# Apocalyptic and Millenarian Themes in Interwar British Art

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## Introduction

The engagement of British visual art and culture with apocalyptic and millenarian themes and subjects during the interwar period (c. 1919–39) was often intimately related to the two world wars that circumscribed and, in many ways, came to overshadow the period. This article provides an overview and identifies pertinent examples of the three broad patterns that can be identified: a retrospective mode in the aftermath of the Great War that offered consolation while often remaining rooted in contemporary and recent apocalyptic rhetoric and religious justifications for the conflict; a progressive millenarian mode that accordingly sought to reshape the world; and a prospective, increasingly secular mode of apocalyptic thinking that emerged in the 1930s.

## The Aftermath of the Great War

The aftermath of the Great War saw tens of thousands of memorials erected across Britain. These provided the main focal point for both local and national grief at the deaths of three-fourths of a million British lives, and were predominantly located adjacent to parish churches, in churchyards, or within ecclesiastical buildings. Christian imagery was used extensively, with apocalyptic subjects pertinent in the iconography of remembrance.

The most prevalent of these subjects was the Archangel St Michael, the leader of the heavenly host and the victor over Satan, responsible for casting him out of heaven in the overthrowal of the rebellious angels (Revelation 12:7–12). This iconography was used on both local and national memorials. In Shrewsbury a Portland stone rotunda with a bronze figure of the Archangel was erected in 1922 to honour Shropshire's deceased. He stands, framed by his wings, in Gothic plate armour. A plaque identifies the cause: 'For God, King and country'. At the Church of St Michael's, Cornhill, a memorial depicting the victorious Michael was unveiled on 1 November 1920 in honour of the men who had served during the Great War and were employed within the parish in the City of London. A bronze tablet similarly associates St Michael's assignment with the imperial British cause of fighting for 'the freedom of the world'. The Scottish National War Memorial, Edinburgh Castle, also identified St Michael with the national cause. An eleven-foot oak figure of Michael slaying the dragon is the centre point in the shrine's iconography. The figure, designed by

Alice Meredith-Williams, is suspended above the interior shrine casket, apparently protecting the roll of honour. The Scottish stained-glass artist Douglas Strachan interpreted the Archangel as

> a Symbol of Righteousness overcoming Wrong in the perpetual antagonism between the Spirit of Good and the Spirit of Evil. He is the Captain of the Heavenly Hosts, and Conqueror of the Powers of Hell: but he is also Captain of all Earthly hosts fighting in a just cause and conductor and guardian of the spirits of the dead. (MacMillan 2014, 135)

Ian Hay's (1931, 133) guidebook to the memorial likewise identified Michael in terms of just cause. Publicly, St Michael was integrated with the national cause.

The Archangel was frequently used in conjunction with other warrior-saints and especially St George; given St George's status as patron saint of England, the latter pairing conflated the national identity with divine identity and righteousness. The two saints share an iconography of the medieval knight fighting a dragon that was especially popular with artists associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, such as Christopher Whall (1849–1924), who displayed a *stained-glass* memorial design combining the two saints George and Michael at the *War Memorials Exhibition in October 1919, and* his former student, *Mabel Esplin (1874–1921), who exhibited a design of* St *Michael (Royal Academy of Arts 1919, 52). The exhibition,* encompassing designs for 'the present war', *was one of two in 1919 initiated by the Civic Arts Association and the Royal Academy War Memorials Committee. The largely didactic exhibitions were held on the basis that the exhibits should inform memorial projects across the country. In this context, the iconography of St Michael was identified as appropriate*[Pr1] [TB2] [AL3] . The symbolism ostensibly signified the triumph over the evil of war; however, with propaganda and the Treaty of Versailles both attributing blame for the war to German militarism, the underlying concept—war's conquest—contentiously echoes triumph over Germany. The association itself theologically sanctioned the national war effort as righteous—or even as holy (Goebel 2007, 93). The deceased are accordingly implicitly endorsed as God's army.

