The Concept of Apocalypse in the Narrative of New Generations

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Introduction

Apocalypse is a part of the revelation in John of Patmos' book *Apocalypse* (a title rendered into English as *Apocalypse* c.1230 and *Revelations* by Wycliffe c.1380), where the Apostle divulges what has been revealed to him about the future end of the world. Literally meaning "revelation" or "prophesy," in Middle English the word signified "insight," "vision," and "hallucination." Its modern meaning is that of a great disaster, a cataclysmic event that causes much fear, loss and destruction.

Through the times, the idea of apocalypse has always been a part of the human mentality, assuming different interpretations depending on the concerns and problems threatening the existence of mankind. While in the early Jewish or Christian writings (b.c 200 to a.d. 350) apocalypse meant a prophetic revelation with the ultimate divine purpose to inform people of a coming cataclysm, in which the forces of good permanently triumph over the forces of evil, nowadays the idea of salvation is not that strongly associated with the word. Today, the word pairs with Armageddon and the End of Days and denotes any dramatic and catastrophic widespread disaster seen as likely to completely destroy the world or/and the human race.

This article analyzes some trends that literary criticism has detected in the treatment of apocalypse by postmodern literature and looks at the ways these trends have been reflected in two well-known postmodern novels, *Generation X. Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (1991) by a Canadian writer Douglas Coupland and *The Book of Dave. A Revelation of the Recent Past and the Distant Future* (2006) by Will Self, a British writer and publicist. The choice of these novels has been grounded in the fact that they belong to different cultural movements and places with their specific outlook on the impending cataclysm. Of no less importance is the fact that though these novels are temporarily spaced by only fifteen years, their creation belongs to the pre- and post- periods of the great divide, the tragic events of 9/11, which inevitably have affected the perception of apocalypse and post-apocalyptic reality in the postmodern mentality.

Apocalyptic Thought in the Twentieth Century Culture

The concept of apocalypse has always had a powerful imaginative and narrative potential, which has dramatically increased in the twentieth century with the advent of nuclear power and the invention of an atomic bomb. But even prior to those groundbreaking developments in technology, natural disasters and other technological advances have threatened people's imagination with unforeseeable doomsday consequences. Take, for instance, the disturbingly visionary *The Last War: A World Set Free* by H.G. Wells (1914) or the late writings of Henry Adams, who in *The Education of Henry Adams* (1918) provided "perhaps one the most prophetic, disturbing, and convincing accounts of how the massive technological changes that were taking place

around the turn of the nineteenth century would transform the world. … What in retrospect seems difficult to read as anything less than a kind of nuclear prescience, and as an awareness about the exponential rate of technological change that would quickly outpace human cognition and control (Fest, 2013, p. 38).

In postmodern cultural environment, the concept of apocalypse has become one of the basic matrixes of contemporary art and literary production. In his book *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1968), Frank Kermode presents an original interpretation of the connection between apocalyptic perception of reality and fiction. Regarded as a landmark in the twentieth century critical thought the book seeks to establish a connection between fiction, time and apocalyptic modes of thought. Kermode sees innate analogy between the apocalyptic features and the process of reading and writing fiction. According to him, any narrative or story should be viewed existentially within the perspective of the beginning and the end. He concludes that in imagining the end of the world, apocalyptic thinkers are imposing a pattern on history, thus making possible "a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle" (Kermode, 1968, p. 17). The critic believes that a naïve vision of the world's end, described in the biblical *Apocalypse*, makes the basis of the human mentality, but all predictions of the end are continually being falsified, so people have to adjust their patterns in the interest of reality. Likewise, the apocalyptic idea is present, to a certain extent, in each literary narrative, as it defines the plot and allows the reader to be 'in the middle' of the story. The imminent end of the narration is associated with death; similar to any human life, where death is inevitable and life is stretched between the beginning and the end, any narration develops between the beginning and the end. The story is drawing to its end, and the reader is anticipating the end, even looking forward to it, which makes the narration meaningful. Similar to adjustments people make in real life about their falsified predictions of the future, fiction utilises 'peripeteia,' a sudden change in the movement of the plot, which undermines reader's expectations and naïve predictions of the end. 'Peripeteia' makes reader's expectation falsified, and assimilating it he is "enacting that readjustment of expectations which is so notable a feature of naive apocalyptic" (Kermode, 1968, p. 18). Further on, he points out that:

