

Apocalypse Memories and the Continuing Relevance of Apocalyptic Literature in the Modern World

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Introduction

The term “apocalypse” often brings to mind images of a catastrophic event that involves the destruction of mankind and our environment. In such imaginings, the apocalypse is often seen as a combination of natural and unnatural forces. The way we treat our planet and its inhabitants as we face greater climate change, wars and recover from a pandemic has generated apocalyptic discourse. Fiction reveals these possibilities of an apocalyptic world we might one day face. Thus “we are made to see the world, our lives, our blinding reality, with new eyes” (Weaver 175).

Indeed, the word “apocalypse” comes from Classical Greek and is a combination of the word “apo” meaning “off/away” and “kalputein” meaning “to cover.” Apocalypse therefore means: to take the cover off, to reveal or unveil. The word entered Western popular imagination as the title of the last book of the bible; St John’s Apocalypse otherwise known as the *Book of Revelation*. In the Bible, the end of the world reveals God’s plan and purpose for the universe. Thus the term apocalypse often refers to a specific sort of revelation that concerns eschatological events or an interaction with the divine. It is important to note that Apocalyptic literature did not begin with St John however and in the Hellenistic period, three centuries before the *Book of Revelation* was written, it flourished. In Judaism, it emerged as the Sibylline Oracles and even made its way into the Torah as the *Book of Daniel*.

Pondering the nature of the apocalypse and its literary genre led me to ask the following questions: why are we still inspired by eschatological texts in modern literature? What is the meaning of the apocalypse and how is it present in fiction? How and why do some fantasy texts include the role of a Christ-like figure? If the apocalypse is heaven-sent, do we fight it or do we rejoice? In part one, I will cover *The Sense of an Ending* by Frank Kermode and how the apocalyptic genre follows a literary evolution that both allows for change and reveals something constant about human nature. In the second part, I dive into how modern literature is inspired by eschatological

texts and how it portrays the role of the Messiah. Finally, I will explore different genres, especially the spoofy-teen-horror genre seen in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and how it explores the apocalypse. Using the novel *Apocalypse Memories* by Laura J. Burns and Melinda Metz (based on the popular TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) as a case study while also drawing links to other popular modern fantasy texts I will examine the questions above. I aim to show that the spoof-horror-gothic genre can mix with teen adventure fiction to explore the ancient religious concept of the apocalypse and illustrate that the timeless fascination for apocalypse reveals something fundamental about human nature.

Indeed, *Apocalypse Memories* makes it clear that it draws on the *Book of Revelation* for inspiration as Buffy faces the Archangel Michael who has been awakened to unleash thirteen events onto the world eventually causing the apocalypse. The *Book of Revelation*, written in 100 AD by St. John Patmos, provided many of the tropes, images, and themes that we see in modern apocalyptic literature (Weiss 1). In *Apocalypse Memories* we are faced with the same dichotomies as in the *Book of Revelation*. There is light against darkness, angelic against demonic. In *Apocalypse Memories* these are represented by the Archangel Michael and vampires and demons. The angel also appears differently to demons and humans and the novel teaches the reader that this can be seen in Judaism or Buddhism as a “prophecy of the end time” (Burns and Metz 84).

The horrors of the *Book of Revelation* are seen as the fulfilment of God’s plan. The end becomes a good thing. In *Apocalypse Memories* Buffy and her friends are made to reckon with this idea pondering that if Michael is sent by God the apocalypse ought not to be stopped. “Well, I don’t know that the apocalypse itself can be described as good... But the forces bringing it about are good. This isn’t an untimely unnatural destruction” (Burns and Metz 159).

In a society that has largely lost faith, the apocalypse no longer means God’s revelation but rather invokes ideas of the end of everything. This too is reflected in *Apocalypse Memories* as Buffy wonders whether to fight or let it all end. Perhaps our fear and need for reassurance is behind our continued fascination with apocalyptic literature. This question too I shall try to answer throughout.

The Sense of an Ending: Kermode and Buffy, an unlikely pair

One of the most important works of literary scholarship on the apocalypse and the “End” as a genre is Frank Kermode’s *The Sense of an Ending*. In the text, he quotes St Augustine: “Who can deny that things to come are not yet? Yet already there is in the mind an expectation of things to come” (Kermode 34). He does so to illustrate that endings are imagined by people, that they are not demonstrably, historically true but they do nonetheless exist for those who believe them, they are “in the mind.” This brings to mind a passage from J. K. Rowling’s *The Deathly Hallows*: “Of

course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" (Rowling 591). Perhaps the most famous of all young adult fantasy series, Rowling's work figures an eponymous protagonist who can be compared to Christ in their sacrifice, death and rebirth to tackle the forces of darkness. Such literary inventions of the end would no doubt have caused St Augustine to express his incredulity, as he did about the eschatological tales of his time in his *City of God*: "For myself, I am astonished at the great presumption of those who venture such guesses" (20.10). So we see that writing on the apocalypse has come in many forms for a long time and even one as erudite as St Augustine struggled to reconcile the intellectual truth and outlandish nature of many of these tales.