The Holy Trinity Church on Prince Consort Road, Kensington Gore, London, contains a notable example of this righteous warfare imagery; alongside a memorial tablet (1925) by Cecil G. Hare depicting St Michael is a memorial window designed and executed (c. 1925) by Thomas Henry 'Harry' Grylls (1873–1953). The window depicts Christ as the Rider on the White Horse. He is surrounded by medieval knights on horseback, riding beneath St George's Cross, while on the horizon the New Jerusalem radiates light. Scrolls along the bottom of the composition quote Revelation 19:11: 'He was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.' The lower lights had not been installed at the time of the dedication in 1925; the service paper described these as symbolizing 'the summons to war and response as applied to the Motherland and her daughters' (quoted in Bromwell 2019, 141). Of these the four centre lights depict Deborah and five warriors of the Hebrew Bible (Joshua, David, Jonathan, Judas Maccabaeus, and Gideon) beside the Arms of Imperial Dominions. National—and imperial—identity is conflated with moral Christian warfare. In the upper lights Christ rides out for eschatological warfare beneath the flag of England, while in the lower lights the imperial effort is identified with the righteous cause, and the empire is granted divine status (Bromwell 2019, 141–42).

The concepts of St Michael and eschatological conflict in the memorial iconography of the Great War construct a moral dualism of good and evil, elevating a particular human cause and denigrating opposing

human forces (who are identified as enemies of the divine). The lexicon of evil and apocalypse that circulated during the war stoked the animosity and demonization of the other. After 1918 this rhetoric did not disappear; it morphed and continued in iconographies that justified the British war effort through a morally unambiguous dichotomy of 'good' and 'evil'. With the lines between national and Christian identities blurring, the British Empire inevitably adopted and maintained the mantle of the Kingdom of God upon earth (Bromwell 2019, 142).

A second strand of apocalyptic iconography in the culture of remembrance appeared as an addendum to the imagery of Christ and the Crucifixion: specifically, the use of the Cross and its variations. A cross—as opposed to the Cross, the Crucifixion, or a crucifix, which all emphasize Jesus's death by crucifixion—is free of the corpus; thus, the promise of resurrection comes to the fore while the reference to bodily mortality recedes. Death in the war was frequently framed in terms of sacrifice and resurrection; as Paul Fussell (2013) acknowledged, many 'readily embraced the image [of the Crucifixion] as quintessentially symbolic of their own suffering and "sacrifice"' (118). The imagery announced the soldier's sacrifice, their transcendence beyond death, and the nation's renewal. The postwar culture of memorialization was indebted to the way the war had been framed between 1914 and 1918, recurrently remembering the dead in terms of Christian resurrection and paraphrasing Isaiah 26:19: 'the dead men shall live' (quotations are taken from the King James Version).

*The 1919 war memorials exhibitions referred to above displayed a wide variety of designs that made use of both the Crucifixion and the generic iconography of a cross. The Cross of Sacrifice*, designed by Reginald Blomfield (1856–1942), was displayed in the central quadrangle of Burlington House at the second exhibition. Blomfield's design was used throughout the British military cemeteries established after the war. These followed a pattern that explicitly linked the dead with Christian sacrifice and resurrection via a chapel, central Cross of Sacrifice and Stone of Remembrance (designed by Edwin Lutyens), and pious inscriptions. The Cross, with inset sword, was accepted as indeterminate in meaning by the Imperial War Graves Commission, suggesting either sacrifice in war or hope in resurrection (Mosse 1990, 83). Lutyens conceived the Stone as a pantheistic symbol; it was, however, commonly identified with reference to Christianity as 'the altar' and bore an inscription proposed by Rudyard Kipling that alludes to the eternally heroic dead ('THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE'), taken from the apocryphal biblical text Ecclesiasticus 44:14. Unidentified soldiers were buried with headstones engraved with a cross and the inscription 'A British Soldier of the Great War Known Unto God'. Lutyens's Cenotaph, which was unveiled on Armistice Day 1920, can be identified with the wider trend. 'Cenotaph' etymologically means 'empty tomb', which, in the Christian context, alludes to the empty tomb following Christ's resurrection. With the cross so prevalent in the visual and material culture, the memory of the Great War came to be populated with the iconography of resurrection.