> The great majority of interpretations of Apocalypse assume that the End is pretty near. Consequently the historical reality is always having to be revised; time discredits it. And this is important. Apocalypse can be disconfirmed without being discredited. This is part of its extraordinary resilience. It can also absorb changing interests, rival apocalypses, such as the Sibylline writings. It is patient of change and of historiographical sophistications. It allows itself to be diffused, blended with other varieties of fiction [. . .] and yet it can survive in very naïve forms. (Kermode, 1968, p. 30)

Another treatment of apocalyptic discourse is suggested by the collection of essays edited by Bloomquist and Carey (1999), which single out a number of criteria proper to such a discourse. The most important among them is a message from God that the prophet receives; its interpretation by the holy intermediaries; anonymity of the message itself since it is the prophet himself who delivers the message of apocalypse within unspecified time; ongoing anticipation of the world's end and the beginning of the new life, which will replace the current unfair and faulty existence with the ideal one in the wake of the Judgment Day, delivering punishment and reward to the mankind. No less important are such elements as the catastrophe itself and multiple binary oppositions: the good and the evil, God and Satan, the epochs gone and commenced. Unlike Kermode, Bloomquist and Carey approach apocalypse from the theological rather than literary stand, though one of the contributors to their book is worth quoting for better understanding of the nature of modern apocalyptic narrative. Vernon K. Robbins writes in his essay:

> Every text is a fabric woven from multiple textures, those textures include its relationship to historical events, other texts, and contemporary discourses (intertexture), its location within the web of sociocultural

> conventions and institutions (social and cultural texture), its connection with the larger values and beliefs of its authors and readers, including modern readers (ideological texture), and the variety of ways that it transmits sacred experiences (sacred texture). (Robbins, 1999, pp. 95-96)

A number of researchers, such as Berger (1999), Bull (1999) and Ostwald (2003), also focus on postmodern apocalyptic discourse, which has become particularly dynamic at the threshold of the new millennium. Such a discourse presents a desacralized version of the biblical apocalypse as it develops, according to Robbins' schemata, in the new social, cultural and ideological textures. In the postmodern vision of the apocalypse, people themselves trigger the end of the world as the result of a nuclear explosion, ecological catastrophe, lethal diseases and/or uncontainable terrorism. Many critics characterize postmodern mentality as socially and psychologically apocalyptic in its essence. Contemporary mankind, cognizant of its precarious existence, is driven to seek new ways of survival, significantly deviant from the one suggested by the sacred texture. Postmodern apocalyptic literature, reflecting this, is engaged in deconstructing biblical scriptures and reconstructing history, which conforms to Kermode's thesis of adjustments that people make in real life about their falsified predictions of the future. These adjustments are reflected in a new typology of apocalyptic plots, suggested by Kermode and typical of the postmodern apocalyptic narrative. These scenarios include: 1) crisis or catastrophe, punishment and requital; 2) destruction, punishment and resurrection; and 3) the end and the revival (Kermode, 1968). It is remarkable that expectation, even anticipation of the imminent end is often associated for a postmodern person with optimism and hope, as the prospect of repentance and renewal helps to overcome the existing hardships. It is not surprising, therefore, that the instigators of the apocalypse admit their own survival among a few chosen ones (Brown & Carson, 1998). A similar idea is expressed by a researcher of postmodern science fiction, Elana Gomel, who states that in this type of narrative Apocalypse "is not merely a depiction of the catastrophe – it is a complex of narrative features that links the cessation of time with the advent of the millennium. Apocalypse is a one-way road to eternity which is the salvation of the chosen few and the damnation of the discarded many" (Gomel, 2010, p. 22).

In postmodern discourse, in general, the idea of apocalypse as repentance, redemption and renewal is replaced by post-apocalypse, in which the catastrophe itself is left behind in the past, revelation and unveiling have occurred, and a faith in a new world has come and gone (Heffernan, 2008). Quite often, as in *The Book of Dave* (Self, 2006) discussed below, the nature of the catastrophe itself is obscure, while the narration alternates between the pre- and post-apocalyptic states.

A plurality of the postmodern perspectives of apocalypse is observed by Rachel Muers (2005), who characterizes postmodernism as: 1) apocalyptic concept signifying the end of history; 2) the end of the autonomous personality; and 3) the end of representation. According to her, postmodern apocalypse substantiates the crisis of representation, a view also supported by M.H. Abrams (1984). Postmodern apocalypse has also become one of types of modality typical for postmodern temporal images, the most notable among which are those suggested by a prominent scholar of postmodernism, François Lyotard. While asserting the collapse of a metanarrative, or master narrative, Lyotard (1984) outlines some of the ways in which modernity deals with temporality. These are presented by him as three modalities of the postmodern temporal imagination: myth, contingency and apocalypse. While the deterministic narrative, which characterizes myth, is still alive, for Lyotard postmodernity is largely defined by contingency and apocalypse. His ideas, to a certain extent, are in accord with Kermode's perception of the ongoing adjustments to the narrative a postmodern person performs in face of reality: according to Lyotard, the nature of knowledge is shifting from being an end in itself to a commodity meant to be repackaged and redistributed.