Building on St Augustine's idea Kermode then notes that Nietzsche argued that the veracity, or lack thereof, of an opinion is not relevant to its power to move people to action (Kermode 37). In *Apocalypse Memories* it is Michael's opinion that bringing about the apocalypse would be a good thing; therefore he believes that it ought to happen. The text plays with this idea cleverly: the signal that starts the apocalypse is a wolf in sheep's clothing, symbolising false prophets in the Bible (Matthew 7:15). Indeed, the sign will be a false prophecy for that apocalypse will never come. By the end of the book, the spell that created the wolf is undone, the past rewritten and the apocalyptic events never occurred. Hence the "memory" of *Apocalypse Memories*. Before averting the apocalypse, Buffy tried to explain that the wolf in sheep's clothing could not be the sign that foreshadowed the end for it was an accident. Michael retorts: "It doesn't matter where the sign came from [...] only that it came" (Burns and Metz 147). Michael trusts in the end, that the end will justify the means, he therefore intends to take what is "in his mind" and impose it on the world.

Kermode demonstrates, with macabre simplicity, how dangerous such thinking can be by reminding the reader how the Nazi's opinion of the Jews, not couched in any truth, led to the Holocaust (Kermode 38). While relating a piece of young adult fiction to a discussion of the Holocaust might seem woefully inadequate this essay needs to note that the fundamentals are the same; we imagine our own apocalypse and by acting as if our opinions are fact create real-world events and consequences.

Here we begin to see what it is about the apocalypse as a genre that means it can be adapted into teen fantasy fiction. Kermode notes that the history of literature is linked to that of the education of the public which is "cultivated but not necessarily learned," referencing Auerbach's division of "la cour et la ville" (Kermode 117). While keeping with this dichotomy, *Apocalypse Memories* is very much de "ville" it nonetheless belongs to a long tradition of apocalyptic literature. Indeed it very self-consciously draws from Christian eschatological literature, as seen above (amongst other religious traditions). Kermode himself argues that the Christian paradigm provides

such powerful “structural and linguistic features” that even Samuel Beckett’s texts can be deciphered via them (Kermode 116). Therefore, it makes sense that Christian paradigms could structure a much more accessible text. Indeed, *Apocalypse Memories* reflects the *Book of Revelation* by having the angel Michael serve as the agent of apocalypse and pouring seven bowls of destruction on the earth (John 16:1–21).

Furthermore, the literary nature of the *Book of Revelation* makes it easier to adapt into a modern fantasy text. It undermines “the non-violent ethic of the synoptic gospels” and draws on the Roman imagery of gladiatorial games (Armstrong 205). In *Revelation* (19:11–16) the Lamb is no longer the vulnerable lamb but a violent conqueror who enjoys a Roman Triumph his cloak soaked with blood. Indeed, to this day Greek and Russian Orthodox churches do not read the *Book of Revelation* considering it to be too violent and in contradiction of the Kenotic tradition (Armstrong 206). So, for some Christians, the *Book of Revelation* remains non-canonical. Perhaps it is best defined as a work of fiction?

This idea leads us back to Kermode who states that fictions belong to the category of the “consciously false” and thus fictions blur into myths “whenever they are not consciously held to be fictive” (Kermode 39–40). Therefore when Kermode writes “having compared the novel-reader with an infant and a primitive, one can go further and compare him with a psychopath; and this I shall shortly be doing,” we must argue that Kermode goes too far (Kermode 50). Not only in his hyperbolic language but also in his meaning does he err. For while the reader does indeed allow themselves to be temporarily charmed, according to Kermode’s own argument they retain their conscience so long as they recall the fictiveness of what they read.

Apocalypse Memories has no pretensions to mythological status. Indeed it is very self-consciously aware of the boundary between myth and fiction and plays with it. When Buffy demands to know who ordained the apocalypse Michael responds that the being has many names: “God, destiny, Buddha, fate, Mother Earth, higher power, Krishna, The Powers That Be, greater good, the Force” and says the last of those with a smile, indicating the joke (Burns and Metz 73). The reference to Star Wars, another young adult fiction that focuses on one person chosen by a power beyond mankind to bring justice, brings to mind the boundary between myth and fiction of which Kermode speaks so eloquently.

Michael’s list, however, is mostly comprised of references to faiths and texts which Kermode would refer to as myths. Indeed, comparative mythology is important in *Apocalypse Memories* in the form of meta-criticism as we have the trope of the librarian and academic character Giles (Buffy’s mentor) who talks at length about the various interpretations of angels and apocalypses found in many faiths. Therefore we have a text that draws on the tradition of apocalyptic literature

deliberately referencing these traditions to make sense of them. Indeed, Giles tells his students and thus the reader, that in popular culture angels come from Christian art which in turn comes from Judaism itself deriving angels from Zoroastrianism or the Classical Greeks (Burns and Metz 83). The character builds on this by comparing Judaeo-Christian angels to Greek daimons, Arabic djinn and similar beings stressing that they carry messages from the divine to mortals. He further compares the Judeo-Christian Messiah to the Buddhist Metteyya and notes that the idea of apocalypse stretches from Ancient Persia to modern times (Burns and Metz 84–85).