A third strand of the trend is focused on the iconography of Christ in Majesty (Revelation 4–5) and the related iconographies of the Last Judgment and the general resurrection. The imagery of Christ enthroned—as used, for example, in the war memorial window (1921) by Burlison & Grylls at St James' Church, West Hanney, and Eton College Chapel's memorial to General Sir Stanley Maude (1927)—heralds eschatological triumph and consolation. The shrine room at the Scottish National War Memorial at Edinburgh Castle, mentioned earlier, culminates with a stained-glass depiction of Christ in Majesty. The scheme unifies aspects from the three trends already outlined; according to the 1928 guidebook, Douglas Strachan's seven windows depict 'the feelings and forces deep in human nature which make first for War

and then for the triumph of Peace' (Deas 1928, 19). The left two windows depict the 'Birth of War': the Creation of the World takes place above the story of Cain and Abel, while the story of Abraham and Isaac is depicted in the lower order. The right two windows correspond with the 'Overthrow of Tyranny', with the lower order depicting strife and oppression. Angels pour the 'vials of wrath' (Revelation 16:1). In the upper region, the Apocalypse's Four Horsemen ride behind Christ as the Rider on the White Horse (Revelation 19:11). The design climaxes with multiple references to Christ in the central three windows. The innermost window ('The Spirit Triumphant') depicts the enthroned Christ, with a dove and Agnus Dei (Lamb of God). Beneath is the Crucifixion; however, Christ appears to hover away from the Cross, shifting emphasis from suffering and death to ideas of resurrection and ascension (Hay 1931, 138). A pelican at the base of the Cross symbolizes Christ's sacrifice. In the lowest register the allegorical figure of Peace holds the dying personification of War. A soldier at their feet lies facing upwards towards the redemptive Christ. In the left and right windows—known as 'Praise' and 'Peace' respectively—soldiers in late medieval armour stand ceremoniously, while in the upper register the Elders of Revelation flank the throne. The soldiers' elevation to near-mythical status in the memorial iconography helped to obfuscate the reality of their death. Similar themes are found in other stained-glass memorials; for example, a three-light memorial designed by the Irish artist Wilhelmina Geddes (1887–1955), unveiled in November 1919 at the Anglican Church of St Bartholomew in Ottawa, Canada, depicted a slain soldier being welcomed into heaven. In the left window the newly resurrected soldier is received by the Archangels Raphael and Gabriel. In the central and right windows, beneath the Archangel Michael and St George, are soldier saints welcoming the soldier. In the region above are the Knights of King Arthur with the Holy Grail; the deceased have ascended into the pantheon of mythical national heroes.

The Arts and Crafts artist Phoebe Anna Traquair (1852–1936) painted two schemes incorporating the Christ in Majesty iconography in the aftermath of the Great War, with both offering commemorations to those who had served in the conflict. Traquair's triptych (c. 1920–21) for All Saints' Church, Jordanhill, depicts Christ in Majesty surrounded by ranks of angels, the four living beings (Revelation 4:6–8), and, in the lower region of the central panel, the blessed souls. The heads of the blessed represent the members of the congregation who had served in the war, with the fourteen members who had been killed among them (Cumming 1986, 259). Traquair's *Te Deum* followed in 1922. The mural above the altar at All Saints, Thorney Hill, is divided horizontally into three bands: an upper register in the dome of the apse depicting the enthroned Christ with angels; a lower decorative region; and a central band depicting local landscapes with life-size figures standing around the Holy Family. The mural was commissioned by Lord John Manners (1852–1927) following the death of his spouse Constance (1861–1920). The middle band is populated with historic and contemporary personages (both living and dead) who had an intimate or influential connection with the Manners family or Traquair. Along with depictions of Tennyson and William Blake are representations of friends who had died in the Great War, with Herbert Asquith's son Raymond and Edward Horner (Raymond Asquith's brother-in-law) among the soldiers dressed in their British military uniforms. Death is defeated and the ultimate kingdom is atemporal, with the local area recast as the eschatological paradise.