In later studies, a modern apocalyptic myth is viewed as a reiteration of what was and will be said; it is an image of the time, which escapes temporality. As for the contingency, modern people are perceived as being attracted to the idea of apocalypse, as the lack of certainty in their lives, wrought by random acts of terrorism,

financial crises, and escalating natural disasters are viewed as chaos. In the line with this modality, or timeshape, only a big disaster, the end of history, can pave the way to "New Jerusalem." Analyzing this apocalyptic type of modality, Gomel remarks:

> It is perhaps the most ideologically potent and dangerous timeshape – and the most popular. Like time travel, apocalypse is deterministic but only in its destination, not in the means of getting there. … The timeshape of apocalypse specifies the beginning and the ending of history but leaves some room for contingent action in the middle. Apocalypse may be averted or postponed but it remains a perpetual temptation because, alone of all postmodern timeshapes, it promises here timeless utopia/millennium that will come after the ritual murder of time. (Gomel, p. 53)

Utopia, however, is not a universal attribute of apocalyptic discourse. A doomsday mentality, which does not envision future at all or foresees the future state of humanity as fallen into ruins and gloomy despair rather than ameliorated by the catastrophe, suggests another type of a narrative. This direction of apocalyptic discourse is prompted, in our opinion, primarily by the perception of the Chernobyl catastrophe and its consequences. It is worth noticing that for many years in the Soviet Union the disaster at the nuclear plant was commonly referred to as 'Chernobyl *tragedy'* while in the West it was treated from the start as a '*catastrophe*'. This terminological shift clearly signifies that, as a catastrophe, Chernobyl is not over yet, and many generations to come will still be affected by its repercussions. Acknowledgment of this has gradually reached the post-soviet culture, with '*catastrophe*' eventually replacing '*tragedy*' in popular and mass media vernacular (Gundorova, 2012). A renowned French philosopher and urbanist Paul Virilio views this catastrophe, associated for him with other traumatic disasters of the XX century, in a broad temporal perspective. A critic of "accelerated modernity," Virilio believes that "mass-production...industrialized the man-made accident" (Virilio, 2003, p. 25), and it is the speed of our life that is responsible for man-made as well as ecological accidents. Although Virilio is not using the term apocalypse, his vision of technology advancement is apocalyptic in its essence: every single technological disaster is a part of an 'integral accident,' or a general catastrophe, which is not confineable to a particular technology or region of the world and which may "one day become our only habitat" (ibid.). Not surprisingly, Virilio's exhibition *Unknown Quantity* dedicated to mega-catastrophes of our time borrowed its name from a short film made after a groundbreaking book, *Voices of Chernobyl: The Oral History of the Nuclear Disaster* (2005) by the Nobel Prize laureate Svetlana Alexievich. The philosophical dialogue of Virilio and Alexievich, a French theorist of speed and a Belarusian literary journalist, reveals two converging dimensions of postmodern apocalyptic discourse. Virilio calls Chernobyl a "time accident," "one of astronomical time - that of generations, centuries and even millennia" (ibid, p. 202), while Alexievich argues that the materialist philosophy proved powerless in the face of such catastrophes and only religion can alleviate the fear. In her words, having been thrown from materialism into the infinite, she felt that she was observing not the past but the future (ibid.). It is noteworthy, that Alexievich invokes 'apocalypse' quite frequently in her books, which deal with the fate of people affected by various tragedies in their lives happening as a chain reaction to the major catastrophes, like Chernobyl or collapse of the Soviet Union. Incidentally, the first part of her Nobel Prize winner *Secondhand Time* (2015), which comprises the interviews with *homo sovieticus*, the citizens of the former Soviet Union from 1991 to 2001, is called *The Consolation of Apocalypse*.