So with the examples cited above we see how a popular culture text such as *Apocalypse Memories* can serve to educate its reader on the ubiquity of eschatological myths. In doing so it brings to mind Kermode's argument on the nature of man and the creation of narratives. Indeed, he writes that we "need to remember not only that we have what Bergson called a function fabulatrice, but that we do set ourselves problems of the kind that would presumably not arise as a matter of simple biological necessity" (Kermode 41). By this he means that man has "in the mind," to return to St Augustine, stories beyond that which are needed for physical survival. Stories that we use to make sense of our lives and imagination. Kermode builds on this taking a clock as the Platonic Ideal of a story: "The clock's tick-tock I take to be a model of what we call a plot, an organization that humanizes time by giving it form [...] Tick is a humble genesis, tock a feeble apocalypse" (Kermode 45). Time passes for everyone, so everyone knows that the end is coming. Indeed, "Kermode suggests that all narratives are in some sense apocalyptic" for all stories must end (Pitetti 438). *Apocalypse Memories*, despite being a work of popular culture proves Kermode's sophisticated idea by highlighting the importance that so many cultures have given to the apocalypse, the end.

It has been argued that "literary narratives such as those told in novels provide small-scale, implicit models of the finite and comprehensible history explicitly described in apocalyptic religious writings," and that fiction now fulfils this role (Pitetti 438). Therefore, according to Pitetti, *Apocalypse Memories*, with its deliberate focus on endings embodies Kermode's ideas.

Kermode, however, does not limit himself to grand ideas about the fundamental nature of stories and endings but also enquires into the personal motivations for storytelling. Indeed, he writes that fiction is a "means to personal freedom or perhaps simply to personal comfort" (Kermode 35) and argues that it is something that helps us to make sense of and navigate our world. *Apocalypse Memories*, particularly because it is a piece of outlandish, spoofy, young adult fantasy – all the factors which might encourage one to dismiss it as a quarry of intellectual endeavour – illustrates this point well. Buffy, the character and fictional universe, has long been held up as an icon of modern feminism: the pretty blonde who causes the monsters to run scared

flips the paradigm. This particular book, via its multiculturalism in highlighting the similarities between religions, adds to this sense of modernity and changing cultural mores. Kermode's "personal freedom" here finds a home in religious tolerance and openness. Indeed, the authors manage to make the apocalypse seem like a climate-conscious choice. Buffy asks Michael whether the end of the world means "A new planet [...] Cause that could be good. We've sort of made a mess of what we've got" (Burns and Metz 74). Here we see on display Kermode's "personal comfort" for the climate-conscious young adults to whom the book is aimed.

Indeed, he writes that texts and ideas that talk of crisis and tradition "can be studied in historical depth. We can think of them as fictions, as useful" (Kermode 103). So we see that Kermode's interest is not only in what unites human stories over the millennia but what continues to give them renewed vitality. In this sense studying a piece of contemporaneous popular culture illuminates much beyond itself. Furthermore, Kermode warns that if we treat apocalyptic ideas or texts as more than products of their time we risk being irrational or worse. He is part of the generation traumatised by World War Two and the Holocaust and, for a man of letters such as him, how many brilliant authors were seduced by the apocalyptic ideas of Nazism. Indeed, he continues his analysis of the limitations of imagination without kindness, sympathy or even empirical data via an exposition of Nazi apologists amongst great writers such as Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis and T. S. Elliot (Kermode 110–112). This is why, we believe, Kermode insists on individuality and reinterpretation. Returning to the historical nature of the *Book of Revelation*, it is crucial to remember that St John was a Jewish convert and drew on his elder's contemporaneous apocalyptic literature. He wrote, it is believed, just after the Jewish War of AD 70 (*Revelations* 11:1–3 hints at this) and was influenced by Judaic texts such as the Sibylline Oracles. Those texts, at times, referred to Nero as does St John (*Revelations* 13) who sees Nero as an agent of Satan. The famous "666" draws upon manifests "gematria," an old Jewish mystic concept. If we transliterate Nero Caesar from Hebrew (qsr nrwn "Neron Caesar") into Greek or from Hebrew into Latin we arrive at that number. So we see that, from the start, the apocalyptic literature has built on previous texts and is tied to the historical period it emerges from (Lefebure 77–81).

Therefore, while we doubt that Kermode would have enjoyed the writing style and spoofy, over-the-top action of *Apocalypse Memories*, we believe that he would have appreciated the text's dedication to tradition, diversity and its insistence on choice. The text does this not only by highlighting the various religious traditions one can choose from but also by stressing that one can decide how to react to the apocalypse and the idea of the end. Indeed, the angel Michael's appearance has a varied impact on the characters in the novel: "He looks the same. People just interpret him differently" notes one character. Another retorts: "It's the apocalypse. We fight it.

