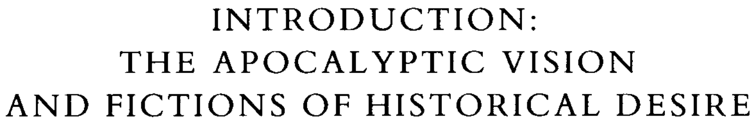
CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42691-6 - Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction
Lois Parkinson Zamora
Excerpt
More information

1

INTRODUCTION: THE APOCALYPTIC VISION AND FICTIONS OF HISTORICAL DESIRE



> We are designed to want: with nothing to want, we are like windmills in a world without wind.
>
> *The Aristos*, John Fowles

AS THE YEAR 2000 APPROACHES and we become accustomed to thinking of crisis in global terms, references to apocalypse seem to be increasing steadily, both in frequency and volume. Our modern sense of apocalypse is less religious than historical: The word is used again and again to refer to the events of recent history, whether nuclear or ecological or demographic, which suggest all too clearly our ample capacities for self-destruction. The end of this millennium has displaced 1984 as a focus of speculation, and apocalypse is in vogue. However, we should remind ourselves that visions of apocalypse have in fact long been a significant source of inspiration for literary and visual art.

Since its establishment as a literary genre in the century or so preceding the birth of Christ, apocalypse has held a special fascination for artists, in part because of its arresting imagery and powerful poetry, in part because of pride of place. It is, after all, ostensibly God's last word on his creation. The Revelation of St. John, by many judgments the most complete and the finest of traditional apocalyptic texts, occupies the final place in the Christian canon, as if to reinforce by position the authority of its summarizing intent. Apocalyptic visions, particularly John's, began to inspire a significant body of imaginative literature and visual art in the later Middle Ages, and have continued to do so, variously and abundantly. (There is some irony in this, given the difficulties and delays which testamentary apocalypse generally encountered before being accepted into the canon – integrated belatedly, as if grudgingly, because of its subversive nature.[1]) Though Revelation announces itself as the definitive reading of history, its innumerable literary and pictorial interpretations seem to mock the very notion of a definitive reading.[2] It is, in short, a text which has directly or

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42691-6 - Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction
Lois Parkinson Zamora
Excerpt
More information

indirectly engendered and enriched other texts, including the novels I will be discussing here.

In the second part of my introduction, I will review in some detail the conventions of biblical apocalypse and their implications for contemporary novelistic narration. Here at the outset, a brief summary of apocalyptic elements will suffice to suggest the historical and narrative concerns of this mythic mode. In both the canonic Hebrew apocalyptic texts (Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah) and the Christian apocalypses (the thirteenth chapter of Mark, the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, the Second Epistle of Peter, the Revelation of John), the end of the world is described from the point of view of a narrator who is radically opposed to existing spiritual and political practices. Whether Jew or early Christian, his narrative reflects not only his opposition to existing practices but also his political powerlessness to change them. His is a subversive vision: He is outside the cultural and political mainstream (in John's case, literally in exile on the Greek island of Patmos), awaiting God's intervention in human history, when the corrupt world of the present will be supplanted by a new and transcendent realm. From a point ostensibly beyond the end of time, the apocalyptist surveys the whole of human history, focusing on its cataclysmic end. For him, the future is past: He states God's plan for the completion of history, alternately in the prophetic future, then as accomplished fact.

Preceding the end, there will be upheavals which in the Book of Revelation include the turbulent reign of the Antichrist, the Second Coming of Christ, the consequent cosmic battle of Armageddon, a thousand-year earthly reign of Christ, a last loosing of Satan, the Last Judgment, and the appearance of "the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). So catastrophe is balanced against millennium, desolation against fecundity, God's wrath against his mercy. Because the readers of apocalyptic texts associate themselves with those who will be saved by God at the end of time, the plagues and torments which the apocalyptist describes are a source of consolation rather than dismay. The series of historical disasters projected by the fantastical images of the apocalyptist represent God's vengeance on his (and his people's) enemies. Thus, apocalypse is not merely a vision of doom: For its original audience it was, on the contrary, a luminous vision of the fulfillment of God's promise of justice and communal salvation.