Abrams in his study of apocalyptic themes and variations (1984) outlines a number of narrative strategies, with which postmodern narrative reacts to the threat of a nuclear catastrophe. First, the threat of a catastrophe itself is diminished by the variation of different scenarios of its occurrence. Second, the nuclear apocalypse generates a fantastic reality, conducive for the formation of new civilizations - a strategy embraced by science fiction. Third, the meaning of nuclear apocalypse is transformed at the level of narrative itself. Specifically, apocalypse can be a metaphor or a concept of a certain individual in the narration (like in one of the books in

our analysis, *Generation X. Tales for an Accelerated Culture* by D. Coupland). The end of the world itself is no longer perceived with panic and fear as the apocalyptic event has already occurred and belongs to the past (Abrams, 1984).

To illustrate the reflection of some apocalyptic themes and different discursive strategies in modern fiction we have selected two well-known postmodern novels, *Generation X. Tales for an Accelerated Culture* by a Canadian writer Douglas Coupland and *The Book of Dave* by Will Self, a British writer and publicist.

Nuclear Explosion as Apocalyptic Narrative

Of all scenarios of apocalyptic end that postmodernism offers, a nuclear explosion has become the most common one in the mentality of the Cold War generation. Outlining the psychological portrait of post baby boomers, Neil Howe and Bill Strauss (1993) emphasize the following feature: "In her dispiritualized life, she strips billowy questions down to their real-world fundamentals. Having come of age without war but with an obsessive fear of nuclear holocaust, she sees apocalypse for what it is – just death" (p. 31). Powerful imagery haunting human consciousness and artistic expression at that time was prompted by the tragic reality of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, reflected by art, first, in vanguard painting, specifically in abstract expressionism of S. Dali, J. Pollock, M. Duchamp and others. Stephen Peterson, who analyzed the reaction of these painters to the explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, suggested that artists get obsessed with explosive imagery and fall under the spell of "nuclear mysticism," "nuclear ecstasy," and "nuclear sublimation." Peterson contends that to these artists atomic explosions reveal complete disintegration of objects, disappearance of man and his traces, and spontaneity of unconsciousness (Petersen, 2004). Analyzing the affect of the vividly documented aftermath of nuclear explosions in Japan on the mentality of Americans, Donald Pease concludes:

> As a historic national spectacle, Hiroshima turned the entire U.S. social symbolic system into the afterimage of a collectively anticipated primal scene, a self- divided (rather than self-present) instant, that always had not yet taken place (hence always anticipated) but had nevertheless always already happened (in the lived experience of anticipated disaster). (Pease, p. 51)

The way the concept of nuclear apocalypse dominated the consciousness of the postmodern generation is powerfully reflected in the landmark novel by the famous Canadian writer Douglas Coupland *Generation X. Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. The novel belongs to the series of "generational" literary narratives spurred by the reaction of the society to the problem of generation gap tormenting North America at the end of the last century. "Generation Gap" became an overlapping metaphor for other metaphoric "gaps," those of time and space, historical memory, information, traditions and norms, and so on.

Howe and Strauss have provided the interpretation of these phenomena in their much acclaimed sociological theory, according to which generation gaps have always been historically linked to generational cycles. Of the most recent generations, Strauss and Howe's research distinguishes Generation X, Generation Y and a new Silent Generation. Those born between 1961-1981 comprise Generation X, a nomadic cohort characterized by the awakening revolutionary mentality. Generation Y are Millennials, born between 1982 and 2000. The researchers term this generation a "heroic" one, as it is destined to participate in global cultural battles. Those born after 2001 belong to the new Silent Generation. They are artistic by nature, but living in the epoch of international crises they are doomed to wage the war with terrorism. According to Strauss and Howe's theory, not only history creates different generations, but each generation affects history and creates it (Strauss & Howe, 1991, 1993, 2000).

Generation X by Coupland is the author's reflection on the role of generations in history, as well as on the phenomenon of apocalypse, which permeates culture on the threshold of the new millennium. Coupland of-

fers his own interpretation of the end of the world as envisioned by the main characters of the novel, representatives of Generation X, for whom their apocalyptic anticipations are closely connected with the transformation of history in the epoch of total consumerism plaguing the postmodern capitalist society. It is the fear of the imminent end of the world in the form of apocalypse that, among other motives, drives Andy Palmer, Clair Baxter and Dagmar (Dag) Bellinghausen to run away from their previous "normal" lives and fortress themselves in the California desert. Having become the "members of the poverty jet set, an enormous global group" (Coupland, p. 5), they create their fables of love and death, following the principle of "either our lives become stories, or there's just no way to get through them" (p. 8).