Discussion over” (Burns and Metz 85). So we see that there are even various interpretations as to whether interpreting what the apocalypse means is worthwhile. Many characters ask the philosophical, theological question: do you fight the divinely ordained apocalypse? Indeed, *Apocalypse Memories* (Burns and Metz 74) explains to its reader the term apocalypse is Greek for revelation and implies divine knowledge. However, other characters are more prosaic and see the end of the world as something to be averted, no matter who or what ordained it.

The text pushes us to ask; why do we fight when we know something better is coming afterwards? Within the world of Buffy she had died, gone to heaven and been reborn to fight (this Christ-like parallel is explored in more detail below). Her rebirth is painful and traumatising as earth pales in comparison to heaven. Therefore, when Michael asks Buffy why she fights she responds, “I learned that I want to live. That life is worthwhile even when it really sucks” (Burns and Metz 214). So we see that *Apocalypse Memories* forces us to confront the value of the end and compare it to the price of continuing. Thus this piece of young adult fantasy combines Kermode’s ideas of apocalypse as a defining feature of human imagination (Pitetti 438) and of endings as deeply personal and helpful (Kermode 35).

The reader of *Apocalypse Memories* is reminded that at the end of season five of the series, Buffy was told “Death is her gift” (“The Gift” 5.22) by a spiritual appearance of the very first Slayer. Buffy, having taken this idea to heart will sacrifice herself at the end of the season to save her little sister. However, her end is undone and she is pushed back onto her mortal coil. Despite the trauma, as seen above, she determines that she does not want to end.

Death is represented in different ways throughout the series and does not always come as a gift. When dealing with the undead such as vampires death is no longer final as it is in the real world. From the beginning of the storyline, Buffy stands face to face with constant death as it is her destiny to slay the demons in her path. When her vampire boyfriend loses his soul and starts acting on his vampire instincts, Buffy is for the first time forced to confront a meaningful death, that of her loved one. Out of duty, she kills Angel though he eventually comes back to life. Death in Buffy is supernatural, far away from the harsh reality of the real world where death is a final thing. Indeed, when death finally becomes irreversible it is because it comes as a real-life sickness. Buffy’s mum dies of an aneurysm in season five, this is the first time the characters have to stand face to face with a final goodbye.

The other side of this equation is that death caused by a Slayer can also be argued to be a gift. This is particularly true when it concerns vampires, as their soul is torn between life and death. When a vampire is killed their soul becomes one and whole in death (Abalea 3). Therefore, the

Slayer provides death as a gift as well. As the famous poet said, “No more let life divide what death can join together” (Shelley Stanza 53).

So death might become a gift. This may sound peculiar in a culture whose aim seems increasingly to extend life for as long as possible. Indeed, “the association of Death with something as positive as a gift, something willingly bestowed to another person as a token of gratitude or attachment, is likely to be viewed as either odd or tragically cruel by a 20th-century Western mind.” (Abalea 1). Therefore, the view in *Buffy*, the TV series and *Apocalypse Memories* death as a gift for a life of defending the forces of good resembles a Judeo-Christian view of the afterlife as good deeds on earth are rewarded (Abalea 13).

In fact, the apocalypse could be alluring and could seem like a comfort to the ones who know little but suffering: “Once evil is defined and destroyed, then comes the utopia. The apocalypse does not mean the end for all; it the end of Evil and the final glorious triumph of Good” (Joyce 50). This touches on marginalized apocalyptic groups who are finding a purpose within the belief of a nearing apocalypse and having people with the same belief around them. For some people, the apocalypse offers an ending to life and all its struggles. *Buffy* touches on this when Michael refers to when she died: “‘You died,’ he said, ‘So you should know that it’s nothing to be afraid of.’ ‘It was a wonderful place,’ *Buffy* agreed” (Burns and Metz 214). All that *Buffy* has known is death, inflicting it on others and going through it herself. Therefore, one final, true end could become a reward for a Slayer. All the good they have done on Earth is rewarded with Heavenly rest away from the violent life of a Slayer and they become a messianic figure.

To conclude our discussion on Kermode and *Apocalypse Memories* we return to the idea that “fiction of the end is like infinity plus one and imaginary numbers in mathematics, something we know does not exist, but which helps us to make sense of and to move in the world” (Kermode 37). This fits well with *Apocalypse Memories*. Indeed, the very title of the book hints at this fact by containing the word “memory.” A memory is in the past, it is finished, and complete and may hint at the future but is not truly real. It has no existence other than “in the mind” to circle back to St Augustine. This reminds the reader of the fact that the apocalypse in this book is heralded by a wolf in sheep’s clothing, a metaphor for false prophets (Matthew 7.15). As the apocalypse is undone the characters will remember it but no one else in their fictional universe will. Therefore the reader takes the place of the character in remembering a story that they know to be fiction, nothing more but, crucially, nothing less.

Literary messiahs

It is because they bring us self-consciously into the world of fictional endings that the authors of *Apocalypse Memories* can flirt, as we have seen above, with mythical narratives and build parallels between their secular protagonist and the mythical, religious Christ figure. Indeed, it has long been argued that Buffy, like many other characters such as Harry Potter (and others we explore below) fits into the literary tradition of the Christ figure.