My subject is not biblical apocalypse per se but rather the literary uses of apocalypse in selected works of fiction by contemporary U.S. and Latin American writers. I will be discussing the historical consciousness and the mythic vision of six writers and, more particularly, the relationship of their visions of historical ends to their narrative endings. I will argue that their self-conscious use of the imagery and narrative forms of biblical apocalypse affects this relationship between ends and endings, and I will be comparing

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42691-6 - Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction
Lois Parkinson Zamora
Excerpt
More information

their work in terms of their various uses of that biblical mode. These writers do not always use apocalyptic modes without question or criticism: If Gabriel García Márquez, Julio Cortázar, and Walker Percy accept and incorporate the forms of biblical apocalypse into their fiction, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, and Carlos Fuentes invoke those forms in order to modify or reject them. Thus the fiction I will discuss may define its historical and narrative perspectives by explicitly departing from the forms of apocalypse, as well as by integrating them into its structure. In either case, the work of these writers embodies the suspicions of apocalypse that pervade our times.

Most of us do not conceive of time as it is presented in biblical apocalyptic narrative, nor do the novelists whose work I will discuss take literally its metaphoric history. Nevertheless, biblical formulae and images are woven into the fabric of the cultures and languages of the United States and Latin America, and control in essential ways the articulation of our thinking. The Americas have inherited from Judeo-Christian thought its philosophy of history, and though modern secular conceptions of history do not posit a finite beginning or end to time (in fact, quite the opposite), we share the need of the apocalyptist to interpret and assign significance to our experience of history.[3] In Latin America, the reception and assimilation of this European biblical heritage has no doubt been conditioned by instances of indigenous apocalyptic historicism: Historians and anthropologists have identified points of congruence in the apocalyptic expectations of European and indigenous historical thinking, especially among groups in Brazil and Peru, despite otherwise vastly different conceptions of temporal movement.[4] As research continues, more extensive literary critical discussions of the multiple sources of apocalypticism in Latin American fiction will certainly be called for. In this study, I will discuss non-European strains of apocalypticism in Carlos Fuentes's work but, in general, my critical concern is with the biblical sources of apocalyptic mythology in contemporary fiction.

The use of apocalyptic structures and images in contemporary U.S. and Latin American fiction is likely to place the literary discussion of human time somewhere between myth and history, an observation that I will develop in my discussion of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Absalom, Absalom!* in the next chapter. The apocalyptist describes the broad strokes of history by which human beings are moved. Novelists who employ the images and narrative perspectives of apocalypse are likely, therefore, to focus less on the psychological interaction of their characters than on the complex historical and/or cosmic forces in whose cross-currents those characters are caught. Their awareness of the historical forces conditioning and constraining individual existence suggests a dissenting perspective: Novelists who use apocalyptic elements, like the biblical apocalyptists, are often critical of present political, social, spiritual practices, and their fiction enter-

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42691-6 - Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction
Lois Parkinson Zamora
Excerpt
More information

tains the means to oppose and overcome them. They are also concerned to create comprehensive fictions of historical order, universal dramas that moralize judgments of isolated events and individual behavior. And they will often address, in their own narrative structures, the means by which to narrate history, a question as essential to apocalypse as the nature of history itself.

The writers whom I will discuss here correspond in a variety of ways to these generalizations. They use the historical vision and narrative forms of apocalypse to explore the relationship of the individual, the community, and the novel itself to the processes of history. In some cases, they are less explicitly interested in biblical apocalypse than in their own visions of the end of the world. But generally, there is a strong metaphoric association in their novels between their own apocalyptic visions and the conventions of the biblical mode. I will, therefore, be proposing implicitly throughout my study that apocalypse functions in these novels as what Mikhail Bakhtin has called the chronotope, that "élément privilegié" of the literary work which is "la condensation et la concrétisation des indices du temps – temps de la vie humaine, temps historique, dans différents secteurs de l'espace."[5] I will argue that apocalypse is the chronotope of these novels, their organizing principle and their figurative center. It is what makes time visible in them and determines their relation to historical reality.

