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Wynn Gerald Hamonic  
Thompson Rivers University, geraldhamonic01@gmail.com

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# Verdens Undergang (1916) and the Birth of Apocalyptic Film: Antecedents and Causative Forces

## **Abstract**

This essay describes the antecedents and causative forces giving rise to the birth of apocalyptic cinema in the early 20th Century and the first apocalyptic feature, *Verdens Undergang* (1916). Apocalyptic cinema's roots can be traced back to apocalyptic literary tradition beginning 200 BCE, New Testament apocalyptic writings, the rise of premillennialism in the mid-19th Century, 19th century apocalyptic fiction, a growing distrust in human self-determination, escalating wars and tragedies from 1880 to 1912 reaching a larger audience through a burgeoning press, horrors and disillusionment caused by the First World War, a growing belief in a dystopian future, and changes in the film industry.

## **Keywords**

Verdens Undergang, Apocalypse, Motion Pictures, Antecedents, Causes, Danish Film

## **Author Notes**

Wynn Hamonic is Subject Matter Expert and Curriculum Consultant for Film 3991: Cinematic Visions of the Apocalypse, at Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, B.C., Canada. He holds a Ph.D. from the Department of Film and Television Studies at Brunel University, London, England, and a Masters Degree in Library and Information Science from University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario (1997). His Bachelor's Degree was in Paralegal Studies at University of Great Falls (1990). He is the author of *Terrytoons: The Story of Paul Terry and His Cartoon Factory* (John Libbey Publishing, forthcoming 2017). His research interests include Apocalyptic Cinema, Animation Studies, Horror and Supernatural Film, Film Noir, and History of World Cinema.

## **The First Apocalyptic Film**

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On April 1, 1916, *Verdens undergang* (*The End of the World*), a 77-minute black-and-white silent motion picture, was released in Denmark to theatrical audiences. The film, with Danish intertitles, is acknowledged by film historians as the first apocalyptic feature film. The film, also known as *The Flaming Sword*, featured strong production values and Denmark's finest production talent. The film was produced by Nordisk Film Kompagni, directed by August Blom, written by Otto Rung, and starred Olaf Fønss and Ebba Thomsen. *Verdens undergang* depicts a worldwide catastrophe when an errant comet passes by Earth and causes natural disasters and social unrest.<sup>1</sup> The film was a huge success across Europe, partly the result of great special effects for the period. When the motion picture toured German cinemas as *The Last Judgment* (*Das jüngste Gericht*) in November 1916 local media described the spectacular scenes of natural disasters, as "astonishingly technical accomplishments" doing so "with such elemental force" that it "almost surpasses the power of human imagination."<sup>2</sup>

### ***Verdens undergang* (1916): A Seminal Motion Picture**

Despite being released in a small European country when the atrocities of the First World War were headlining newspapers and entertainment news was relegated to back pages, *Verdens undergang* was not overlooked by the movie-going public and became a highly influential work of art. The film is set in a small Danish mining town where two sisters, Dina (Ebba Thomsen) and Edith (Johanne Fritz-Petersen), daughters of the mine owner West (Carl Lauritzen) are romantically involved. The latter remains faithful to a childhood friend named Reymers (Alf Blütecher); the first falls for the promise of a wealthy life alongside miner owner Frank Stoll (Olaf Fønss) with whom she elopes, abandoning her engagement to worker Flint (Thorleif Lund).

Stoll benefits from the rumors of an imminent disaster caused by the passing of a comet when his cousin, the scientist who discovered the comet, orders the release of fake reassuring news, promising the newspaper editor a significant amount of money resulting from the complete sale of stocks. A wandering prophet (Frederik Jacobsen) arrives in the mining town at the very first scene of the film, signifying that the comet is “God’s punishment.” On the night of the comet, the poor pray on a hill while Stoll and the rich hold a lavish feast. While the comet is wreaking death and destruction across the countryside, Stoll, his wife, and the vengeful Flint (seeking revenge for his stolen love) find refuge in

a cave where all succumb to poisonous gases saturating the mine shaft. Edith is rescued by the prophet while Reymers is saved miraculously from his mission on sea. The film ends with the young couple kneeling, thankful to God they were the few spared death.

