. 14-15). For O'Leary, apocalypse is situated, "not as text embodying archetypal and timeless formal principles, but as an event '*alive in its present*,' attempting to discover how it influences, and is influenced by, the discursive practices that surround it" (1994, p. 14-15 *apud* PEPPER, 1970, p. 232) Note that this present seems to indicate the time in which the discourse in question is crafted, tying it to historical narrative and its control.

O'Leary's analysis is also similar to my argument in that it allows for the temporality of any apocalypse to be tailored to the history for which it provides both telos and eschaton. I agree that apocalypse is *instrumental* within history; we both see its role as performative, an effective tool in the historian's toolkit giving her narrative contextualized meaning. This granted, his account differs in its construction of apocalypse as being primarily about evil, specifically in its instantiation *as redemption*. While he is certainly correct that apocalypses can be seen as theodicies justifying historical means, my argument has demonstrated that apocalyptic logic, leveraged as a historical, narrative-creation technology, trades as much in beginnings as it does in endings.

The performativity of apocalypse can thus be equally applied to histories emplotting concepts of progress (or, as I mentioned earlier, perhaps even utopia) towards better states of affairs. If I am right, the term refers as often to triumphalist interpretations as it does to disastrous ones, resulting in characterizations of the 'end of history' being

mapped to both these predicates. Indeed, from a certain perspective O'Leary himself might permit this construction. In his conclusion, he argues for a "deliteralization" of apocalyptic rhetoric in religious discourse and presses for historians and theologians to reopen a dialogue decoupling narratives of progress from literally-interpreted, cataclysmic endings "putting the world right" (O'LEARY, 1994, p. 218-224). Thus he gestures at the possibility for apocalypses to be instantiated as both endings and beginnings in symbolic terms.

As a parting thought, which must await future development, consider that triumph seems to entail the defeat, or *conquest*, of a competitor. It follows then that histories tend to rely, in varying degrees, on a foundation of conquest. They are vested with a motive to control their narratives and the subjects and events within them. Scott (2004, p. 19; 208s) makes a profound insight in this vein when he recategorizes subaltern protagonists in post and anticolonial histories as "conscripts of modernity". I want to go further and say that the 'losers' more generally within any history, either as its actors or erstwhile scribes, are conscripts *not only of modernity but of historiographical form/content simpliciter*, at least in those histories leveraging apocalyptic logic as narrative technology. Whether or not tragedy's form winds up being more appropriate than romance for narratives of conquest turns out to be orthogonal to the observation that both trade in the limitation of potential teleologies for the stories in question. Scott himself alludes to this when he concludes his monograph by noting that our visions of alternate futures have to be "tempered by the remembrance of his (Toussaint's) example" (SCOTT, 2004, p. 221). Any such framing of historical possibilities necessarily *limits* their realizable tropes and thus plays a normative role pre and pro-scribing what can be considered 'accurate' histories. Put differently, it unveils and then enforces borders for *truth*.

Guyatri Chakravorty Spivak describes this privileging or curtailing of certain actors' historical agency like this: "This is not to describe 'the way things really were' […]. It is, rather, to offer an account of how an explanation and narrative of reality was established as the normative one" (CHAKRAVORTY, 1988, p. 43). Ranajit Guha also offers a delicately nuanced analysis of how these power dynamics play out, noting that when both writing national history, *and casting visions for its future*, the primacy of elitists' (both Indian and British) visions resulted in a "historic failure of the nation to come to its own" (GUHA, 1982, p. 8). This failure, put in the terms of my analysis, can be represented as a hegemonic insistence on *not* unveiling what Guha refers to as an authentic version of the Indian nation. An elitist telos, restricted to a certain historical hermeneutic, limited the ways in which prophetic visions of India's colonial and post-colonial future imaginaries could be expressed. Unsurprisingly, the scope of the hegemony created and sustained within such crystallized histories must then

extend into the future. Recognizing this dynamic seems central to parsing a historical narrative's motivation and unveiling its meaning in any context.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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