DAVID M. BETHEA

The Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction

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FOR KIM AND EMILY

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We hoped; we waited for the day
The state would wither clean away,
Expecting the Millennium
That theory promised us would come,
It didn't.

—W. H. Auden, *New Year Letter*

The rider on the white horse! Who is he then? . . . He is the royal one, he is my very self and his horse is the whole *mana* of a man. He is my very me, my sacred ego, called into a new cycle of action by the Lamb and riding forth to conquest, the conquest of the old self for the birth of the new self . . .

—D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse*

What tense would you choose to live in?

"I want to live in the imperative of the future passive participle—in the 'what ought to be.' "

I like to breathe that way. . . . It suggests a kind of mounted, bandit-like, equestrian honor. That's why I like the glorious Latin "Gerundive"—it's a verb on horseback. . . .

Such was the dialogue I carried on with myself as I rode horseback through the variegated terrain of wild and cultivated uplands, nomadic territories, and vast pasturelands of Alagez.

—Osip Mandelshtam, *Journey to Armenia*

A Note on the Transliteration

The system of transliteration I have used is that recommended by Professor J. Thomas Shaw in his *The Transliteration of Modern Russian for English-Language Publications* (Madison, 1967). In the text itself as well as in the substantive sections of notes, I have used Shaw's "System I," which is a modified version of the Library of Congress system for the purpose of "normalizing" personal and place names for the generalist Western reader. References to secondary literature in the text and notes are to *abbreviated* titles (the complete bibliographical information being found in the "Works Cited"). In the "Works Cited" section and in transliteration of words as words I have used "System II," which is the unmodified Library of Congress system, with the diacritical marks omitted. It is hoped that any confusion that might arise from the combination of these two systems (e.g., "Andrey Bely" in the text but "Andrei Belyi" in the "Works Cited") will be compensated for by the increased readability afforded the non-specialist and the greater precision afforded the specialist.

Preface

"There are," as the philosopher Nikolay Berdyaev once wrote, "two dominant myths which can become dynamic in the life of a people—the myth about origins and the myth about the end. For Russians it has been the second myth, the eschatological one, that has dominated." This statement, which fairly revels in its lack of qualifiers and scant context in the original (*The Russian Idea*), would undoubtedly strike the historian as excessive, yet at the same time it expresses an idea, *the Russian idea*, which many writers have taken to be true and have assumed as a point of departure for their fictions. The objective and received truths of this statement are not at all the same, just as the objective and received truths of America's "chosen" status, its "manifest destiny," are different. This study, which is essentially about the "End" of history as presented in selected works of modern Russian fiction, has, as is usually the case in such matters, a history of its own. The original conception developed in response to what I saw to be a distinct gap in the existing scholarship and criticism: while the Western, or more precisely Anglo-American tradition has been blessed with a number of studies about apocalypse as both historical and literary phenomenon, there has as yet been no sustained attempt to bring what is known about the Russian view of the *eskhaton* to bear on the form of Russian prose fiction. The works of those such as M. H. Abrams (*Natural Supernaturalism*), Norman Cohn (*The Pursuit of the Millennium*), and Frank Kermode (*The Sense of An Ending*) have become classics in their fields for anyone interested either in the roots of Western apocalyptic or in the impact that social and cultural models of the End have had on literary form. Yet this tradition and these models have a decidedly *Western* bias, and Russian historiographers and philosophers of history have never been comfortable with their country's ability, or inability, to fit western paradigms. For our purposes, therefore, these studies are at best anachronistic (*if* Russian cultural models are indeed, belatedly, becoming "westernized") and at worst irrevelant (*if* Rus-

sia's Byzantine and Asiatic legacies, together with the Western one, have made these models unique and indigenous). When no less an authority than Abrams can claim that "the nation possessed of the most thoroughly and enduringly millennial ideology . . . is America" ("Apocalypse: Theme and Variations" 357), one has to wonder, as did Lévi-Strauss in his exposure of Sartre's insider's cultural bias, how "savage" at times can be the sophistication of the Western mind.

The tasks I set myself in these pages are several: (1) to provide close analytical readings of five major novels, which, though written in different periods, are each related to the others through their prominent allusions to the Book of Revelation and through their common concern with the narration of history (and historical closure); (2) to take some of the generalizations about the "messianic" and "eschatological" impulse in the Russian historical character and show how, in each context, they provide powerful models for structuring these works of fiction; (3) to indicate where this theme of apocalypse actually enters into the realm of narrative structure, where it takes on dynamic shape and expands into a moving picture of history in crisis; and (4) to outline a possible typology for these "apocalyptic fictions" that would, with its essentially Christian orientation and implication of a God-Author beyond the Finis of history, stand as a kind of countermodel to the Socialist Realist classic, with its essentially Marxist orientation and implication that immanent laws within history guide our steps toward a secular paradise. These tasks, which now seem crucial to the integrity of the project, were not obvious at the outset. Like Ivan Petrovich Belkin, Pushkin's endearing but feckless historiographer in "The History of the Village Goryukhino," I had to order the material in a way that seemed consistent and honest in view of the "facts," which brings me to the question of the shape of my narrative, itself about the fictionalized shape of history.