The doomsday mood that prevails in the novel is set up from the start, in the opening chapter "The Sun is Your Enemy," when Andy recalls his experience of watching the total eclipse of the sun at the age of fifteen:

> And in that field, when the appointed hour, minute, and second of the darkness came, I lay myself on the ground … and held my breath, there experiencing the mood that I have never really been able to shake completely - a mood of darkness and inevitability and fascination – a mood that surely must have been held by most young people since the dawn of time as they have crooked their necks, stared at the heavens, and watched their sky go out. (p. 4)

As can be seen from their mostly gloomy stories, through which the characters try to internalize their past, Generation X has already experienced 'an apocalypse' in the form of the traumatic deformation of mentality and disintegration of relationships brought about by the ideology of unlimited consumerism. The landmarks of this apocalypse are events connected with the Vietnam War, Cold War, arms race and others. But one of the dominant themes is the anticipation of the nuclear apocalypse, which "is a recurring motif in Dag's bedtime stories, eschatological You-Are-There accounts of what it's like to be Bombed, lovingly detailed, and told in a deadpan voice" (p. 62). Dag does not only incessantly think and talk about the nuclear blast: he actually goes to the Scotty's Junction in Nevada, where atom bomb scientists assemble, "mad with grief over their spawn" (p. 68). He, however, tries to camouflage his paranoid phobia displayed by this trip with the story of a young man, called Otis. Otis moved to Palm Strings (the actual habitat of the characters) because he studied weather charts and learned that if Los Angeles were "ever beaned by a nuclear strike, wind currents would almost entirely prevent fallout from reaching his lungs. Palm Springs was his own personal New Zealand; a sanctuary" (p. 69). His persistent anxiety somewhat subsided when in the postcard from another friend, probably equally obsessed with the atomic apocalypse, he saw a 1960s picture of a desert nuclear test with an astonishingly small nuclear mushroom cloud, much smaller than the monstrous ones he had seen on TV. Otis (read 'Dag') makes a trip to "the bombed New Mexican moonscapes," where (as he mentions on the way) many Hollywood movies were made, after which half of the crew involved in shooting died of cancer. There Otis confirms his discovery– clouds indeed are smaller than he feared. This realization silenced all "small whispering nuclear voices that had been speaking continually in his subconscious since kindergarten. There was nothing to worry about after all" (p. 71).

Otis's comfort was short lived, however, as the ubiquitous presence of shopping malls, epitomizing the encroaching power of apocalyptic consumerism, got merged in his imagination with the diminished nuclear threat, leading him to a more sinister revelation: people will be mentally equating nuclear bombs with regular bombs. Seeing new, "smaller *friendlier* explosion site, the conversion process would be irreversible. All vigilance would disappear. Why, before you knew it you'd be able to buy atomic bombs over the counter" (p. 71).

Through the book Coupland shows that anticipation of the world ending with the nuclear explosion was not just Dag's idiosyncrasy - it was an innate phobia of the entire generation grown under the perils of the Cold War. It is noteworthy that in his imaginative scenario of the nuclear blast experienced in the supermarket Dag uses the pronoun "you," referring to all people of his generation living in the constant anticipation of the

nuclear attack: for them, the sound of sirens is "the worst sound in the world, and the sound you've dreaded all your life" (p. 63); the end of the world after The Flash is "the silent rush of hot wind, like the opening of a trillion oven doors that you've been imagining since you were six" (p. 64). In his story of Otis, he concedes: "Like a surprisingly large number of people, Otis thought a lot about New Zealand and the Bomb" (p. 69).

Apocalyptic ideology of Generation X is also reflected in marginal glosses, which accompany the narration: *chryptotechnophobia* (*"The secret belief that technology is more of a menace than a boon"* – p. 172), *survivalousness* (*"The tendency to visualize oneself enjoying being the last person on earth"* – p. 62), *strangelove reproduction* ("Having children to make up for the fact that one no longer believes in the future" – p. 135), *mental Ground Zero* (*"The location where one visualizes oneself during the dropping of the atomic bomb; frequently, a shopping mall"* – p. 63). Constant expectancy of the nuclear blast is also the theme of one of the illustrations, where a man charges back from the window in panic with the words: "Oh no! It's finally happened! The blinding flash of light!" only to add later: "Phew! It was only lightning" (p. 132).