From a technical perspective, *Verdens undergang* stands among the first films introducing a new (at the time) technique in lighting, specifically the enhancing dramatic effect of a protagonist struggling in the dark with a hand-held source of light, in this case a candle.<sup>3</sup> The special effects set a new standard in technical craftsmanship. The dramatic on-location filming depicting the ocean rising and the strong winds battering the weather-beaten houses, are equally matched in their intensity by the display of fire sparks falling onto a miniature replica of the town. The effects convincingly depict the comet's devastation while reinforcing the meting out of Christian justice on a land plagued by sin as lust, betrayal, deceit and vengeance are all punished by death.

The motion picture is not only the first apocalyptic feature but is also notable for being the first full-length film to cast a globally destructive comet as a central plot element. The influence on other filmmakers is evident in the narrative similarities between Blom's film and French director Abel Gance's *End of the World* (French: *La Fin du monde*) (1931), both morality plays highlighting the excesses of capitalism, and each involving a comet hurtling towards Earth, manipulations of the media to capitalize on stock market volatility due to

impending calamity, romantic intrigue, and a comet that causes near total devastation to the world's population.<sup>4</sup> In 1913 French director Abel Gance was meditating on the idea of his film *End of the World*. However, he had other film projects pressing at the time, and only after producing *Napoleon* in 1927, did he convince himself and backers to go forward with the project.<sup>5</sup> Almost assuredly Gance had screened and was influenced by Blom's film prior to production of his feature fifteen years later.

Only since the film's restoration by the Danish Film Institute in 2006 and subsequent re-release has the motion picture been re-discovered and appreciated by a new generation of cinema audiences. The importance of the film to the study of the apocalyptic film genre has only recently been recognized by film critics and historians. In her 2012 article *The Comet Tail: Celestial Apocalypse in Silent Cinema*, film scholar Delia Enyedi argues: "Apocalyptic cinema owes the silent period the setting of foundations for the genre together with a narrative type of structure favouring the pre-eminence of the special effects. But, at the same time, the particular case of August Blom's *Verdens undergang*, by casting the comet as central character with a reason of its own, stands as the valuable legacy of the period as it represents one of the most intriguing apocalyptic screenwriting resolutions in film history."<sup>6</sup>

## **Apocalyptic Film: A Definition of the Genre**

Capturing a definition of what constitutes an "apocalyptic film" is critical in determining which motion pictures fit the apocalyptic mold. The classification of films into genres assists in pinpointing the antecedents and causative forces giving rise to these motion pictures and facilitates comparisons of the films in the same genre to one another in terms of their artistic and technical merits. In *The End of the World: The Apocalyptic Imagination in Film and Television*, John W. Martens argues that God is at the center of apocalyptic texts and is usually missing in the action in apocalyptic movies. He argues that the "Traditional Apocalyptic" film has at the heart of them: (1) a battle between the forces of Good and Evil; (2) Evil ultimately proceeds from an Evil One, Satan, the Devil, who is directing the forces of Evil; (3) This battle has cosmic dimensions, that is, the fate of humanity and the earth are at stake; and (4) The outcome of the battle leads to the vanquishing of evil and the triumph of good, or at least it averts catastrophe for the time being, and preserves the Earth for the time being.<sup>7</sup>

Film scholars and critics usually give a broader definition of apocalyptic film encompassing both religious and secular motion pictures. The apocalyptic film genre is generally considered to be a sub-genre of science fiction film and as defined by Charles P. Mitchell in *A Guide to Apocalyptic Cinema* involves a theme of global catastrophic risk, "a motion picture that depicts a credible threat

to the continuing existence to humankind as a species or the existence of Earth as a planet incapable of supporting human life."<sup>8</sup> The film usually centers around an apocalyptic event such as a nuclear holocaust, a plague or virus, runaway climate change, an impact event from space such as an asteroid, a religious occurrence (e.g. the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy), an alien invasion, or a zombie apocalypse.<sup>9</sup> The plot may involve attempts to avert an apocalyptic event, manage the impact and consequences of the disaster itself, or it may be post-apocalyptic, set after the occurrence.

Films such as *Verdens undergang* involving a comet bringing divine retribution for the sins committed by the characters in the film would, I argue, in Martens opinion likely be considered more to do with "eschatology," or a part of theology concerned with the final events of history, or the ultimate destiny of humanity. I would further posit that those films which involve global calamity and make no reference at all to God could be argued by traditionalists such as Martens to be simply a "disaster film." For the purposes of this article, all references to "apocalyptic film" will be in context to the Mitchell definition which best captures mainstream contemporary thought on apocalyptic film form and genre.