Notably, it appears there were few clear depictions of eschatological judgment for the deceased. Where an analogous iconography was present, it was largely reconfigured for the purposes of consolation. The Australian Bertram Mackennal (1863–1931) designed the Parliamentary War Memorial, *The Recording Angel* (1921). The winged figure stands centrally, chronicling every person's deeds for the purposes of judgment (Malachi 3:16; Revelation 20:12). Eight stone panels record the names of Members of

Parliament, peers, senior staff, and their sons who died during the Great War. The memorial suggests that their deaths have made them into the righteous. Perhaps the most celebrated painted memorial scheme in Britain was executed by Stanley Spencer (1891–1959) between 1927 and 1932 at the Oratory of All Souls, Burghclere (Sandham Memorial Chapel). The scheme of nineteen paintings culminates in the altar painting (*Resurrection of the Soldiers*, 1929), a macabre vision of Christ administering the general resurrection. Soldiers emerge from the ground and carry the crosses that marked their graves towards the central figure of Christ in the upper register of the painting. Spencer's brother-in-law Richard Carline (1928) noted that the risen soldiers present their crosses, 'their last worldly impediments… just in the same way as they would hand in their equipment on demobilisation' (316–21). While the composition is a close approximation of the Last Judgment's iconographic tradition, any sense of judgment itself is absent. Even the soldiers' uniforms are without national insignia or rank; the soldiers, irrespective of the divisions on the battlefield, are united in death and at the resurrection. For Jay Winter (1998, 169), the painting is a depiction of the Resurrection as armistice.

## Millenarian Visions

The interwar period was buoyant with promises of a better world after the apocalyptic rhetoric and devastation surrounding the Great War. Visual artists often interacted with these utopian ideas and projects (political, secular, or religious), which sought to reinvigorate society and potentially realize an eschatological paradise. Indeed, the secular manifestations often overlapped with or closely approximated the religious hopes. The League of Nations (LoN) was founded in 1919 with ambitions of healing and reconciliation between the belligerent nations. Advocates such as Randall Davidson, Archbishop of Canterbury, identified the LoN with divine purpose (Davidson 1922, 4); he declared in a sermon at the opening of the LoN Assembly in 1922:

> If we consider what the League of Nations is for, what its covenant covers, what are its aims, its possibilities, its resolves, here, as the very kernel of Jesus Christ's teaching, it lies compact—'The Kingdom of God and His righteousness.' It is nothing less than that.

Harry Morley's *Lighting the Lamp of Peace* (1922) resonates with the contemporary hope for everlasting peace. Morley depicted a female figure holding the Lamp of Peace, which a male figure lights with fire from a smouldering pile of papers labelled 'Corpus Delicti'. Putti (cherubs) in the upper corners of the canvas hold scrolls with the opening words of Psalm 133, 'Ecce quam bonum' ('Behold, how good'). The psalm addresses and promotes the ideal union of the faithful and the hope that there will one day be the spiritual unification of all God's people. The satirist David Low (1934, 20) sustained the hope for a peaceful accord for humanity in *Sermons by Artists*:

> It is now possible to dream with some prospect of ultimate realization of a world in which all peoples will live together in peace, contentment and pride … it is dawning on humanity that patriotic sentiment need no more be exclusively confined to the nation than to the village, but may embrace the whole world.

The LoN-initiated British Mandate in Palestine came into effect in September 1923. It was distinguished along with the Palestinian campaign by the Anglo-Welsh artist Frank Brangwyn (1867–1956) in *Entry of the Welsh Troops into Jerusalem* (1920–31). The Welsh War Memorial Committee commissioned the painting, having requested a specifically Welsh subject. Brangwyn exemplified this as the capture of Jerusalem in 1917. Welsh identity frequently interacts with Jewish culture and identity, and often identifies with the Jewish people as a historically persecuted small nation living with a sense of divine calling (Davies 2002, 18–20). There was distinct pride in Wales when Jerusalem was occupied under a Welsh prime minister—David Lloyd George later stressed that the Welsh affinity for the Jewish people was a key factor in his advocacy of Zionism—and with the contributions of the 53rd (Welsh) Division under Major General Motte. Brangwyn's painting of the 53rd entering Jerusalem engages with these closely associated national identities and resonates with the Welsh empathy with Zionism.