According to Cook, writing about Anton Karl Kozlovic and his article “The Structural Characteristic of the Cinematic Christ-figure,” there are twenty-five characteristics that define Christ figures. Buffy fulfils many of these characteristics or qualities. Firstly she is the tangible embodiment of an otherworldly force, she is physically present in our world and affects it as such. Secondly, she is central to the story in much the same way that Christ is central to the New Testament’s story in all the Apostle’s accounts. Thirdly, Buffy resembles Christ in being an outsider for she is not seen as “popular” at her school. A fourth link between Buffy and Christ is equally prosaic, her financial situation. It has been noted that during Jesus’ time on earth, people were desperate for loans as is noted by the ancient historian Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities* 18.36–38 (White 139). Buffy fits into this mould as she is begging for a mortgage following her mother’s death and is rejected by the government which does not care for little people. In this too she is like the humble Christ who advocates for the poor (Cook 23).

The eleventh characteristic mentioned by Cook, and the fifth resemblance we point out, is that the point prophet that accompanies Jesus can be mirrored in the figure of Giles. Throughout the series and in the book Giles functions as a father figure and guide for Buffy and her friends. Giles resembles John the Baptist as he trains Buffy and guides her in her mission. Giles also possesses knowledge of ancient texts and myths which helps him in his role as a guide (Cook 23). This can also be seen as a clever piece of metatextuality as Giles is the character via whom the authors point out the long tradition of apocalyptic literature their book draws on and adds to which recalls our discussion of Kermode above.

A sixth resemblance is that she too is “divinely sourced” as the voiceover at the beginning of earlier episodes of the TV show makes clear. “In every generation, there is a chosen one: one girl in all the world. She alone will stand against vampires, the demons, and the forces of darkness. She is the Slayer” (Cook 22). The Christological symbolism of standing against demons and darkness recalls Jesus’ role within the *Book of Revelation* in which he fights Satan and his hordes. Building on this idea we return to the fact that the *Book of Revelation* contains much detailed, spectacular violence which brings to mind the gladiatorial games (Stratton 45–76). As such Buffy, in her role as an over-the-top demon killer is not too far from certain biblical narratives.

Buffy's similarities to Christ already appear in the first season of the show when she goes against an ancient vampire called the Master who wants to unleash an apocalypse on Earth. This raises the idea, which we explore below, that Buffy faces villains that parallel the anti-Christ, a role that Michael might well fulfill in *Apocalypse Memories* (Burns and Metz 84). Giles reveals a prophecy to Buffy saying that she must die to stop the Master. Buffy responds with "I don't care. Giles, I'm sixteen years old. I don't wanna die" ("Prophecy Girl" 1.12). This relates to the moment Jesus prays in Gethsemane: "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want" (Cook 25). Buffy, like the Christ, eventually accepts that her fate is to stop the apocalypse and thus goes against the Master. Buffy is killed before being resuscitated by her friend Xander and thereafter she kills the Master and stops the apocalypse, the first of the many she will face. A few seasons later, Buffy sacrifices herself once more for the sake of her little sister. This voluntary sacrifice, which mirrors Jesus' death for the sins of man, is the fifteenth characteristic noted by Kozlovic. In performing this sacrifice Buffy jumps to her death doing a cruciform pose which means that she also fulfils the seventeenth of Kozlovic's characteristics. During this scene, a voiceover plays with Buffy saying "Giles, give my love to my friends. You have to take care of them now. You have to take care of each other. You have to be strong." This echoes Christ's last words to his mother and to John which are spoken to ensure that he will take care of Mary (Cook 27). All of this is explicitly referred to in *Apocalypse Memories*, a book whose very title recalls Buffy's past adventures (Burns and Metz 200, 214–15).

Returning to Buffy's second sacrifice we note that the show purposefully builds many parallels between Buffy and Christ. As noted above, when she jumps Buffy extends her arms to create a cruciform, perhaps the most famous symbol of Christianity since the Roman Empire (Hengel 76). Furthermore, Buffy's body, lifted into an ethereal storm will be broken and torn. For St Peter, the revelation, written as apocalypse in Greek, is the vision of Christ's broken body lifted by God to the highest place of heaven (Armstrong 198). This idea of a suffering Messiah suffuses the Bible with Luke (24:15) writing that God "ordained that the Christ would suffer and so enter into his glory." Even the visuals of Buffy's sacrifice are remarkably similar to Christ's. All three synoptic gospels – Mark, Matthew and Luke – describe an event during which three of Jesus' disciples – James, John and Peter – saw Christ blazing with divine light. Even his clothing became white as light according to the Bible (Hurtado 200). Buffy's body is shown surrounded by a brilliant white light and she is even dressed in a white top recalling the Biblical passages.

Finally, just as Buffy is both mortal and divinely chosen (Burns and Metz 73), so Christ, in early Christianity at least, was torn between being the Son of Man and the Son of God (Armstrong

197). To strike a balance between Christ's dual natures some early Christians labeled him the anointed one just as Buffy is the Chosen one.