## **Apocalyptic Film: Critical Questions in the Study of the Genre**

The release of *Verdens undergang* raises critical questions in the study of the apocalyptic film genre. First, why was the first feature on an apocalyptic subject produced in a tiny European country before countries such as the United States or Great Britain with several well-established production facilities and where millions of cinema tickets were sold annually? By 1916, Denmark (population: 2.936 million<sup>10</sup>) was no longer one of the leaders in the film industry. After 1913, foreign companies intensified competition in the production of feature-length films. Danish cinema begun to suffer from a lack of imagination and a willingness to take creative risks on the part of Danish producers.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, the United States (population: 101.9 million<sup>12</sup>) and Great Britain (population: 34 million<sup>13</sup>) had vibrant growing film industries. By 1916, two major film companies, Paramount and Universal, had studios in Hollywood, as did a number of minor companies and rental outfits. By 1915, over 500 feature films were being produced annually in the United States.<sup>14</sup> Simultaneously, Great Britain had several film production companies producing feature and documentary films including the Hepworth Manufacturing Company, London Film Company, and Charles Urban Trading Company.<sup>15</sup>

Second, why did it take twenty years after the birth of cinema for the first apocalyptic feature to be produced? Films of most genres, albeit not of feature

length, had been produced shortly after the birth of cinema. The first silent comedy *L'Arroseur Arrosé* (also known as *The Waterer Watered* and *The Sprinkler Sprinkled*) was produced in 1895. *Le Voyage dans la Lune*, created by Georges Méliès in 1902 is often considered to be the first science fiction film. The first Western film was *The Great Train Robbery* produced by Edwin S. Porter in 1903.<sup>16</sup> The first feature-length narrative film, the Australian crime drama *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, was produced in 1906.<sup>17</sup> Finally, why did the Danish producers choose a comet as the instrument of doom? Why not something more indigenous to Denmark like a water-related disaster such as the famous Baltic Sea Flood of 1872?<sup>18</sup> The answers to these questions lie in identifying and tracing the antecedents of apocalyptic cinema up to 1916.

### **The Apocalyptic Narrative Tradition, 200 BCE to the End of the Middle Ages**

The birth of apocalyptic cinema in the early 20th Century was the culmination of a number of religious, societal, technological, literary, and historical forces that established an apocalyptic imagination of a world on the brink of destruction and capable of being destroyed, narratives considered suitable for presentation on film for audience consumption. The roots of the genre can be traced to apocalyptic literature, a literary genre that envisages supernaturally inspired cataclysmic

events that will take place at the end of the world. Since much of apocalyptic film derives its inspiration from the apocalyptic narrative tradition, a very brief historical overview is necessary.

The first comprehensive study of the subject was completed by Lücke in 1832.<sup>19</sup> The earliest apocalyptic literature dates from about 200 BCE to about 165 BCE, is pseudonymously written, and employs esoteric language meant for a select few.<sup>20</sup> By character, apocalyptic language expresses a pessimistic view of the present, is narrative in form and considers the final end of days as imminent.

The earlier Jewish writers, the Prophets such as Joel and Zephaniah, foretold the coming of disasters, many times in esoteric language, but they neither placed these disasters in a narrative framework nor conceived of them in eschatological terms. The purpose of these writings was to urge the reader to repent and seek the Lord.

During the time of the Hellenistic domination of Palestine and the revolt of the Maccabees (167 to 160 BCE) against the Seleucid Empire, a pessimistic view of the present became coupled with an expectation of an apocalyptic scenario which is characterized by an imminent crisis, a universal judgment, and a supernatural resolution.<sup>21</sup> The most famous of the early Jewish apocalypses is found in the last part of the biblical Book of Daniel (chapters 7–12) written about 167 BCE.<sup>22</sup> When three Jewish rebellions (66-135 CE) against the supremacy of

the Roman Empire failed,<sup>23</sup> rabbis codifying the Jewish tradition turned away from apocalypticism to an emphasis on upholding and interpreting the law of the Pentateuch. Consequently, it was Christians who translated and preserved the other Jewish non-Biblical apocalypses written in Hebrew or Aramaic text (e.g., the first *Book of Enoch* (c. 200 BCE), the fourth *Book of Ezra* (c. 100 BCE), and the second and third *Books of Baruch* (c. 100 CE)) in Ethiopic, Syriac, Greek, and Latin translations.