The British Empire reached its territorial apogee after the Great War. Throughout its history, the empire associated itself with the Kingdom of God. Sir Hubert Parry (1848–1918) had set William Blake's 1804 poem 'And Did Those Feet in Ancient Time' to music in 1916 to inspire English patriotism during the war. The result, 'Jerusalem', identifies the English as God's new chosen people and calls for England to become the New Jerusalem. Such conceptions contributed towards a secular, popular utopian ideology. Brangwyn's Empire Panels (1926–32) celebrate the empire's flora, fauna, and ethnography. The critic Frank Rutter (1933) claimed that it was the unity—rather than the diversity—of the empire that was most important to Brangwyn's design; thus 'East and West are indissolubly fused' (18). The scheme had been conceived as a memorial for the Great War; Brangwyn's celebratory imagery conceals the tragedy of the conflict behind an Edenic imperial cornucopia (Le Pocreau 2018). Thus, a benevolent natural world and a universal paradisal state are manifest; the empire is made utopian. Rutter alluded to Isaiah 2:4 in describing the scheme:

> [It forecasts] the era of peace upon earth when the sword will have become a sickle and the ponderous and ugly engines designed for man's destruction will be remembered only as records of a curiously persisting savage strain in an highly civilised age. (Rutter 1933, 9)

Brangwyn's scheme coincided with a period of imperial visual propaganda advocating a utopian concept of empire. A promotional poster for the 1924 British Empire Exhibition identified the empire as a 'model for the mighty world', and in 1926 the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) was established to promote intra-empire trade. From 1927 until 1933 the EMB published around 800 posters. These endorsed and consolidated an imperialist ideology in British popular culture (Constantine 1986, 223–24). The Canadian painter James Kerr-Lawson (1865–1939) designed a pentalogy (a five-part representation)—captioned using Isaiah 2:4—titled *The Empire Stands for Peace* for the EMB ahead of Armistice Day 1929. Kerr-Lawson links the empire with scriptural prophecy regarding the eschatological kingdom of peace. People traverse from left to right across the five posters; at the front is a Christ-like figure shrouded in light, signalling to the perceived proximity of Christian teachings and the empire.

Brangwyn's four-painting scheme *Man in Search for Eternal Truth* (1932–33) for the Rockefeller Center, New York, reiterated the importance of human agency in achieving the Kingdom of God. Brangwyn was commissioned on the theme 'Man's New Relation to Man'; it was intended to 'express man's new relationship to society and his fellowman: (1) His Family Relationships; (2) His Relationships as a Worker;

(3) His Relationships as a part of Government; and (4) His Ethical or Religious Relationships'. The fourth panel, revealing 'the real meaning of the Sermon on the Mount', was 'the dominating and controlling factor, without which the first three can only fail' ('Theme' draft memorandum 2, 30 September 1932. Rockefeller Center Archives). Brangwyn's friend the British author and fellow Catholic Philip Macer-Wright provided inscriptions for each painting from which their titles are taken: *Man Labouring*, *Man the Creator*, *Man the Master*, and *Man's Ultimate Destiny*.

The initial three panels condense human history; they sequentially romanticize a lost Edenic age, chart the creation of sophisticated technologies, and identify that modernity's promises remain unfulfilled. The fourth panel clarifies that humankind—hitherto defined by technology—needs redefinition through scripture. Brangwyn's mural situates a melange of people in modern dress in Palestine nineteen hundred years earlier; soldiers of the Great War stand beside an inscription that reads:

> *Man's ultimate destiny depends not on whether he can learn new lessons or make new discoveries and conquests, but on his acceptance of the lesson taught him close upon two thousand years ago.*

Brangwyn elucidated:

> *The panels … show the three great dynamic periods in man's conquest of the physical world and … suggest the nature of his yet more tremendous destiny—that of cultivating the garden of his soul and attuning himself to the Christ-infused spirit of Brotherhood, by which alone he may hope—in spirit and in truth—to inhabit the earth. (Frank Brangwyn to John D. Rockefeller Jr., 19 November 1933, Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller Records, Business Interests, Series C (FA312) RCI—Themes and Decorations 1931–33, Rockefeller Archive Center)*