So we see that the links drawn between Buffy and Christ are unlikely to be accidental. However, if they are, it reinforces the point we made earlier about the Biblical narrative forming a schema to which modern interpretations of apocalyptic literature can refer. *Apocalypse Memories*, as noted above, plays on these ideas by referencing Biblical texts and reminding the reader that stories of the apocalypse are common throughout cultures.

In *Apocalypse Memories*, Archangel Michael explains to Buffy how her destiny as the Chosen One means that she is one of the greatest forces of good in the world. Because of this, she is immune to apocalyptic pests such as the swarm of bees. Michael explains: "Buffy, you're a kind of angel too. You were chosen to do a job and you've done it superbly. Your job is done now, but you are still the Chosen One. Nothing that will happen in this apocalypse will harm you. You are protected" (Burns and Metz 200). Indeed, Buffy is told that she, alone amongst mortals, will survive the apocalypse. The end of the world does not need to mean her end. However, as we examined above, Buffy rejects that idea declaring that she wants to live. Having already faced the end she declares that she prefers the Tick to the Tock (Kermode 45).

Buffy is hardly the only Christ Figure in modern young adult fiction. As we touched upon in our discussion of Kermode's oeuvre a text such as *Apocalypse Memories* can tell us a lot about why people write and read about endings and sacrifice by fitting and adding to a long tradition of such texts.

Indeed, it has been argued that modern fiction, both literature and film, has taken over the function of myth to express and convey archetypes. Certain academics have argued that this is automatic with the Christ figure having become an archetype of the collective unconscious in Carl Jung's sense (Eliade 21–39). In this notion, Christ figures in modern texts are a mirror image of Christ types in the Old Testament or myths (Downing 13–27). However, we are more convinced that it is rather very self-referential, as in *Apocalypse Memories*, where the text reminds the reader of the tradition of eschatological myths.

Here we find a tradition within a tradition – modern texts that consciously refer to Biblical tales of ending and rebirth. There is a group of writers called the Inklings, of whom Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Charles Williams are the most famous, who can be seen as the fathers of this tradition. Known for their works of fiction these writers often include Christ figures in their tales such as the god of the mountain in *Till We Have Faces* (Lewis), Aslan from *The Chronicles of Narnia* (Lewis) and Frodo or Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien). This is why they have been seen as the precursor of texts such as Rowling's *Harry Potter* (de Moffarts 77) and we argue *Apocalypse Memories*.

As in *Apocalypse Memories*, the parallels to the Bible, Christ and the apocalypse are not subtle. For example “Most obviously the beginning of Narnia in *The Magician’s Nephew* allegorizes the beginning of the world in Genesis; [Aslan’s] murder in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* allegorizes Christ’s passion; and the final scenes in *The Last Battle* are allegorical of Judgment Day” (Karthick 1212).

The Last Battle is the final book in *The Chronicles of Narnia* and brings forth an approaching apocalypse. Lewis clearly refers to *The Book of Revelation* and the allegory to Judgment Day. Aslan’s death on the stone table and his resurrection allude to the life of Jesus Christ and the Armageddon in *The Last Battle* is followed by events foreshadowing the Biblical apocalypse (Zegarlińska 152). As in *Apocalypse Memories*, the world is falling apart. The earth is shaking, and Aslan is commencing the destruction of the world. “Father Time raises from his sleep and blows a giant horn emitting the sound which is ‘high and terrible, yet of a strange deadly beauty’” (Zegarlińska 154). In *Apocalypse Memories* we have Archangel Michael waking up from his sleep as he is called to bring about the apocalypse. “‘I’ve been asleep,’ he said. [...] ‘And now that I’m finally free in the world, I have to bring it to an end’” (Burns and Metz 193).

Harry Potter too can be seen as a Christ figure, in the final book, he freely accepts death to save his world. Furthermore, as in *Apocalypse Memories*, there are direct references to Biblical texts. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, Harry finds on his parents’ tombstone the inscription “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” lifted from 1 Corinthians (15:26). So we see that *Apocalypse Memories* draws not only on the religious tradition of eschatological texts and messiahs but also on modern texts that had previously drawn on said texts. It is but a link in Kermode’s chain of literary evolution.

Not only does *Apocalypse Memories* reference messiahs it also tackles their opposite, false prophets. In this too it draws upon both the tradition of religious texts but also modern works of fiction which have been inspired by said texts.

As mentioned above, in *Apocalypse Memories* Michael and thus the apocalypse is summoned by the apparition of a wolf in sheep’s clothing, the symbol for a false prophet (Burns and Metz 147). We argued above that since the apocalypse does not come, the “false prophet” here could be a symbol itself which tricks us. However, a wolf in sheep’s clothing is also a known idiom meaning “a person with a pleasant and friendly appearance that hides the fact that they are evil” (“A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing”). This description could be a nod to Michael whose physical description is viewed differently to each character in *Apocalypse Memories*.