The importance of illustrations and marginal glosses in the Coupland's novel should not be underestimated as besides expanding the central linear narrative to the range of a mini-encyclopedia of a specific socio-cultural stratum, these textual and visual components perform another important cognitive and content-building function. As a separate entity they present the unique language of Generation X, a specific characteristic only of the given marginal subculture argot. Being incomprehensible to outsiders (that is why these words and terms need to be explained to the reader on the margins), they signify the withdrawal of Xers from the mainstream, dominant mass culture. Like any argot, this lingo fulfills a collective identity function, based on a special shared knowledge within the given social milieu (Averianova, 2010).[1]

Through characters' stories and marginal glosses Coupland's novel reflects the scenario, where the narration involves anticipation of a nuclear apocalypse. However, reality introduces certain corrections to the scenario along the lines suggested by Kermode and Lyotard, as the main character, Andy, has indeed experienced a certain 'apocalypse,' which for him has become a kind of redemption. In the final chapter, travelling through Imperial County he finally saw something he took for a thermonuclear cloud: "It was not imaginary. It was that same cloud I'd been dreaming of steadily since I was five, shameless, exhausted, and gloating" (p. 176). "Possessed with lurid curiosity," Andy kept on driving to find, to his profound relief, a simple source of the monstrous cloud: farmers were burning off the stubble of their fields. Though illusionary, the Andy's 'apocalypse' involved other appropriate attributes of the event. Together with a group of mentally retarded teenagers who stopped to watch the fire, he saw "a cocaine white" egret swooping over the burned fields and circling over their small group. "We felt chosen" (p. 178), he narrates, and among them the most "chosen" was Andy as egret grazed his head, bringing him to his knees in rapture. The bird cut his scalp, and as a drop of blood oozed down his forehead, he became the object of sympathy and love of all retarded children: "Suddenly I was dog-piled by an instant family, in their adoring, healing, uncritical embrace, each member wanting to show me their affection more than the other" (p. 179). Remarkable is the date – January 1st, 2000: on the date when apocalypse was predicted and most expected to happen, Andy was indeed "winded – crushed – pinched and trampled," but "this pain … this crush of love was unlike anything I had ever known" (ibid.).

Thus, the finale of the novel is a scene of an apocalypse, with a few chosen experiencing the revival through unconditional love. But like the 'explosion' itself all this apocalyptic paraphernalia is also an illusion. This way, perhaps, Coupland addressed the over-engagement of his generation in the apocalyptic moods consistently fueled up by mass media. Chronologically, Andy's personal revival happens on the 1st of January 2000, the beginning of the new millennium, prophesized by many as the date of the apocalypse. The culmination of the novel thus discredits yet another illusion of Generation X, presenting a 'peripeteia,' which makes

1 Analyzing the works of W. Gibson, V. Pelevin, and other contemporary writers, Polishko (2004) considers the presence of a particular jargon in a novel a common typological feature of postmodern texts dedicated to marginal societies.

reader's expectation falsified and character's expectations readjusted, and which constitutes, according to Kermode (1968), a typical feature of apocalyptic narrative.

The Book of Dave as a Post-Apocalyptic Novel

As the threat of the Cold War started to recede, the nuclear deterrence has been superseded by other perils feared by the mankind, the most common among which are various ecological catastrophes. Surging waves, tsunamis and floods destroying cities and whole civilizations comprise new imagery of the end of the world employed by the next phase of apocalyptic art.

An interesting example of the postmodern literary discourse, in which the idea of apocalypse as repentance and renewal is replaced by post-apocalypse, is the novel by a famous British writer and publicist Will Self *The Book of Dave. A Revelation of the Recent Past and the Distant Future* (2006).

Self's fifth novel presents another of his satiric and hilarious "what –if?" stories the author is famous for. As the critic N. Rich concedes, "Self imagines what would happen if, 500 years from now, English society was shaped not by Judeo-Christian theology but by the scurrilous rantings of a hateful 21st-century London cabbie" (Rich, 2006). The story alternates between present and distant future and is set up in pre- and post-deluge London. The present scene is centered on the life of mentally disturbed, misogynic, racist London cab driver Dave Rudman, who possesses the Knowledge of London, virtually lives in his aging dirty cab and hates his passengers, with one of whom, a beautiful business woman Michelle, he had an accidental casual sexual encounter. When heavily pregnant Michelle shows on his doorstep several months later, Dave marries her, but their marriage is a disaster, with Dave growing furious with Michelle's demonstrative indifference and getting abusive to both her and their young son Carl. Michelle soon dumps Dave, denying him an opportunity to see their son and even revealing that the boy is not his son after all. Profoundly depressed and full of hatred, Dave puts all his raging against women and child-custody laws into a book printed on metal and buries it in his ex-wife garden in hope that his son would eventually find it and learn what kind of man his father was. He partially recovers his sanity after meeting Phyllis Vance, a mother of another psychiatric patient, and under her influence writes a second book, in which he renounces the content of the first and recommends a life based on freedom and tolerance. He tries to retrieve his first book but fails, while his second one gets also buried in the metal case by his son after Dave's accidental death in the hands of Turks, loan sharks.