An addendum to the artistic tradition of interpreting the ultimate paradise was manifest in novel political expressions. Progressive, ostensibly secular political movements and revolutionary groups frequently adopted the themes and rhetoric of the millennium. Examples such as John E. Nicholls's *A. D. 2026* (1927) conflated the Christian millennium with socialism; angelic beings toil for the manual labourers, who now rest in an eschatological paradise. The proximity of a Marxist theory of history to the Christian millennium was apparent in the radical left-wing satirist Will Dyson's essay on Matthew 6:28–9 in *Sermons by Artists*. Dyson (1934, 57) emphasized human industriousness, agency, and creativity in achieving the earthly paradise:

> *No dream of man is unrealizable; dreams are prophetic visions of unembodied realities, and consciously or unconsciously we move towards their embodiment. The conscious pleading of the saint and the unconscious urging of the practical man are all towards the kingdom of God upon earth.*

Paintings such as Quentin Bell's *May Day Procession with Banners* (1937) and Clive Branson's *Demonstration in Battersea* (1939) indicate the increased presence of utopian politics in the late 1930s.

Both portray communism as organized and nonviolent, and with revolutionary elements obfuscated. Branson joined the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1932; by the late 1930s he had self-consciously rejected his academic training at the Slade School of Fine Art, instead favouring the untrained approach of the Ashington Art Group (also known as the Pitmen Painters), a group of Northumberland miners who recorded their experiences in artworks during the 1930s. Branson believed that their approach to painting was more authentic than his own bourgeois, educated approach, and was therefore stylistically more appropriate to his own Communist ideology.

C. R. W. Nevinson (1889–1946) satirized the unflinching certainty of dogmatic ideology in the painting *'They all Know the Way': A Symbolic Satire on Fascists, Socialists, Capitalists, Hedonists, Ascetics, Intellectuals, and Priests* (1934). The artist suggests that while each satirized character professes some unique gnosis for reorganizing human society, they all in fact conform to the same model. Nevinson (1936) lamented the fanaticism of contemporary politics, recalling that as a 'young man, it was my lot to listen occasionally to Lenin positively foaming at the mouth in a Montparnasse café. He was in those days much addicted to prophecy' (186). Nevinson said, 'The youth of Europe is becoming increasingly under the domination of a socialistic ideal of State or race worship' (211). Nevinson claimed that while 'it was imagined that another war was inconceivable' in 1921, he 'realized that nation-worship was only in its infancy, and the creed of State and nothing but the State would be the next European phase' (217).

The visual culture of moderate utopian politics indulged in similar hyperbolic rhetoric and frequently alluded to millenarian themes to signal its progressive aspirations. In the 1920s the Labour Party often campaigned with posters sharing Keir Hardie's progressive millennial vision for the Labour movement. *To-Morrow—When Labour Rules* (1923) and A. S. Merrit's *Greet the Dawn: Give Labour It's Chance* [*sic*] (1923) promote a realized socialist millennium that is as imminent as the sunrise. The wholly positive attitude was not ubiquitous. Pacifist movements, although advocating a new world of peace, campaigned using fear tactics and images of total destruction. Richard Overy (2010) identified 'a strong element of religiosity, or religious analogy, running through the language and values of the pacifist cause' (240). The Northern Friends' Peace Board combined Christian and secular references in a poster titled *Protest Now Against Air Armaments* (early 1930s), juxtaposing air combat with an ironic quotation of Psalm 19:1: 'The heavens declare the glory of God.' The Northern Friends' Peace Board issued a poster in 1938 with a quotation attributed to the Quaker Member of Parliament Thomas Edmund Harvey inverting Isaiah 2:4: 'If we go on turning ploughshares into swords how can we expect a harvest of peace?' The implication was that beneficial tools were being sacrificed for the destructive tools of warfare.

Among these debates around eschatological configurations for society we can place Stanley Spencer, who developed the nascent idea of a 'Church-House' (rather than gallery), where the sacred and domestic would be combined, and his schemes of thought could be unified in specific rooms. Although a definitive plan was never composed, Spencer settled on three main sequences: *The Pentecost* (depicting saints and angels in his native Cookham, started 1933), *The Marriage at Cana* (started 1935), and *The Baptism of Christ* (started 1935). These were loosely collected under the title 'The Last Day' (Bell 1980, 122). Spencer's scheme attended to the absolute finale of the divine plan; the dead resurrect and receive general judgment, after which the New Jerusalem—being for Spencer a world of love—will be established. In Spencer's own words: 'The Last Day is in my treatment of it, a record of all that to me I love' (Leder 1976, 24). Spencer advocated an ultimate paradise that could be achieved through human agency. The Catholic artist Mark Lancelot Symons (1887–1935) shared a belief in the importance of human agency in