But he doesn’t appear different, Willow argued. He looks the same to everyone. Anya, didn’t you say you saw Michael with blond hair and blue

eyes? Yes, Anya said, shuddering. He was horrible. As Giles explains the concept of judgment he says; the idea that this particular angel appears as one thing to the good another to the wicked... it's well, it's a prophecy of the end time (Burns and Metz 84).

Even though Michael's appearance to the good is pleasing his other side is clear to the wicked. "Not every religion believed angels were inherently good. Just that they were there, between human and deity" (Burns and Metz 84). Even Giles refers to the possibility of Michael not being inherently good. Remember Matthew 7:15 which states "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." This raises the question of whether Michael can be seen as a false prophet with evil intentions. To Buffy and her friends Michael's role is more like an Antichrist as his job is to unleash apocalyptic events. Indeed, as we have seen, Buffy wants to live, she does not want to face the end.

A similar biblical parallel can be found in Narnia when an ape is called in Aslan's place becoming a false prophet called "the mouthpiece of Aslan." Aslan becomes impersonated by this beast while it does foul deeds in his name. Narnians become disillusioned and wish for the old Aslan. The false prophet, also known as Antichrist, originates in the Book of Revelation: "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which deceived them... And them that worshipped his image" (Zegarlińska 152). In the *Book of Revelation*, we also learn that Doomsday will foreshadow the fall of religion and the reverence of false prophets. This in turn recalls our discussion of the historical context of the *Book of Revelation*; in that text, Nero is seen as a false prophet. It can be argued that St John was inspired by Judaic texts of the period such as the Sibylline Oracles 3 and 5 which also portray Nero as a false prophet leading people astray. So, once again we note that *Apocalypse Memories* fits into Kermode's ideas that apocalyptic texts are linked together in a chain that stretches back to the Bible and beyond, revealing something fundamental about how we understand the condition of being human.

Apocalypse across genres

However, as we have touched on briefly above Buffy, the TV series and *Apocalypse Memories* is also very much a creation of its time and reflect contemporary mores. Therefore it also illustrates Kermode's notion that apocalyptic texts can be mined for historical information (Kermode 103). The Buffy series and book encompass different genres such as teen, fantasy, comedy and horror. Buffy surpasses the stereotypical horror genre for she inverts the trope of the dumb, pretty blonde who gets killed first. In *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* we get a teen girl who could fit these stereotypical

standards but defies them as the predestined and supernatural hero of mankind. As a heroine, she becomes a symbol for young women and girls all over the world.

In an interview from 1999, Josh Whedon, the creator of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* described Buffy as “all over the place transcending-genre kind of thing” (Stein and McCarthy 4). As Buffy combines a great many fantasy and horror subgenres they contrast with comedy and the more realistic teen elements in the franchise which grounds the whole and makes it more relatable (Stein and McCarthy 5).

Indeed, the Buffy universe explores comedy, especially when the characters are face to face with their deepest fears. For example, Buffy jokes about her first encounter with Giles: “If some old British guy had showed up and said, ‘Hey, you’re the Chosen One. The first thing you must do is kill all the puppies in town,’ I wouldn’t have done it” (Burns and Metz 115). In this way, the tone of the horror genre is dimmed by the characters’ humoristic one-liners while retaining an acceptance of their destiny to stop evil.

All of the genres mentioned above become mixed as we can see the elements of horror shine through with the murder, violence, sex and death. Buffy combines several horror tropes, from the creature she fights to the setting she inhabits, a small American town. Furthermore, “The Bible’s *Book of Revelation* has been an inspiration of several hellish horrors in Western literature” (Reyes 5). The eschatological elements of *Apocalypse Memories* can therefore be seen as part of a literary tradition stretching back to the bible and beyond.

In the *Cambridge Dictionary* “Apocalypse” is described as “a very serious event resulting in great destruction and change.” This can also be used to describe the transition from childhood to adulthood with teenagerhood as the in-between. Teenagerhood is a period of changes to not only oneself but also one’s relationships with friends whom you might grow apart from. We see the destruction of one’s childhood self on the path of finding your adult self. The “Buffyverse” follows a group of teenagers becoming adults while battling with physical demons and monsters representing their inner demons. This fits with the fact that Sunnydale (Buffy’s hometown) is located on a Hellmouth that lures demons and eventually brings on multiple apocalypses. Teenagerhood becomes an actual hell in this case (Stein and McCarthy 6). The characters continuously try to stop apocalypses from happening they become closer to each other realising the importance of each moment. “According to this pragmatic view of horror, the genre, by delving into what is repressed by society, including the traumas we bury in the most inscrutable recesses of our minds, is brilliantly placed to undertake cultural work that reflects our darkest, forgotten and best left unspoken fears” (Reyes 3).