Five hundred years later after an apocalyptic deluge, which destroyed the planet, the primitive survivors on the remaining islands of Ing discover Dave's first book and make it a foundation of a new ideology, culture and religion. Dave's book with all its psychotic misanthropic rantings has become their gospel, followed with rigid devotion, upon which they create a cruel, callous and tyrannical society. All Dave's turmoil divorce and separation experiences have become their norm of life, with sexes being permanently separated from each other (except for procreation) and children fluctuating between 'mummies' and 'daddies' at the decreed days of "Changeover." The satiric parallel between Dave's insane "cannon" and the tenets of the post-apocalyptic society is emphasized by its language Arpee (a deformed variant of English) and *Mokni* (*Inglish* dialect, derived from Cockney). In the new religion called Dävinanity, Dave is God; everything evil is *chellish* (from Michelle), and everyone is obliged to recite The Knowledge (or pre-deluge London driving instructions). Everything from the dävine past, or *MadeinChina* (a creation period), is sacred, especially pieces of plastic, Daveworks, with some print preserved on them. Priests are drivers, who communicate with their fares via mirrors, looking back at them like cab drivers do; the sun is *foglamp* and the time is measured by three *tariffs*, and so on.

Again, we are not engaged here in analyzing the esthetic characteristics of the novel and the author's often criticized (Rich, 2006) methods of the plot and characters' development. What makes *The Book Of Dave* interesting for our analysis of apocalyptic narrative is its approach to the theme of apocalypse. There is no pres-

ence of the apocalypse itself, but there is its premonition by the leading character in the first part of the book and depiction of its aftermath in the second. In the classification of the variations of apocalyptic narrative mentioned above it belongs to the type, where, according to Heffernan (2008), the nature of the catastrophe itself is obscure, and resurrection and revival are absent altogether or are grotesquely transformed, like in the Self's book, chosen for our analysis. Equally transformed is other paraphernalia of apocalyptic narrative, such as revelation, prescience, redemption, and in lieu of the latter, a search for another revelation.

Thus, Dave Rudman has a recurring divination of the catastrophic flood, which will eventually (according to the book) destroy the world, and this prescience has, to a certain extent, motivated him to write The Book. He experiences the first "uncomfortable intimation" in a London swimming pool with the wave machine. He imagined all the "agitated water … cupped in a stony outcrop of the two-thousand-year-old city." And with each automated surge Dave felt "the future seething, the present boiling, the past churning" (Self, 2007, p. 218). At the most critical moment of his life, when Dave realizes that he is finished and his Knowledge is gone, he actually envisions the flood engulfing London and its post-deluge future:

> He saw this as clearly as he'd ever seen anything in his life. The screen had been removed from his eyes, the mirror cast away, and he was privileged with a second sight into deep time. The great wave came on, thrusting before it a scurf of beakers, stirrers, spigots, tubes, toy soldiers …. *(here goes seven more lines of the text enumerating another thirty-one random items, trivial attributes of modern life – IA)* … and a myriad other bits of moulded plastic, which minutes later washed up against the hills of Hampstead, Highgate, Harrow and Epping, forming salt-bleached reefs, which would remain there for centuries, the lunar pull of the new lagoon freeing spiny fragments to bob into the cockle-picking hands of *know-nothing carrot-crunches* who would scrutinize them and be filled with great awe by the notion that anything ever had – or ever would be again – Made in China. (pp. 404-405)

As future verifies his prophesy, Dave indeed becomes a prophet, and not just a messenger of God, but God himself as he imagines him to be in one of his most confusing states: "He felt his hearing becoming sharper and sharper, more and more sensitive … Then he could hear It … *There is no god but you, Dave, It whispered, and you can be your own prophet*…" (p. 345). At that moment he decides, "There hasta be a Book of Rules" (ibid.), and he writes the Book, inscribing his prophesy in it: there will be "a mighty flood, great wave transforming the city streets into raging rivers" (p. 312).