A good deal of intellectual energy has been expended and ink spilled (or computer diskettes filled) in recent theoretical discussions about the "open" boundary between history and fiction, between facts as such and their inevitable narration. In the Russian context this issue goes back at least as far as Karamzin and Pushkin: Karamzin began as a belletrist and ended his career as Russia's "first historian and last chronicler"; Pushkin, fascinated by the difference between fact and artifact, explored these very boundaries in such later works as *The Tales of Belkin*, the already mentioned "The History of the Village Goryukhino," and *The Captain's Daughter*. As intriguing as all this may be, I must confess that as "historiographer" I have for some time had the distinct impression that it was not I who was "prefiguring" my field of study, enclosing facts within the "meta-" viewpoint of a (hi)story, but the facts themselves that were constantly shaping and changing the rough sketch first dictated by intuition. Thus, if what follows

has a bias, as indeed it must, this bias is not naive; it has been checked and re-checked against the information supplied by specific authors, texts, and contexts. The reader has every right to call my arrangement of the facts a "fiction," just one of many possible narratives, but it is my underlying argument, one shared not only by these authors but also by the very structure of their works, that not all such narratives are created equal.

In order to free my narrative from the heavy hand of an a priori theoretical framework, which seemed to me essentially dishonest (it was the works, not the binding idea "from outside," that came first), I began each chapter as a "chronicler" rather than as a "historiographer." My aim was to read and analyze each work *on its own terms*. Hence the first mental draft envisioned five very different studies linked loosely by a common *theme* ("revolution and revelation"). Only later, in the course of analysis, did the theoretical considerations, the narrative interstices out of which a chronicle becomes a history, emerge. This is not to say that my priorities are the only appropriate ones, or that an opposite ordering of the material (theory over close reading or, in structuralist linguistic terms, *langue* over *parole*) would not be possible and even rewarding, but simply that these priorities seemed to me the best way of dealing with the concept of apocalypse as it surfaced in specific texts and contexts, with their own agendas and dialogues perhaps quite different from ours. To borrow Hayden White's terminology in *Metahistory* for the possible paradigms (formist, organicist, mechanistic, contextualist) available to one "explaining" (narrating) history, my approach is fundamentally contextualist.

Nevertheless, it would be equally disingenuous of me to claim that, as work progressed, the idea of apocalypse, and thus the theoretical issues involved when inscribing the biblical End in narrative form, did not loom larger, attracting more of my attention and requiring additional effort to raise my perspective from the synchronic flatland of the individual text to the heady atmosphere of diachrony, the mountain aerie or "overview" from which some of the most important works in Russian literature could be seen as reworkings, in *their* time and place, of the same biblical plot. Although my study does not pretend to be a literary history of "apocalyptic fiction" on Russian soil (the very idea of a series of close readings militates against breadth of coverage), it posits, in skeletal form, the existence of such a history. For each of the novels treated—Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, Bely's *Petersburg*, Platonov's *Chevengur*, Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, and Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*—is an active participant in a formidable web of allusion and intertextuality; this web leads back to Pushkin, Gogol, and *their* views (as refracted through the novel or narrative poetic form) of Russian history in the first half of the nineteenth century, at a time when modern Russian historiography and historical consciousness were being

born. (The symbolist poet Innokenty Annensky probably said it best: "Pushkin and Gogol—our two-faced Janus. Two mirrors on the door that separates us from our past.") In other words, these works, dominated as they are by the overwhelming sense that national history and biblical plot are in a state of fatal alignment or parallax, continually look from the "presents" of their contexts *back* to a pre-history, or "epic past," when Russia's future was a still open book. This "Great Time," as the scholar of myth Mircea Eliade would call it, may be the old *Rus'* before the Petrine reforms or some folk ideal such as the underwater kingdom of Kitezh. More importantly, it is the necessary "before" that preceded a "fall" into history and that allowed these writers to explain the shape of what followed, up to, and in some cases *beyond*, the events depicted in their apocalyptic presents. As I demonstrate in the Introduction, the works of Pushkin and Gogol are significant as late "pre-history" because the tensions driving them—the temporal "old"/"new," the spatial "East"/"West"—are, while ominous, far from being resolved and because the dynamic images (Bronze Horseman, troika) embodying historical momentum and radical change are, while not "apocalyptic" in context, capable of becoming so in the eyes of later generations, when social and political ferment in the second half of the nineteenth century made the threat of revolution seem imminent and inevitable.

The Introduction sketches the salient features of the Russian apocalyptic tradition and attempts a brief typology of what will be called "apocalyptic fiction," dwelling in some length on the role played by the images of the horse and train in this tradition and typology. Thereafter, each subsequent chapter has the same basic format: a discussion of the historical and biographical contexts out of which the work in question grew precedes and introduces an in-depth reading of the text itself. The important difference between "apocalypse" and "utopia," between a divinely inspired conclusion to history leading to an atemporal ideal (the New Jerusalem) and a humanly engineered conclusion to history leading to a secular paradise (one model being the classless society), becomes an issue only in the work of Platonov. All the other authors write works whose epistemological point of departure is essentially Christian and apocalypticist; Platonov, whose novel is related to the others structurally and typologically, blurs and confuses the Christian and Marxist approaches to history under the influence of the philosopher Nikolay Fyodorov. Thus *Chevengur* is included in this study as the expression of yet another artistic means, together with those of the "Christian" Bulgakov and Pasternak, of dealing with the fact that the End (and Beginning) promised by the revolution was a failure, was *not* equivalent to the one foretold in Revelation. Dostoevsky, whose *Idiot* was written before the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, and Bely, whose *Petersburg* was written between them, create texts permeated with a nervousness and urgency that