I.

I will begin to make these generalizations specific and relevant with a discussion of the fiction of Gabriel García Márquez in the chapter which follows. García Márquez employs the dissenting perspective of apocalypse to criticize political and social structures, and the eschatological perspective of apocalypse to comment upon the structure of time. Though his novels differ markedly from one another, they are all meditations on the nature of duration, and the ways in which duration ends. In this chapter, I will propose *Absalom, Absalom!,* by William Faulkner, as a model of this apocalyptic narrative stance. Because Faulkner is universally acknowledged as an important precursor of contemporary Latin American fiction, this initial discussion will provide substantial grounds for my subsequent comparative conclusions.

My third chapter is on the fiction of Thomas Pynchon. Like the biblical apocalyptists, Pynchon is concerned with death – of individuals, society, the universe. However, his vision is not of a cataclysmic end, but of gradual loss and disintegration. Pynchon is related to the apocalyptic tradition not by his use of the conventional sense and structure of apocalypse, but by his reaction against them: He explicitly rejects an apocalyptic narrative perspec-

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

Cambridge

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42691-6 - Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction
Lois Parkinson Zamora
Excerpt
More information

tive for one based on the thermodynamic concept of entropy. I juxtapose this chapter on Pynchon's fiction to my discussion of García Márquez's novels because of the striking contrast between these authors. Whereas García Márquez's view of time is organic, Pynchon's is mechanical; if García Márquez's precursors are Faulkner and, through Faulkner, the "vitalist" Henri Bergson, Pynchon's are Henry Adams and, through Adams, the physicists and mathematicians Clausius, Kelvin, Bolzmann, Gibbs, Heisenberg. Although both entropy and apocalypse are metaphors, and only metaphors, by which these novelists describe their characters' relationships to the reality of temporal ends, they are nonetheless important metaphors which convey their novelistic conception of human beings in the world. The promise inherent in the apocalyptic vision, the radical transformation of old worlds into new, is absent in the entropic vision: The apocalyptic tension between the anthropomorphic symbols of good and evil collapses in Pynchon's fiction into a formula for the statistical measurement of molecular probability.

Chapters 4 and 5 are also conceived in relation to each other. Julio Cortázar is concerned with the visionary experience of the artist in his early fiction; and with the visionary experience of the political activist in his later work. In both instances, he depicts the inspired transcendence of the ordinary, invoking the myth of apocalypse as a metaphor for his characters' privileged perspective. In contrast, John Barth's fiction does not embody apocalyptic experience, political or artistic, but rather employs what I call an apocalyptic style. Barth says of this style that it "deliberately exhausts (or tries to exhaust) its possibilities and borders upon its own caricature."[6] Barth displays – like Jorge Luis Borges, but for different reasons, which I will explore briefly – an almost obsessive fascination with narrative endings. Paradoxically, this fascination with endings often manifests itself in elaborate strategies for their subversion or negation. Apocalypse thus becomes for Barth a formal question rather than a philosophical one: Confronted with the baroque realities of the present moment, it is, according to Barth, the "virtuoso," the master of technique, the craftsperson who will be "the chosen remnant of the literary apocalypse." If Barth creates closed narrative endings which send the reader back in circular fashion into the narration, Cortázar creates open narrative structures which multiply potential endings. Both writers present dilemmas which they cannot, and do not want to resolve: They believe neither in answers nor in endings. In their very different ways, each uses the mythic vision and narrative structures of apocalypse to embody this postmodern skepticism about the very possibility of conclusion.

My sixth and seventh chapters discuss the fiction of Walker Percy and Carlos Fuentes. Of the writers whose work I treat in detail in this book,

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42691-6 - Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction
Lois Parkinson Zamora
Excerpt
More information

Percy and Fuentes are the most profoundly versed in philosophies of history, without reference to which no serious discussion of their fiction is possible. For both, a knowledge of mind and a knowledge of culture are based on an understanding of the nature of history.