The use of the Greek title *apokalypsis* (revelation) as a genre label does not appear before the birth of Christianity. The first work introduced as an *apokalypsis* is the New Testament book *Revelation to John* (written about 95 CE) and even in the text it is not clear whether the term denotes a special class of literature or is to be applied more generally to revelation.<sup>24</sup> The literary form "apocalypse" carries that title for the first time in the very late first or early second century CE. After that date, the title and form were fashionable to the end of the classical period.<sup>25</sup> While the Gospels are permeated with the language of Daniel and the Pauline epistles contain apocalyptic content, the *Revelation to John* is thoroughly drenched in apocalyptic language. Using esoteric allusive language, John recounts a series of visions that foretell an intensification of persecutions and martyrdoms followed by universal judgment, punishment for the forces of evil, and everlasting rewards given to those who follow the Lamb.<sup>26</sup>

Other Christian apocalypses were written between 100 CE and 400 CE (e.g., *Apocalypse of Peter*, *Ascension of Isaiah*, and *Testament of Abraham*) but these texts although adhering to apocalyptic form were concerned with an individual's salvation thereby lacking characteristic apocalyptic content of treating collective history and collective salvation.<sup>27</sup> The Church Fathers, pre-eminently St. Augustine, concentrated on individual salvation in their theological writings and although propagating a belief in the Last Judgment insisted that the end of the human history was unknowable. New apocalyptic works such as the *Revelations of Pseudo-Methodius* (mid-7th century) and the *Vision of Brother John* (late 13th century) did appear based on scripture (Daniel and the New Testament).<sup>28</sup>

After the Middle Ages, the apocalyptic genre disappeared and its re-emergence has been traced to two spiritual awakenings: the First Great Awakening (1730-1760), an evangelical and revitalization movement that was initiated in the American colonies by Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards and Anglican preacher George Whitefield and swept across Protestant Europe and British America encouraging church members to shun traditional Christian practices and develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ involving new standards of personal morality,<sup>29</sup> and The Second Great Awakening (1790-1840) which revival movement began in the United States in different denominations and rejected the skeptical rationalism and deism of the Enlightenment.<sup>30</sup>

Within both movements, end times were viewed optimistically in which the American faithful had a major role to play in improving world conditions in preparation for the second coming of Jesus after a millennium during which time faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity would prevail in the affairs of men and of nations, a view known as post-millennialism which found support in the secular optimism of the Enlightenment.<sup>31</sup> The revivals enrolled millions of new members in existing evangelical churches, led to the formation of new denominations and many reform movements designed to remedy the evils of society before the anticipated Second Coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>32</sup> By the 1840s, the "great day" of the advent of the new millennial age had receded to the distant future, and postmillennialism became a more passive religious dimension of the wider middle-class pursuit of reform and progress.<sup>33</sup>

With the decline of postmillennialism came the rise of premillennialism beginning in 1790 in England, the belief that Jesus will physically return (the "Second Coming") to the earth to gather His saints before the Millennium.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the 19th century, premillennialism gained wider acceptance in both the United States and in Britain.<sup>35</sup> Premillennialism foretells before the millennial period the Great Tribulation, a period that would occur at the end of time when over a relatively short period of time worldwide hardships, disasters, famine, war, pain, and suffering will wipe out more than 75% of all life on Earth before the Second Coming takes place.<sup>36</sup>

### **First Modern Works of Apocalyptic Fiction, 1805 to 1840**

Modern works of apocalyptic fiction borrowed heavily from the apocalyptic tradition of centuries past. The first modern work of apocalyptic fiction to depict the end of the world, and the first secular apocalypse story, is Jean-Baptiste Cousin de Grainville's French novel *Le Dernier Homme* (English: *The Last Man* (1805)).<sup>37</sup> Published shortly after his death, de Grainville's novel follows the character of Omegarus, the titular "last man," or Last Adam, and Syderia, the Last Eve, in a retelling of the *Book of Revelation*, where both are led toward the moment when "the light of the sun and the stars is extinguished." Unlike most apocalyptic tales, de Grainville's novel approaches the end of the world not as a cautionary tale or a tale of survival, but as both an inevitable, as well as necessary, step for the spiritual resurrection of mankind.