Thus, in the apocalyptic narrative of *The Book of Dave* the scenario has been reduced to the prophecy and the aftermath of the catastrophe, with the apocalyptic event being present only as a premonition, clairvoyant vision of it by the "prophet." The outcome of the apocalypse is also devoid of resurrection and revival, outlined by Kermode in his typology of apocalyptic discourse. The humanity, according to Will Self, has plunged into a primitive, primordial state run by the "mad DOCTRINES and madder COVENANTS" (p. 419) of the dävist orthodoxy. The possibility of the revival, sustained by the hope of finding the second Book of Dave, was ultimately lost, as the only person who claimed to have seen it, Symon Dévúsh, was broken on the Wheel after he had started preaching David's revised principles, and his two follows, including Symon's son Carl, found nothing in Symon's box but a shingly mound of Daveworks.

Building his "what if?" fable around pre- and post-apocalyptic realities, Self does not seem to be interested in the apocalypse per se; his purpose rather is to show the "grotesquerie of the world we know - or at least the one Dave Rudman knows" (Harrison, 2006), while grounding down not the reader, as Harrison sees it, but a blinding sycophantic devotion to religious covenants, no matter how faulty or insane they might be. We would also disagree with Nathaniel Rich (2006), who states that the readers are "ultimately left with a pair of grotesque worlds, facing each other like two mirrors, but reflecting nothing." The message from god Dave that Carl of the future hears in his head makes him realize "that if it hadn't been Dave who so blighted the

world, it would have been some other god – Jeebus or Joey or Ali – with his own savage edicts" (p.450). Whatever Rich's criticism is, she does not fail to notice the main message of *The Book of Dave* "to show religion's tyranny over its devoted followers, the arbitrariness of its symbols and tenets, and its brutal effectiveness at stifling critical thinking" (Rich, 2006).

Pertinent to our study is yet another conclusion, which can be drawn from the book: for Will Self, apocalypse will not bring the humankind either redemption or utopia. Kermode's peripeteia at the end of the novel does falsify reader's expectation that Carl, having experienced revelation of the true nature of Davinity, would be able to bring redemption to his people. Instead, he becomes yet another victim of tyrannical "drivers", thus taking the end of the novel out of the typology of typical postmodern apocalyptic narratives suggested by Kermode (1968).

Conclusion

The humanity has always imagined its destruction by some kind of an apocalypse. In much earlier times, the Book of Revelations forecast a flood sent by God to punish people for their sins. Later, each generation developed its own catastrophic fantasies, which permeated the mentality and art of people. In modern times, with the problems of our civilization mounting and reaching a disastrous and very tangible scale, the apocalyptic discourse has been gaining a new and more powerful attraction.

The revolutionary developments of technology, ecological crises and religious confrontations have dramatically increased the imaginative and narrative potential of the concept of apocalypse, which is reflected in the growing number of literary, cinematographic and other forms of art constructed around the idea of the imminent apocalypse. With the development of science people started to perceive the advent of the end of the world not so much as divine intervention but as the result of their own activity. Consequently, apocalyptic discourse turns to the current problems of life, which appear to have the most credible potential to cause a disaster.

In our analysis, we scrutinized two books, which include the concept of apocalypse either as a permanent apprehension and haunting vision (*Generation X. Tales for an Accelerated Culture*), or as an actual event, lead to the creation of a new civilization (*The Book of Dave*). Both writers, Douglas Coupland and Will Self, used the idea of apocalypse for their own creative purposes, including it in their narrations to focus on the problems they deem as crucial for the wellbeing of the mankind, be it the overwhelming destructive consumerism, dangerous political confrontation or forbidding religious fanaticism.

Though a time space between these two novels is not significant in the scale of a century, the treatment of apocalypse is notably different. While Coupland at the end of the twentieth century reflected the obsession of his generation with nuclear threat, for Self, a decade later, flood is more perceivable as possible catastrophe. While apocalypse (if even imaginary) for Coupland's characters is followed by redemption, for the characters of Self it brings only destruction. One reason for this distinction in the perception of apocalypse and its aftermath might be the tragic events of September 11, 2001, shortly after the threshold of a new millennium, which was widely expected to trigger apocalypse. The deadliest in history terrorist attack has annihilated, for many, any optimistic prospect of the future, and this doomsday disposition is reflected in *The Book of Dave*.

What unites these two books, though, and puts them in line with other apocalyptic narratives is that postmodern writers are all well aware of the origin of the problems the humanity is now facing, be it a flood, a nuclear explosion, or a terrorist attack. These problems laden with apocalyptic consequences are all manmade, created by people themselves, and, like thousands years ago, the awareness of committed sins is always paired with anticipation of punishment. But unlike primordial times, postmodernity does not hold much hope for redemption…

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