The avowedly Catholic eschatological point of view in Walker Percy's fiction reflects this author's belief in the original intent of apocalypse as divine revelation. To his orthodox Catholic understanding of apocalypse, Percy adds an existential interpretation based on a number of modern philosophers of history, among them Romano Guardini, Eric Voegelin, and Martin Heidegger. In an essay entitled "Notes for a Novel about the End of the World," Percy expresses his sense of postmodern culture, and the relation of the novel to that culture. The subject of the postmodern novel is a man who has "very nearly come to the end of the line," and the function of this fiction is to avert that end by writing about it.[7] Apocalypse is explicitly invoked in all of Percy's novels, but I will argue that in the Christian existential context of his fiction, the end becomes something present and potential in every moment of his characters' lives. Apocalypse is the symbol and the means of renewal in the present, and the novel, according to Percy, must be the vehicle for this renewal.

Like Percy, Carlos Fuentes is concerned less with an actual end than with an "eternal present" which integrates the past and the future, and which he announces as the subject of his fiction. In *Terra Nostra*, Fuentes's context and concerns are less psychological and metaphysical than Percy's. The larger historical and political patterns of nations are invoked in this monumental investigation of the origins and identities of Mexico, and it is Giambattista Vico whose work provides a complementary structure to apocalyptic historicism. The novel begins in 1999, in the midst of global revolution, but after some thirty pages leaps back into the sixteenth century to what Fuentes calls "the least realized, the most abortive, the most latent and desiring of all histories: that of Spain and Spanish America."[8] Fuentes's novel is a sustained critique of many modes of historical desire. For this reason and others, the title of my chapter on *Terra Nostra* is "Beyond Apocalypse."

My comparative approach will lead me to propose lines running north to south and south to north which may suggest affinity, influence, or the conditions of literary reception. Above all, however, my discussion depends upon the similarities and differences which become apparent when novels from different national and linguistic contexts are juxtaposed, opposed, superimposed. I have chosen to discuss these six novelists in detail because they use the historical vision and narrative forms of apocalypse throughout their work. I will also refer tangentially to a number of other writers who employ apocalyptic imagery or structures in a single novel or story, but I will focus on writers for whom an apocalyptic vision coincides

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42691-6 - Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction
Lois Parkinson Zamora
Excerpt
More information

with and repeatedly expresses their most persistent esthetic and philosophical concerns. I will therefore be referring to the evolution of apocalyptic attitudes in each author's work, a critical perspective which may itself approximate the apocalyptic desire for a comprehensive view of history, in this case, the history of the myth in these writers' work.

The virtual absence of women writers from my study would seem to suggest that apocalyptic modes of conceiving history and narration are less attractive to women than to men. Though such a generalization is problematic, it is undeniable that by far the largest part of contemporary apocalyptic fiction is written by men. There are exceptions, among them Flannery O'Connor and possibly Joan Didion. And although Latin American women writers like Elena Poniatowska, Isabel Allende, Luisa Valenzuela write pointed political fictions, their work is not generally characterized by the use of specifically apocalyptic devices. Is it that the militantly destructive elements of the myth of apocalypse contradict what we traditionally consider to be the female impulse to create, nurture, regenerate? Or is it a question of scale? Perhaps the macrocosmic and totalizing political intent of apocalyptic visions is less compelling for most women writers than psychological relations on a more intimate scale? Such hypotheses are easily assailable because they are based on sexual stereotyping, but I entertain them because they may provide at least a partial explanation for the lack of apocalyptic fiction by women. Furthermore, such antiapocalyptic stereotypes are in fact explicitly dramatized by female characters in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Second Coming*. Carlos Fuentes also engages the decidedly masculine orientation of apocalypse in *Terra Nostra,* not by opposing male and female characters' attitudes toward apocalypse as do García Márquez and Percy, but by integrating apocalyptic visions from mythological sources other than the Judeo-Christian. We will see that these other traditions contain radically different attitudes toward the female role in the cosmic drama of apocalypse, and hence serve to highlight the masculine nature of the Judeo-Christian version of the myth.