achieving the paradisal state. Symons's religious philosophy of life and belief in the millennium is divulged in his intricate painting *The Earthly Paradise* (1927–34) (Wines 1937, 53). The title alludes to Genesis 3 and the lost Edenic state. The composition is divided into distinct inner and outer spaces. An inner tondo-shaped region corresponding to paradise is populated with vivacious children, while the fallen world is located in the outer area. Symons understood that the Fall had resulted in spiritual—not physical—displacement (Wines 1937, 55). For Symons, the innocence of children allows them access to paradise (58). These visions of the future attest to a sense of dissatisfaction with the world as it was, and they ask viewers to imagine radically different scenarios of our collective futures. All of these artists were acutely aware of the horrors of their time, and yet their interpretations of the kingdom and millennium do not consign it to a deferred prospect. Instead, they conceived of heaven on earth in the here and now, with its imminence under human agency (Bromwell 2019, 216).

## Secular Apocalypticism

In 1927, M. R. James delivered the Schweich Lectures of the British Academy on the Apocalypse in English manuscripts from the fifth to sixteenth centuries. James (1931) asserted that 'the living fire of John's Apocalypse has never lost its power' (26). The tenth anniversary of the Armistice and the reshaping of war memories coincided with a new interest in the Apocalypse, with a number of artists attempting illustrated editions of the Book of Revelation (Bromwell 2019, 142–47). In 1931, an edition of the Apocalypse was published with new illustrations by Frances Clayton (1903–1985) in a limited run of one thousand numbered copies signed by the artist. Twelve illustrations (along with additional illustrations for the front and rear covers) use an almost faux-naif simplicity of style to depict the events of the Apocalypse. Of note is Clayton's image of the seven angels emptying the vials that hold the last plagues (Revelation 16:1–20) onto the earth below. Cataclysms roughly corresponding to each vial transpire sequentially; tall buildings, signifying modernity and the contemporary city, are subsumed by the destruction. Clayton's images are largely ancillary to the text as a means of biblical exegesis, yet images of the city on the verge of ruin would resonate throughout the 1930s, when corresponding imagery was widely employed. The interest in illustrating Revelation was partially due to D. H. Lawrence (1885 –1930), who was central to attempts by Frederick Carter (1883–1967), Blair Hughes-Stanton (1902–1981), and John Buckland Wright (1897–1954) at illustrating the last book of the bible. Carter's epistolary friendship with Lawrence developed in the early 1920s around their idiosyncratic interpretations of the Apocalypse. In due course each published their own criticisms and interpretations of the Apocalypse—Carter also unsuccessfully attempted an illustrated Apocalypse using the King James text in the late 1920s. Lawrence was instrumental in Hughes-Stanton's attempt because he had suggested illustrating Revelation to the artist; the edition was published by the Gregynog Press as a premium edition in 1932. Finally, Lawrence's posthumously published *Apocalypse* (1931) inspired John Buckland Wright to illustrate the last book of the Bible. Between around 1931 and around 1935, he was working towards an ultimately unfulfilled edition, reaching a final state on just four engravings. The last major example of this trend was by Stephen Gooden, who was producing a series of copperplate engravings for an edition of Revelation as war was declared in 1939. The project was suggested to Gooden in 1927 and only partially realized between 1937 and 1939, when it was suspended. Gooden's unrealized edition was for the King James text; only three works were ultimately issued, in a limited portfolio of prints in 1940 at the request of the artist.