enters into every aspect of their structure and style and shows their perceived position in history to be "after" the fall and "before" (*right* before in Bely's case) the End. Depending on its time of writing, therefore, each work possesses a "prospectivist" or "retrospectivist" view of the revolution that must be integrated not only philosophically but structurally into its view of biblical apocalypse or (in Platonov's case) utopia. The Afterword suggests its own retrospective view of the typology as well as a prospective view of where that typology, faintly and in various subterranean guises, may still be operating.

If I had to describe my approach, or what I hope is my approach, it would be, as a distinguished colleague once said of his ideal marriage of criticism and scholarship, "structuralism with a human face." The categories and paradigms adduced to marshal one's material should, ideally, be both germane and open-minded, be capable of engaging the text as it speaks and listens to the realities of society, polity, culture, and art. In the language of Yury Tynyanov, a formalist who did become a structuralist with a human face, the "auto-function" (that which links similar elements within different systems of discourse) and the "syn-function" (that which links different elements within the same work) are constantly flexed in a very real, yet often subtle and invisible equipoise. This is the hidden musculature, as it were, that operates below the surface of otherwise arbitrary literary signs to give the text its homeostatic dynamism, its historical personality—what it meant "then" and what it means "now." What is ironic in the case of these authors of apocalyptic fictions is that they, in varying degrees of consciousness, used *the very limitations* of the novel form to imply a reality beyond it. Feeling all the integumentary tugs of their works' hidden musculature and knowing that words were all they had to project what was finally dumb to human figuration, they nevertheless undertook to incorporate Western civilization's ultimate figure of closure in a form that traces its generic origins to the concepts of openness, contingency, desacralization, irreverent laughter, perpetual contact with "profane" time and space. Therefore, while the thinking of those such as Mikhail Bakhtin, Arthur Danto, Mircea Eliade, Michel Foucault, Edmund Leach, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Yury Lotman, and Hayden White has been a constant goad to my own and a source of many of the ordering principles in this book, I do not always agree with them.

Any reader of these Russian apocalypticists should know how, for example, Foucault's now famous prediction of the end of "Man" and the humanistic tradition—"a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea"—would fit into their fundamentally Christian systems of thought and their artistic structures. This statement, after all, is Foucault's adaptation, a century later, of Nietzsche's most provocative pronouncement. But Dostoevsky was

horrified (though also fascinated, to be sure) by history "as such," without God; forestalling Nietzsche, he answered history's inquisitorial proof that "God is dead" with a non-verbal kiss; and against the diamond hard and sharp postulates of Raskolnikov he offered up the stammering meekness of Sonya, whose voice acquired authority only when another voice, coming from the Book, spoke through hers. Thus it seems fair to assume that, at least for Dostoevsky and the tradition that followed, not all voices, regardless of their logical persuasiveness and flair for *ore profundo* (Foucault's being a prime example), are created equal. For what Dostoevsky and the others were trying to do was logically (but not mythopoetically) impossible—the incorporation of life's openness within the closure of God's plot. And to explain this through the immanent binary rules of discourse posited by structuralism or through the relentless accretions to meaning provided by the ubiquitous "other" of post-structuralism is to deny a priori the essential ingredient in an apocalypticist view of the world—that there is such a thing as "revelation," as a radical and total shift in time-space relations, and that it comes *from beyond*. Hence the thinkers to which I freely resort to counterbalance the ones just listed are usually Russian Orthodox in faith and, in several cases, they actually influenced, as metaphysical god-fathers, the novels being discussed: Nikolay Berdyaev, Sergey Bulgakov, Georgy Fedotov, Pavel Florensky, Georgy Florovsky, Nikolay Fyodorov, Ivan Kireevsky, Alexey Khomyakov, Konstantin Leontiev, Vasily Rozanov, and Vladimir Solovyov.

Any work such as this is not only a formal dialogue, but an almost endless causerie with those friends and colleagues patient enough to listen and respond to my ideas and to read parts or all of the manuscript in its fledgling form. These individuals will forgive me for not saying more about their contributions, the much appreciated "sub-plots" from "outside" and "others" that found their way into the shape of my narrative: Vladimir Alexandrov, Mark Altshuller, Stephen Baehr, Nina Berberova, Thomas Beyer, Edward J. Brown, Sergej Davydov, Caryl Emerson, Herman Ermolaev, Efim Etkind, Joseph Frank, Boris Gasparov, George Gibian, Eugene Klimoff, George Krugovoy, Eric Pervukhin, Ellendea Proffer, Gary Rosenshield, Natalya Sadomskaya, Thomas Shaw, Victor Terras, Anatoly Vishevsky, Slava Yastremski, Alexander Woronzoff. Much-needed time for research on the early stages of the project was provided by a year-long fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies and a semester grant from the Graduate School at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Thanks are also due to Mary Heins, Tali Mendelberg, Hana Pichova, Adrienne Shirley (this last of Princeton University Press), and Sonia Yetter-Beelendorf, all of whom spent long hours helping me prepare and edit the manuscript in its various stages. Parts of this study have appeared, in mod-