My comparative discussion is based on a historical awareness of the shared origins of the United States and Latin America in the mind of Europe, and particularly on an awareness of the apocalyptic aspirations imposed upon the New World by Europeans, beginning with Christopher Columbus. To convey to his royal patrons his conviction that his mission represented the fulfillment of apocalyptic prophecy, Columbus referred in letters and in his diary to passages from Revelation and Isaiah which describe the new heaven and new earth.[9] So he immediately initiated what was to become a perennial imaginative association of America with the promise of apocalyptic historical renewal. It is an association which continues to make itself felt, though often ironically, in the apocalyptic perspectives of the contemporary fiction I will discuss here.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42691-6 - Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction
Lois Parkinson Zamora
Excerpt
More information

In *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World,* John Leddy Phelan writes that apocalyptic optimism pervaded the Age of Discovery in Spain. Explorers, statesmen, and clergy alike viewed the events of geographical exploration and colonization of America as the fulfillment of the prophecies of Revelation – that is, as necessary prerequisites to the end of the world.[10] Phelan discusses Spain's sense of its messianic historical mission, and the essential role of the New World's territory and inhabitants in that mission. No colonial empire has ever been built upon such an extensive philosophical and theological foundation as that empire the Spaniards created for themselves in the New World, although Phelan notes that a century later, the Puritans settling North America were also impelled by theological visions of a new heaven and new earth. If the Messiah–Emperor myth of the Middle Ages was embraced by Spain and imposed upon the Spanish New World in the sixteenth century, it was Martin Luther's apocalyptic interpretation of the Reformation that was accepted by the Puritans in England and the English New World in the seventeenth century. The possibility of achieving in the future the primal unity that was lost in the past, when Adam and Eve sinned and were separated from God, seemed to inhere in the virgin territory of America.[11]

Not only could the geographical plenitude necessary to the world's end be achieved thanks to the New World, but also the demographic plenitude. The native inhabitants of America were generally understood to be the lost tribes described in Rev. 7:4–9, who were prophesied to reappear before the Last Judgment. Linked to this prophecy was another, found throughout the apocalyptic literature of the time, that the Jews would be converted as the end of the world approached. If the Indians were the lost tribes of Israel, and if they were converted, both prophecies would be fulfilled at once and the kingdom of God might be initiated. Arguments forwarded in support of the Jewish identity of the Indians were that the Indians knew of the universal deluge as well as of a promised savior, ideas both considered to be of Hebraic origin. It was reasoned that Quezalcoatl, the awaited Aztec god, was actually the Messiah that the Jews expected when they rebelled against Roman rule in 66–70 of the Christian era.[12] So the conquest of the Aztec empire immediately began to accrue levels of apocalyptic significance. Phelan notes that the idea of the Jewish descent of the Indians also appealed to the Puritans settling North America: In fact, he asserts, it is on this very point that the theology of Protestantism meets that of Spanish Catholicism during the "Age of Discovery."

For the Puritans in New England in the seventeenth century, the literal interpretation of Revelation located the site of the new heaven and earth in America. The earliest Puritan texts attest to constant attempts to unite apocalyptic theology and American history: The New World is directly

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

Cambridge

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42691-6 - Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction
Lois Parkinson Zamora
Excerpt
More information

associated with the culmination of history.[13] It is, however, a Spanish Franciscan, Gerónimo de Mendieta, who provides perhaps the most articulate expression of the mystical interpretation of America as the necessary prerequisite for God's apocalyptic plan. Mendieta arrived in what is now Mexico in the middle of the sixteenth century, and became one of the great chroniclers of the age. He wrote long interpretations such as those I have mentioned on the role of the Native Americans in bringing history to its culmination, and he, like the Puritans, applied the symbolic historical scheme of Revelation to the specific history of the New World. Referring to the work of conversion, he writes, "God has been calling all the peoples of the earth to hasten to prepare themselves to enter and to enjoy that everlasting feast that will be endless. This vocation of God shall not cease until the number of predestined is reached, which according to the vision of St. John must include all nations, all languages and all peoples."[14] In Mendieta's redundancy – "the everlasting feast that will be endless" – we sense the apocalyptic ardor invested in the colonization and conversion of the New World. And we will see, particularly in Carlos Fuentes's fiction, the dramatized extension of that ardor, an irony set in the very foundations of America: It is humanity's fate to dream of heaven and create hell.