Mary Shelley's novel, *The Last Man* (1826), is considered by many to be the second work of modern apocalyptic fiction. The story is set in England at the end of the 21st Century and follows a group of people as they struggle to survive in a plague-infected world. There are friendships, philosophical discussions, and love triangles within triangles. By the end of the novel, the main character, Lionel Verney (representing Shelley herself) is left alone in the world wandering the

empty streets of Rome among the dead monuments and begins to write his history. Henry Colburn published two editions of the novel in London in 1826, Galignani published one edition in Paris in 1826, and a pirated edition was printed in the United States in 1833.<sup>38</sup> Of all of Mary Shelley's novels, *The Last Man* received the worst reviews. Many critics scoffed at the very theme of "lastness." Individual reviewers labelled the book "sickening", criticized its "stupid cruelties", and called the author's imagination "diseased."<sup>39</sup> The reaction startled Mary Shelley, who considered *The Last Man* as one of her favourite works. The novel was not republished until 1965.

Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion", an apocalyptic science fiction tale, first published in *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine* in 1839, is centered on two people, who have been renamed Eiros and Charmion after death. Both characters discuss the manner in which the world ended. Eiros, who died in the apocalypse, explains the circumstances to Charmion, who died ten years previously. The destruction was brought about by a comet that removed nitrogen from Earth's atmosphere. This left only oxygen in the atmosphere causing initial exhilaration amongst the populace followed by pain and delirium. Finally, the comet nucleus hits the earth causing a worldwide inferno.

In penning the story, Poe was capitalizing on the excitement caused by Baptist preacher William Miller's (1782-1849) prediction in 1831 that the world would end in 1843.<sup>40</sup> Miller was one of a number of preachers during the Second Awakening that foresaw the end of the world occurring in the very near future. Poe likely used a comet as an agent of destruction because at the time comets were traditionally associated with prophesies of the end of the world and in the early 19th century, several comets were seen arousing people's interests. In particular, Halley's Comet returned on November 16, 1835,<sup>41</sup> and there was interest in Encke's Comet, whose periodicity had recently been calculated; it appeared in 1838, and its return was expected in 1842.<sup>42</sup> After Poe's work, the next great work of apocalyptic fiction would not be published for another 60 years.

### **A Shift in the Apocalyptic Tradition and Proliferation of Apocalyptic Art and Literature, 1890-1915**

Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century a crucial shift occurred within the apocalyptic tradition, from a belief in human self-determination to a conviction of human sinfulness and weakness, from a utopian to a dystopian vision, from progressivism to conservatism, and from humanism to anti-humanism. An optimistic outlook that accompanied secular faith in the advancements of mankind

was supplanted by a far more pessimistic view that distrusted these values. The near future was being envisioned in terms of social disintegration, violence, war and ultimate catastrophe, before a final deliverance brought by divine power which now shapes the contemporary apocalyptic imagination in both its religious and secular forms.<sup>43</sup>

The causes of this shift can be traced to the growing belief that advances by mankind were not going to result in a utopia and a series of major crises, natural disasters and wars during the period 1880-1914 (e.g., eruption of Krakatoa (1883), Russian Revolution (1905), San Francisco earthquake (1906)).<sup>44</sup> While statistically there may not have been more cataclysmic events than previous decades, the proliferation of the press<sup>45</sup> and the widespread reporting of these events by the media made the general populace increasingly aware of these occurrences giving an impression that the world was coming to an end. The culminating event was the onset of the First World War which largely destroyed the confidence and optimism of western societies. The death, carnage and global scope of the conflict discredited the optimism of liberal theology and shattered the belief that End Times meant that the human race led by science and technology would become perfect, and provided new opportunities for premillennial prophets.<sup>46</sup>