ified form, elsewhere and are here so noted: "On the Shape of Apocalypse in Modern Russian Fiction: Towards a Typology" (in *Issues in Russian Literature Before 1917: Proceedings from the III World Congress of Soviet and East European Studies*, ed. J. Douglas Clayton [Columbus: Slavica, 1988]); "Remarks on the Horse/Train as a Space-Time Image in Russian Literature from 1820 to 1920" (in *Russian Literary Mythologies: From the Golden Age to the Silver Age*, eds. Boris Gasparov and Robert P. Hughes [*California Slavic Studies*, forthcoming]); "The Role of the *eques* in Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman*" (in *Pushkin Today*, eds. David M. Bethea and J. Thomas Shaw [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, forthcoming]); "Historicism Arrives at the Station: The Image of the Train and the Shape of Time in *The Idiot*" (*California Slavic Studies* [forthcoming]); "History as Hippodrome: The Apocalyptic Horse and Rider in *The Master and Margarita*" (*Russian Review*, 41 [October 1982], 373–99). The quotation from W. H. Auden's *New Year Letter*, copyright 1941 and renewed 1969 by W. H. Auden, is reprinted with permission of Random House, Inc., from *W. H. Auden: Collected Poems*, edited by Edward Mendelson. The quotation from Yeats's "The Second Coming" is reprinted with permission of Macmillan Publishing Company from *The Poems of W. B. Yeats: A New Edition*, edited by Richard J. Finneran, copyright 1924, by Macmillan Publishing Company, renewed 1952 by Bertha Georgie Yeats, and with permission of A. P. Watt Ltd. on behalf of Michael B. Yeats and Macmillan London Ltd. I dedicate this book to my favorite listener and reader, an expert on the beauty and fragility of plots and on their extratextual ties, and to a future listener, whose story is just beginning.

Madison, Wisconsin

THE SHAPE OF APOCALYPSE IN MODERN RUSSIAN FICTION

Introduction: Myth, History, Plot, Steed

> As far as I know, this [statue of Lenin in front of the Finland Station] is the only monument to a man on an armored car that exists in the world. In this respect alone, it is a symbol of a new society. The old society used to be represented by men on horseback.
>
> —Joseph Brodsky,
> "A Guide to a Renamed City"

MYTH

Humankind has always lived in time, but it has not always lived in history. Archaeologists and anthropologists provide countless examples of societies, "ancient" in time or "primitive" in development, where time was experienced mythically rather than historically, where only those details of life that fit into and recapitulated the master plot of a sacred tale were worthy of remembrance.[1] The British social anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski defined myth as

> . . . not merely a story but a reality lived. It is not of the nature of fiction, such as we read today in a novel, but it is a living reality, believed to have once happened in primaeval times, and continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies. . . . Myth is to the savage, what, to a fully believing Christian, is the Biblical story of the Creation, of the Fall, of the Redemption by Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. As our sacred story lives in our ritual, in our morality, as it governs our faith and controls our conduct, even so does his myth for the savage (*Magic, Science and Religion* 100).

The phrases most operative in this passage are "a reality lived," "believed to have happened once in primaeval times," and "continuing ever since to influence the world and human destinies." "History," on the contrary, is

[1] Perhaps the best-studied recent example of an older, indigenous culture that has taken on the structural models of Christian apocalyptic (imported via missionaries) is the Melanesian Cargo cult. See Lawrence, *Road Belong Cargo*, and Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound*.

perceived as the very opposite of myth—the desacralization of the past, the recording of events as they actually happened, without reference to some prefiguring master plot. What characterizes the "archaic" as opposed to the "modern" human being, according to Mircea Eliade, is that the former is able, through ritual, to return periodically "to the mythical time of the beginning of things" and thereby to abolish "concrete, historical time," whereas the latter, having been cut off from this Great Time through the gradual process of desacralization and secularization, must "make himself, within history" (*Myth* ix).[2] To cite just one example of how ritual served (and serves) as a shield against duration and chaos, the Babylonian New Year festival (*akîtu*) is based on the story of an underwater "carnival" king (Tiamat) who destroys the status quo, humiliates the "real" sovereign (Marduk), and casts the participants back into a pre-time of deluge and darkness; virtually at the same time, and at the dawn of the new year, order is restored, chaos is reconfigured through the act of creation, and a sacred union (hierogamy), symbolizing the rebirth of the human being and the world, is celebrated. Here the parallels with the Christian sacrament of baptism (the ritual death of the old man followed by a new birth), which in earlier times took place on Easter and New Year's Day, are obvious (Eliade 55–59).