The initial attractions of America were hardly singular, and the apocalyptic potential of the New World was seen not only in spiritual terms but also in material ones. The New Jerusalem envisioned by the Franciscans had its physical analogue in Hispanic America in the golden city of El Dorado. For the majority of laypersons who came to New Spain and for many of the clerics as well, America represented the illusion, almost always false, of wealth. And the Puritans were attracted to North America 100 years later not only by the promise of spiritual renewal but also by the promise of political and institutional freedom. We are reminded to this day of these various attractions and their continuing allure in the motto printed on every dollar bill – *Novus Ordo Seclorum,* A New World Order.

I will explicitly address these early apocalyptic interpretations of America only in Carlos Fuentes's *Terra Nostra* and Walker Percy's *The Second Coming;* however, I consider them to be the implicit point of departure and the basis for my comparative discussion generally, as they are for many of the novelistic attitudes and perspectives that I will explore. I do not attempt here to survey historically the apocalyptic tradition in U.S. and Latin American literature, but rather to suggest the ways in which selected contemporary novels may recognize and perpetuate that tradition.[15] These novels remind us that Americans on both continents have inherited a sense of the eschatological significance of their historical and national destiny.[16] They make us conscious that it is against the initial apocalyptic promise of America that we often measure our present and assess our future.

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org

CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-42691-6 - Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction
Lois Parkinson Zamora
Excerpt
More information

II.

Before I pursue the apocalyptic elements in particular works of fiction, I want to trace the myth back to its historical and scriptural origins. I will begin by reiterating what apocalypse is *not*, so as to dispense quickly with a simplistic but common usage of the word. Apocalypse is *not* merely a synonym for disaster or cataclysm or chaos. It is, in fact, a synonym for "revelation," and if the Judeo-Christian revelation of the end of history includes – indeed, catalogues – disasters, it also envisions a millennial order which represents the potential antithesis to the undeniable abuses of human history. While it is true that an acute sense of temporal disruption and disequilibrium is the source of, and is always integral to, apocalyptic thinking and narration, so is the conviction that historical crisis will have the cleansing effect of radical renewal. In Revelation, John, exiled by the authority of the Roman Empire, responds to God's injunction to "Write the things which thou hast seen, the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter" (Rev. 1:19). "The things which are" require of the disenfranchised narrator a lurid description of evil in the world; however, his description of "the things which shall be hereafter" is quite something else. It is John's purpose, as it is the purpose of the Hebrew apocalyptists in Isaiah and Daniel and numerous other pseudepigraphic apocalyptic texts,[17] to convey God's promise that justice will shortly prevail and that those suffering persecution for their religious beliefs will be vindicated. We sense the universal and perennial appeal of that promise: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new'" (Rev. 21:4–5). Apocalypse sets tribulation against triumph and defines suffering in terms of transcendence.

The word itself originally derives from the Greek word *apokálypsis*, to uncover, reveal, disclose (the root is *kalypto*, to cover or conceal, and is familiar to us in the name of the nymph Calypso, who hides Odysseus for seven years.) Apocalypse is eschatological in nature (the root in this case is *eschatos*, furthest or uttermost); it is concerned with final things, with the end of the present age and with the age to follow. (Like apocalypse, the Greek word for truth, *aletheia*, begins with the negative particle: The etymology of both words suggests that essences must be unveiled and deciphered by the perceiving, narrating consciousness.) As a mode of historical thought and a literary form, apocalypse developed out of the Hebrew prophetic tradition in response to a worsening political situation.[18] With the growth of the great empires of Persia, Greece, Rome, and the consequent political powerlessness of the Hebrew people, the contradiction between prophetic ideals and the actual experience of the nation became more and

© in this web service Cambridge University Press www.cambridge.org