In “Introduction: What, Why and When Is Horror Fiction?” Xavier Reyes investigates how horror affects our mind, engages the imagination and how fiction helps us process information. “Horror fiction may be best understood as the literature that actively, and predominantly, seeks to create a pervasive feeling of unease and which, consistently, although not necessarily always successfully, attempts to arouse the emotions and sensations we would normally ascribe to feeling under threat” (Reyes 3). In apocalyptic literature, we are especially inclined to get the feeling of unease as our imagination is at high-speed trying to figure out the ending of our beloved characters. When reading or watching TV shows we start caring about the story of the characters and we cross our fingers for a happy ending. When that ending might be an apocalypse we fear the worst and in *Apocalypse Memories* even the characters seem to understand the seriousness of the threat as it comes from the Archangel Michael.

Today the apocalypse is all around us. This can be seen in our struggle with climate change and all around the world with wars and famine. If we did not know better the four horsemen of the apocalypse are already doing their jobs. People are participating in survival courses just in case an apocalypse might come to pass, and so-called apocalyptic groups are forming. According to Jonathan Moo, “the use of apocalyptic narratives to induce fear and wake people up to what is perceived as dangerous present reality or potential future catastrophe has a long pedigree in the environmental movement, dating back at least as far as ‘A Fable for Tomorrow’ in Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*” (939). The apocalypse is becoming a tool of fear to remind people of what could be a new reality or rather no reality.

To understand the appeal of the apocalypse we must look at the desire to know the truth. Truth transforms our relationship with time, as some see biblical texts as the truth therefore the divine becomes eternal as we will always go back to the origin. As we have demonstrated above, the Bible has had such an influence on Western thought and writing that it can be used as a point of cultural reference with even modern spoofy texts such as *Apocalypse Memories* referring to it. “The challenge is to relate our imperfect lives to the infallible text” (Joyce 46).

The importance of the end or of an ending when it comes to fiction lies in how the reader gets attached to the characters. “The classical apocalypse attracts believers through the certainty provided by knowing how the human story ends, which illuminates the importance of endings for how we understand narratives” (Joyce 47). The reader wants a fitting resolution after the end of either a book series or TV series as we get emotionally involved in the lives of these characters. As we wish for a happy ending for ourselves we wish for the same for our beloved characters. When we read apocalyptic fiction this traditional happy ending is at stake as we do not quite know whether or not the end will mean the end for our characters as well. We have an innate desire to make sense

of the story, only to have all uncertainties resolved at the moment of its conclusion. By searching the narrative for clues we make sense of the information we are given so we can eventually somewhat predict the uncertain future (Joyce 47).

This brings us full circle to the questions we asked at the start of this article. We have delved into *Apocalypse Memories*, applied Kermode's theories and analysis to it and compared it to Biblical texts. We further placed it within the context of other modern texts that examine the importance of the end and create Christ figures of their own. All of this has demonstrated that by using eschatological texts in modern literature as an inspiration we are keeping Biblical tales relevant and easily accessible for a younger audience. These texts follow Frank Kermode's theory about literary evolution as they adjust to their time and audience while retaining at their heart an interest in the end and how humans face the incomprehensible and inevitable.

Indeed, while couched in Biblical references and very self-consciously playing with the blurred line between fiction and myth *Apocalypse Memories* reminds its reader that it is only the latest in a long line of apocalyptic literature. The text manages to refer both to Zoroastrianism and Star Wars and its characters try to understand both the nature of angles and climate change. Its female warrior lead flips gender stereotypes while the older British intellectual mentor plays on well-established tropes. In all the text well illustrates the vitality of apocalyptic literature as a genre that is both ancient and frighteningly relevant.

Through Kermode's study, we learn that apocalyptic narratives provide an endpoint to history. Uncertainty is no more as we know it will all result in an ending. Ignorance becomes definite knowledge as, like Socrates, we know what it is we do not know and gracefully accept our own limitations. Everything will become clear. The apocalypse no longer refers to the end but a revelation that will provide consolation. Even as the world is coming to an end – we understand it and ourselves (Joyce 47). By analysing *Apocalypse Memories* we have demonstrated that a spoofy-gothic-teen-horror can, in its own disarmingly simple way, illustrate such complex ideas as Kermode's. Buffy, the character, has died, has ended and thus faced the tock of Kermode's clock, that Platonic idea of the apocalypse. She has a greater understanding of what the end means than most of us ever could. In this way, she is like Christ and the other Christ figures she so resembles. Aslan and Harry Potter both also died and chose to continue living finding more meaning in the story than its end. Indeed, as we saw above Buffy declares that no matter the hardships, she prefers to continue living. So perhaps that is the most important lesson that the end can teach us; that life, not death is a gift. If even those people, like Buffy or Harry Potter, whose lives are so steeped in death prefer to keep the clock ticking then life must be worth living.

Therefore, we learn that apocalyptic literature provides us with the ability to look at everything with a bigger picture. We learn about the fragility of life and how valuable life is. It is the revelation of life as we know it and of what is to come and what could have been. In reminding us that the clock's tock cannot be delayed forever it pushes us to enjoy our time upon this mortal coil. Focusing on the end leads us back to the now. This is why, in order to continue living her difficult but rewarding life, Buffy Summers once said, "If the apocalypse comes, beep me" ("Never Kill a Boy on the First Date" 1.5).

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