In the venerable confrontation between history and myth the Judaeo-Christian tradition has often been seen as a turning point. Put simply, the Old Testament prophets explained the vagaries of fate and the periodic debacles of the chosen people, the "remnant of Israel" (Zephaniah 3:13), not by relating these events to a continually recaptured great past but by replacing them within a plot of *things to come*, as trials to be borne in order to make the Israelites worthy of their status and mission. "They [the prophets] insisted," writes Amos Funkenstein, "that God's immense, universal powers were manifested by the very plight of the chosen people: only God could employ the mightiest empires as 'rods of wrath' to purge Israel, while these empires were unaware of their role in the divine plan, of their objective role in history (Isaiah 10:5–7)" ("A Schedule" 46). One can immediately see the difference between this view of time and that, say, expressed implicitly in Hesiod's myth of declining world ages (Golden, Silver, Copper, Age of Heroes, Iron) and explicitly in Plato's doctrine of reciprocating cosmic cycles (the *Politicus*), where panplanetary conjunctions are linked with various terrestrial adversities to make a statement about the human being's continuous rise and fall as a moral being (Reiche, "The Archaic Heritage" 27–29). With the Judaeo-Christian tradition, humanity had "en-

[2] Cf. in this regard Engels' remark in a letter to Ernst Bloch that "We *make our history ourselves*" (my emphasis; cited in Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 85).

tered" history (not of course yet history in the modern, secular sense) and that history had a straightforward movement and teleological coloring. The human being had also, as we learn in Genesis, *fallen* from privileged status in the Garden of Eden (the Judaeo-Christian "Great Time") *into* profane time and an imperfect world, and there was *no way back*.

The figure whose interpretation of the biblical plot from a Christian standpoint was most influential for the Western Roman Catholic tradition was St. Augustine (A.D. 354–435). Through his doctrine of the three stages of salvation (the *ante legem* before Moses, the *sub lege* during and after him, and the culminating—for this world—*sub gratia* initiated by Christ) and through his periodization of history into Six World Ages (with the Seventh located *outside* of time), he consolidated the "historiosophy" of the prophets and gave it a christocentric reading that was to dominate for centuries (Reeves, "Medieval Attitudes" 41). Pivotal to this reading was the conviction, expressed in *The City of God*, that the Christ example was unique, unrepeatable, and end-determined. As Funkenstein explains further,

> It is very clear that the apocalyptic tradition does not exclude eternal return, at times even alludes to it under the influence, perhaps, of Iranian tradition. Nor indeed does the Bible exclude eternal return—it simply is outside the horizon of biblical imageries. The *uniqueness* of history, or at least of its central event, became thematic only in the Christian horizon. Against Origen's theory of world succession, Saint Augustine insisted that Christ came only *once* for all times. The difference is rather that while the apocalyptic writer takes his proof from Scripture and history, the Greek philosopher relies on astronomical-cosmological speculations ("A Schedule" 50; see also Pelikan, *Jesus* 21–33).

So with the Judaeo-Christian model the Great Time of the past (the Garden of Eden) was cast into the future (the New Jerusalem), and the steady organ bass of apocalyptic thinking came gradually to drown out the Greek music of the spheres.[3] Ironically, the figure of the circle, distinct from that of the repeating cycle, was not eliminated entirely, since the New Jerusalem not only replaced but was a *return* to the lost garden as a reward for trials suffered in the name of the faith, the shape of history becoming, in Karl Löwith's apt formulation, "one great detour to reach in the end the beginning" (*Meaning in History* 183).

But what is meant precisely by the term "apocalyptic thinking" and how

[3] The ancient Greek interest in astrological signs and configurations continued in the Christian tradition well into the Middle Ages and is prominent in such writers as Dante.

does it relate to the "bookish," "scribal" nature of the revealed message? There are so many apocalypses and so many non-biblical myths of the End that this is no easy question to answer. In an effort to locate certain finite transhistorical categories, such scholars of myth as Franz Cumont and Eliade have been apt to cast their narratives all the way back to ancient Iranian legends about an end of the world by fire, which then, presumably, migrated westward—the *ekpyrosis* that occupies a central position in the religious systems of Stoicism, the Sibylline Oracles, and Judaeo-Christian literature (Cumont, "La Fin du monde" 29–96; Eliade, *Myth* 124). Biblical scholars, however, seem to be more restrained in their application of terminology; they draw a sharp line between "eschatology," or knowledge of the end (*eskhaton*), which any culture may announce it possesses, and "apocalypticism," or the "distinctive form of teaching about history and its approaching End" found in the Judaeo-Christian tradition (McGinn, "Early Apocalypticism" 6).[4] It may clarify matters, therefore, to view apocalypticism as "a species of the genus eschatology," with the implication that there is "an important difference between a general consciousness of living in the last age of history and a conviction that the last age itself is about to end, between a belief in the reality of the Antichrist and the certainty of his proximity (or at least of the date of his coming), between viewing the events of one's own time in the light of the End of history and seeing them as the last events themselves" (McGinn, *Visions* 3–4). In this regard, the "wholesale invasion of Persian religious ideas into post-exilic Judaism as the determining factor in the rise of apocalypticism are now generally discounted," having been supplanted by more plausible "gradualist" theories about the interaction of Canaanite mythology and Near Eastern Wisdom traditions with indigenous Judaism (or Judaisms) as it existed in the Hellenistic world (McGinn, "Early Apocalypticism" 14). Thus the "genre" of the apocalypse, according to those who have examined it most closely, is now believed to have arisen in the third and second centuries B.C. under the impulse of a Jewish nationalism, which was itself a natural outgrowth of, rather than a radical departure from, the "proto-apocalyptic" phases associated with the Canaanite and Wisdom antecedents.