The tenth anniversary of the end of the Great War, the deteriorating economic and international situation

after 1929, and the prospective fear of new war—and what it would entail—loomed large in the cultural imagination. With the tensions came a new trend in the visual arts for secular apocalyptic imagery. At the vanguard was Nevinson. His so-called problem paintings (or 'symbolic satires') and various writings expressed his belief that a coming second Great War would end Western culture. In paintings such as *Sacrifice* (1934, now known as *The Unending Cult of Human Sacrifice*) and *The Twentieth Century* (1932–35), Nevinson diagnosed the social, cultural, and political problems that he believed made war inevitable. The artist adopted a prophetic tone, speaking of having visions (albeit induced by medication) of cataclysm that would guide the paintings. In 1934, *Exodus A. D.*, a novel Nevinson co-authored with the popular writer Princess Paul Troubetzkoy (1898–1948), was published. The book was a partial response to Nevinson's paintings and describes a surprise aerial attack on London that results in mass panic and the rapid collapse of society. The modern city is powerless and the culture it signifies deteriorates into a bestial struggle for survival. Works such as Seán Keating's *Homo Sapiens: An Allegory of Democracy* (1930) and Walter Nessler's *Premonition* (c. 1937) similarly emphasize the existential threat posed by aerial bombardment of civilian targets.

A further wave of secular apocalyptic imagery coincided with the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), with artists such as John Armstrong (1893–1973) galvanized by the conflict. The politics and the collision of ideals and values in the Spanish Civil War allowed for politicized dichotomies of absolute right and wrong. As in the Great War, there were concerted efforts to sanctify the cause using religion or popular political substitutes. In December 1938 a solo exhibition of paintings by Armstrong opened at the Lefevre Gallery, London. His recent work indicated a turn towards surrealism. Art critic Thomas Wade Earp (1938) identified entropy as the exhibition's prominent theme (10), while *The Guardian* described images of 'a world dreaming itself into decay and dilapidation' ('Our London Correspondent' 1938, 10). *Works included Revelations* (1938), which suggests both the devastation heralded in the biblical text—Revelations being a misnomer of Revelation—and a more generalized uncovering. The painting depicts a heavily damaged building; exterior walls have collapsed, the interior has been revealed, and wallpaper peels away. The apocalyptic destruction has climaxed; everything is gone. The exhibition's political content extended beyond the Spanish context. *Pro Patria* (1938) pairs the Italian Fascist slogan with a scene of ruination and destruction. The work was inspired by the ubiquitous Fascist propaganda that had stunned Armstrong on a visit to Rome in 1937. The poet and critic Stephen Spender (1943, 6) recognized an apocalyptic dimension in the surreal aesthetic before 1939:

> For years before the war, European cities were unreal, with the unreality of a landscape sunlit and unspeakably silent before a storm. Some artists expressed this violent sense of disorder in surrealism; others by withdrawing into the search for an abstract and integrating symbol. The war is the fulfilment of prophetic visions of art, and in a sense it means a return to reality by artists who found the peace too unreal to be accepted at its face value.

The 1937 exhibition of paintings by Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957) at the Leicester Galleries included paintings of imagined scenes of conflict in European history (Lewis [1937] 1967). Among the exhibited works was *The Surrender of Barcelona* (with the title *Siege of Barcelona*). *The title* makes two allusions—one to the siege of 1472 and the other to the contemporary conflict in Spain. Lewis had sympathized with the nationalists; however, his allegiance had changed by 1939, and the title was amended from *Siege* to *Surrender* following the fall of Barcelona in January that year. Lewis identified the

tensions and conflict in Spain, and across Europe, as the recurrence of historical patterns (Edwards 1997, 150). Lewis, like Nevinson, anticipated another terrible conflict, with the Spanish Civil War being merely the forerunner. His autobiography warned that 'we have to marshal in our minds all that nexus of disastrous events, of which the Great War was the first, and of which the Great War No. 2, now in preparation, will be the next' (Lewis [1967] 1937, 260).

Practitioners of visual art and culture in Britain widely engaged with the idea of a catastrophic historical break, or the end of the world as we know it, during the interwar period. This is a growing area of research and, as such, further trends and patterns are expected to be identified. Certainly, the Great War and its legacy activated many apocalyptic themes and subjects in British art; these contributed to the retrospective construction of the war as the end of one era of human existence, while its legacy informed the prospective fears of a second Great War. Amid the apocalyptic thought there remained hopes of a transfigured tomorrow, and there was a concerted effort to establish a New Jerusalem across art and society, with artists holding to religious narratives or willingly associating with political programmes secularizing the biblical ideal.

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## Article information