[4] "Apocalypticism in its Jewish origins is distinguishable from two related terms common in biblical theology and the history of religions: *eschatology* and *prophecy*. Apocalypticism is a species of the genus eschatology, that it, it is a particular kind of belief about the last things—the End of history and what lies beyond it. Scriptural scholars have used the term *apocalyptic eschatology* to distinguish the special teachings of the prophets. (Apocalyptic eschatology may be seen as equivalent to the frequently used term *Apocalyptic*, formed in imitation of the German *Apocalyptik*.) Valuable as the distinction may be in the realm of biblical studies, the picture will obviously become blurred in later Christian history when elements of both forms of eschatology will frequently be mingled" (McGinn, *Visions* 3–4).

The Revelation of John, or the Apocalypse, as it is known by its Greek name, is only one of a number of extant apocalyptic texts, some from the Intertestamental period and entirely Jewish in origin (I Enoch, Daniel), others from Christianity's first century (the synoptic Gospels, I and II Thessalonians), and others still from the later Patristic tradition (Shepherd of Hermas, Testament of the Lord, Apocalypse of Peter, Vision of Paul). Still, the Apocalypse of John, which is now generally thought to have been written c. 90–95 A.D., has become the most famous (or notorious) of all apocalypses, the one most laymen have in mind when they speak of *the* Apocalypse. And it in turn has become the text that has most palpably influenced our Western views of history as a plot with: (1) a beginning by divine fiat (the creation), (2) a tale of early catastrophe (the fall of Adam and Eve), (3) a later privileged moment of crisis (the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection), and (4) a final crescendo with awesome dénouement (the *Parousia*, or Second Coming, of Christ, followed by the replacement of the old world by a "new heaven and new earth") (Abrams, "Theme and Variations" 343–44). Narratologically speaking, the Apocalypse, which both comes *at the end* of the Bible and tells of *the end* of human history, allows that history to have a coherent and meaningful *beginning* and *middle* because it provides a fitting conclusion (Kermode, *Sense* 5–8). Hence, while some scholars still argue that apocalypticism as a balance of myth, method, and way of life existed only for about two hundred years (or until the early Christians grew tired of "standing on tiptoes" [Pelikan, *Jesus* 24] in the shadow of disconfirmation), most will agree with Funkenstein that "the fascination with historical time and its structure was the most important contribution of the apocalyptic mentality to the Western sense of history" (Funkenstein, "A Schedule" 49, 57). Precisely how the Johannine conclusion, with its elaborate figures and haunting codes, dovetails with the real events of contemporary history has been a source of endless debate, and no less endless carnage, from the beginning. It has left its signature on page after page of Christian history, constituting the vast "underthought" of orthodoxy and millenarian heterodoxy (Manichaean, Messalian, Paulician, Bogomilian, Patarian, Albigensian) alike (Manuel, *Utopian Thought* 48).

What do all apocalypses have in common, how are we able to speak of them as a distinct genre? A recent volume of *Semeia* answers the question in the following way:

> "Apocalypse" is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial,

insofar as it involves another, supernatural world (Collins, "Towards the Morphology of a Genre" 9).

In the broadest terms, a member of the elect is deeply troubled by the affairs of his church in this world. It may be the pseudonymous Daniel, one of the *maskîlîm* or wise teachers, who must try to make sense of the persecution of the Jews under the Hellenizing program of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (167–164 B.C.), a kind of "proto-Antichrist" (McGinn, "Early Apocalypticism" 8); or it may be John, sent into exile on the island of Patmos by the Emperor Domitian (A.D. 81–96), who must try to find justification for similar persecution of the early Christians by Rome. The seer is allowed to understand through an apocalypse, a "disclosing" or "uncovering," which translates into a series of visions of the glorious End. Hence the various magnificent figures, such as the four beasts of Daniel 7 or the beast rising out of the sea of Revelation 13, have *ex eventu* referents in history (i.e., the Babylonians, Medes, Persians, Greeks, Romans), but at the same time are colorful, compelling, and abstract enough to provide ready-made source material for subsequent "seers." The Whore of Babylon could be the Roman Empire in one epoch and the Church of Rome in another; the beast could be *Nero redivivus* in one context and a concupiscent pope, later called an "Antichrist,"[5] in another. What is significant is that the tribulations of the profane present, of *human beings in history*, are rendered understandable and therefore bearable by reference to a suprahistorical intelligence (God) who, standing *beyond* the Beginning and the End, sends His messenger (the angel of Revelation 1:1) to one of His faithful (the "servant John") with a divine preview of history's "Finis"—that spatial metaphor for a non-temporal paradise called the New Jerusalem. Just as Christ's life culminated in a triadic pattern of trial-crucifixion-resurrection, so now does the life of humanity, that is, universal history, promise to culminate in a similar pattern (thus the *Second Coming* of Christ) of present crisis-coming judgment-final vindication (McGinn, "Early Apocalypticism" 9).

As the *Semeia* volume shows, the genre of apocalypse has numerous permutations: it may contain a review of universal history up to the present moment of crisis or it may involve a purely personal eschatology; the revelation itself may be presented in the form of a vision or a speech or a dialogue; the seer may go on an otherworldly journey (a Judaeo-Christian version of the utopian *topos*)[6] or may be visited in his or her realm, etc. Yet

[5] In the New Testament the name "Antichrist" does *not* appear in Revelation, but only in I and II John.

[6] It is of course moot to argue which impulse came first—the apocalyptic or the utopian. After all, Plato's presentation of his ideal republic, which Thomas More used as an important point of departure in his text, antedates the appearance of Christian apocalyptic. The foremost

whatever the particular variations, certain basic elements, what might be termed the epistemological "deep structure" of apocalypse, hold firm: (1) history is a unity or totality *determined* by God but at the same time so configured as to allow humanity, or more precisely, a member of the elect, to *choose* between Christ and Antichrist, between the truth coming from beyond and the mirage of worldly power, well-being, etc. that passes for truth in the here and now; (2) the moment of decision has arrived and the initial stage in the climactic pattern of crisis-judgment-vindication has begun; and (3) this coming End is viewed as tragic and retributive for those who have chosen not to uphold the faith and as triumphant for those who have (McGinn, "Early Apocalypticism" 4–6, 10–12). Above all, the apocalypticist mentality and its scribal expression in the genre of apocalypse imply the interplay of spatio-temporal *oppositions* and of one's place within them: old/new, here/there, determinism from beyond/free choice from within, the historically mired Whore of Babylon/the ahistorical New Jerusalem, etc. The perceived resolution of all opposition comes, logically enough, at the climax of the Book of Revelation. The Beast, the symbol of benighted power in this world, brings about the destruction of the Whore of Babylon (originally Rome), "the great harlot . . . with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication" (Revelation 17:1–2). Against this sense of tumultuous discord is presented the marriage of the Lamb and the Bride, Christ and the "holy city . . . coming down out of the heaven from God" (Revelation 21:10). In effect, the final vision of the Christian hierogamy has achieved a kind of narrative optical illusion—a view of the "outside" of history from the "inside," a projection of an all-encompassing and all-resolving "then" from the vantage of a beleaguered "now."

American scholars of utopia, Frank and Fritzie Manuel, isolate and historicize the utopian urge in the following way:

> Utopia is a hybrid plant, born of the crossing of a paradisaical, otherworldly belief of Judeo-Christian religion with the Hellenic myth of an ideal city on earth. The naming took place in an enclave of sixteenth-century scholars excited about the prospect of a Hellenized Christianity. While we may loosely refer to ancient and medieval works with some utopian content as utopias, the Western utopia is for us a creation of the world of the Renaissance and the Reformation. . . . But the relation of the utopian to the heavenly always remains problematic. Utopia may be conceived as a prologue or foretaste of the absolute perfection still to be experienced; it then resembles the Days of the Messiah or the Reign of Christ on earth of traditional Judaism and Christianity, with the vital addition of human volition as an ingredient in the attainment of that wished-for state. Or the utopia, though originally implanted in a belief in the reality of a transcendental state, can break away from its source and attempt to survive wholly on its own creative self-assurance. Whether the persistence of the heavenly vision in a secularized world, if only in some disguised shape, is a necessary condition for the duration of utopia is one of the unresolved questions of Western culture (*Utopian Thought* 15–17).

The record of how, time and again, the apocalypticist urge provoked historical confrontation in the West is immense, and can only be touched on in these preliminaries. Suffice it to say that of all the individuals who attempted to transpose the principal figures and codes of the Johannine text to the terms of contemporary reality, two were pivotal to the course of Western apocalypticism—St. Augustine and Joachim of Fiore (1145–1202). In his classic *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, Norman Cohn has written a social history of the volatile fit between the apocalyptic plot and its numerous adaptations among sectarian movements of Northern and Central Europe during the Middle Ages. Whatever the sects (Tafurs, Flagellants, Taborites) and whatever the social basis for their unrest (religious fervor during the Crusades, fear of the Black Death, deteriorating economic conditions in feudal Europe), the pattern was uniform: these were the saving remnant whose role it was to usher in the End and inherit a renovated kingdom. In this context, the Bishop of Hippo's earlier declaration that the millennium, that is, the thousand-year period of Revelation 20:1–6 during which Satan would be temporarily bound and the martyrs would reign with Christ over the world,[7] was coterminous with the reign of the church did little to dissuade what was often a rag-tag band of wanderers, itself socially disenfranchised, that saw that church as a haven of simony, voluptuousness, and the spirit of Antichrist. Officially, then, this move to legitimize the historical church as the only "City of God" on earth had enormous ramifications, not the least of which was to defuse the urgent need to look for a future Golden Age, since apparently it was already here. As we discover in *City of God* (XVIII: 52–53), it is not our place to tease out a divine fretwork of apocalyptic signs from the welter of current affairs: these prophecies are, in R.A. Markus' summation of the Augustinian position, "not to be read as referring to any particular historical catastrophe, but to the final winding up of all history; and the time of that no man can know" (*Saeculum* 152–54).

But in the popular, sectarian consciousness, which could not help from

[7] "In a strict sense, millenarianism, or chiliasm, was originally limited to a prophetic conviction, derived from a commentary on the fourth verse of the twentieth chapter of the Apocalypse of John, to the effect that Christ would reign for a thousand years on earth. The pivotal events of the transition to the days of the millennium were depicted in well-worn images of catastrophe: During a time of troubles empires crumble, there are titanic struggles of opposing armies, vast areas of the world are devastated, nature is upheaved, rivers flow with blood. On the morrow, good triumphs over evil, God over Satan, Christ over Antichrist. As existential experience the millennium of early Christianity is the counterpart of the Days of the Messiah in much of Jewish apocalyptic. The bout of violence reaches a grand climax, and then and only then is there peace—primitive priapic scenes are the inescapable analogy" (Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought* 46–47).

noticing the disparity between the historical and ideal churches, the millenarian impulse remained strong. This is especially true after Joachim, a seminal mystic of the Catholic Middle Ages, reversed Augustinian doctrine and gave the people back their millenarianism with his triadic periodization of history:

> Joachim's originality lay in his affirmation that the threefold pattern of history was as yet incomplete and that the work of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person, must shortly be made manifest in a further stage of spiritual illumination. Recasting the traditional Pauline pattern he expanded his famous doctrine of the three *status* in history: the first, beginning with Adam and ending with the Incarnation, has been characterized by the work of the Father; the second, beginning back in the Old Testament (to overlap with the first) and continuing until Joachim's own day, belonged to the Son; the third, with a double origin in the Old Dispensation and the New and about to come to fruition in the near future, would see the full work of the Holy Spirit completed. *Here was a magnificent programme of progress which offered an advance still to come within history*. Its novelty is well illustrated by the fact that Joachim departs decisively from the Augustinian tradition by placing the Sabbath Age of the World and the opening of the Seventh Seal of the Church clearly within history and identifying them with the third *status* (my emphasis; Reeves, "Medieval Attitudes" 49–50; see also Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy*).

The thirteenth century, as Russia fell under the Mongol Yoke to the East, was a time of great eschatological fervor and anxiety in Europe. 1260 was, in the popular imagination, the year in which Joachim's prophecies were to come true, and the Franciscan Spirituals, whose apocalyptic hopes and fears are presented in Umberto Eco's recent novel *The Name of the Rose*, were to be the original inheritors of the third *status*. But as routinely happens in these matters, disconfirmation makes it possible for later generations to recalculate and retranslate the numbers and signs into their own "chosen" *status*. Thus Joachim's placement of this third age of the Holy Spirit *within* history was enormously influential for the development of apocalyptic thought in the West. It surfaces, *mutatis mutandis*, in the programs of Müntzer, Campanella, Lessing, in the Third State of Auguste Comte, in Marx's Higher Stage of Communism, in Teilhard's Noösphere, as well as in countless nationalisms, from Savonarola's Florence to Hitler's Third Reich (Manuel, *Utopian Thought* 33, 63). Even Columbus' discovery of a new world in 1492 (the year the old world was scheduled to end in Russia) is largely a product of this tradition (Reeves, "Medieval Attitudes" 62 ff.). And in the Russian context it can be seen in modern guise in the tripartite

periodization of history advanced by such thinkers as Vladimir Solovyov and Dmitry Merezhkovsky.

HISTORY

It is difficult to imagine two students of Russian cultural history more unalike than the émigré philosopher Nikolay Berdyaev and the Soviet structuralist and semiotician Yury Lotman. Yet on one issue they are both in unequivocal agreement—the relentlessly *eschatological* shape of those cultural models (of history, of life, and of the two as presented in literature) that have been the focus of Russia's popular and literary imagination for centuries. Berdyaev—who was powerfully influenced by Dostoevsky and who came to maturity on the eve of the revolution, when the thought systems of various Christian mystics and Marxists were brought to a boil by the expectation of a new millennium—could still claim as late as 1946 that "Russians are either apocalypticists or nihilists. Russia is an apocalyptic revolt against antiquity. . . . This means that the Russian people, according to their metaphysical nature and calling in the world, are a people of the end [*narod kontsa*]" (*Russkaia ideia* 195). Lotman—who came to prominence in the 1960s as the leader of the Tartu School of structural poetics and who has written a series of pioneering works on the thesis that art does not passively "reflect" life but actually provides models and norms that social life then tries to imitate and incorporate—argues that "The historical fate of Western thought . . . developed in such a way that, beginning with the Middle Ages and continuing up to recent times, the idea of progress occupied a dominant position in both scientific and social thinking, coloring the whole of culture for entire historical periods. On the other hand, in the history of Russian social thought there dominated, over the course of entire historical periods, concepts of an eschatological or maximalist type" ("Spory o iazyke" 173). Whether both of these writers, the one more "intuitive" and given to broad, unqualified generalization and the other more "contextualist" and given to a meticulous sifting of evidence, are "objectively" correct is ultimately beside the point, since they are continuing a dialogue about the *received* notions of Russia's past, present, and future that is central to any discussion of their country's historical identity.

The binary oppositions by which Russians have tended to define themselves from their first steps into literacy have had, according to Lotman and Boris Uspensky, a profound impact on the eschatological view of national history passed down through the centuries. In the Roman Catholic West earthly life was from very early on "conceived of as admitting three types of behavior [on the model of heaven-purgatory-hell]: the unconditionally sinful, the unconditionally holy, and the neutral, which permits eternal sal-