During this period, apocalyptic themes began appearing in ever increasing abundance in both the visual arts and in literature. In painting, examples include Arnold Böcklin's tempera piece *Plague* (1898), Odilon Redon's *The Apocalypse of St. John* (1899), Albert Godwin's watercolor landscape *London Apocalypse* (1903), and Viktor Vasnetsov's *The Last Judgement* (1904).<sup>47</sup> The first new major work of apocalyptic fiction since Poe's 1839 short story was Richard Jeffries' *After London; or Wild England* published in 1886. The book is divided into two parts. The first, "The Relapse into Barbarism" is a plot-less description rich in botanical detail concerning the ecological consequences of some unspecified disaster resulting in the remnants of civilization buried under brush and shrubbery, society returning to medieval ways, and the countryside populated by lurking savages. The second part, "Wild England," is a straightforward adventure set many years later with the main character Felix Aquila leaving his family to venture into the wilderness to take up residence with some shepherd tribes who become awed by his technological knowledge and skill with the bow. The book ends abruptly as Felix sets out to find his love interest Aurora and bring her back to his new home.

*After London* influenced a number of authors, including Matthew Phipps Shiel (known as "M.P. Shiel") (1865-1947) who authored the apocalyptic "last man" disaster novel, *The Purple Cloud* (1901). This strange novel features the central character, Adam Jeffson, returning to England from a North Pole

expedition to discover that a purple cloud emitting cyanogen gas has passed over the surface of the Earth killing everyone. Jefferson becomes mentally unstable and spirals down into feeling that perhaps mankind deserved this end. He adopts Turkish attire, declares himself monarch, burns down cities (Paris, Bordeaux, London, and San Francisco) for pleasure while filling his journal with his daily writings, then commits 17 years of his life to the construction of a colossal palace made of gold on the isle of Imbros. He eventually meets a young woman and after both avoid another purple cloud they decide to become the progenitors of future humanity.<sup>48</sup> *The Purple Cloud* was well-received by critics for its inventive details, intensity of vision, brilliant language, and unrelenting narrative.<sup>49</sup> The novel formed the basis for the 1959 American doomsday science fiction film *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* starring Harry Belafonte, Inger Stevens and Mel Ferrer with the purple cloud in the novel becoming a cloud filled with radioactive isotopes in the motion picture.<sup>50</sup>

In 1894, *Omega: The Last Days of the World* (French: *La Fin du Monde*) was published. The novel, authored by Camille Flammarion (1842-1925), begins in the 25th century after a comet made mostly of Carbonic-Oxide (CO) is discovered possibly colliding with Earth. At a Paris colloquium, scientific experts from physics, medicine, geology and astronomy provide different predictions of the end of the world. The colloquium president accepts the most probable prediction as being the sun will eventually lose its heat, and the earth will grow

very cold, be shrouded by perpetual night, and will eventually become extinct 20 to 40 million years hence.<sup>51</sup> At the Vatican, theologians and clergy argue over the literal fulfillment of scriptural prophesy. Flammarion then explores different historical beliefs about plagues, comets, earthquakes, and volcanoes as signs of the end of the world.

Humanity survives its encounter with the comet, many lives are lost, the species evolves into a more perfect form capable of telepathy, and then the Earth begins to die. Clearly inspired by de Grainville's *Last Man*, in the final section of the novel Flammarion tells a story of Omegar and Eva, the last human couple living on a scorched Earth unable to continue extracting water from the increasingly dehydrated planet. At the point of death they are visited by the spirit of Cheops, the ancient King of Egypt, who tells them there is no such thing as true death and that worlds succeed each other in time as in space. All is eternal, and merges into the divine. The book ends with a view of the rebirth of new worlds from the remnants of our dead solar system. *Omega* is the first to lay out a scientifically informed, grand future view of the death of the Earth and human extinction, one that left its mark not only on H.G. Wells but also on many writers in the century that followed.

Other "Last Man" stories published during the 1890s included John Ames Mitchell's (1845–1918) *The Last American* (1889), a short post-apocalyptic novel

based on the fictional journal of Persian admiral Khan-Li, who in the year 2951 rediscovers North America by sailing across the Atlantic. Mitchells' work is considered the very first work of science fiction set against a backdrop of ruined, major U.S. cities. The other notable work is Herbert Ward's (1861-1932) *Republic Without a President and Other Stories* (1891).

In 1894, English writer George Griffith, Britain's version of Jules Verne, authored *Olga Romanoff*, a science fiction novel first published as *The Syren of the Skies* in *Pearson's Weekly*. The novel, a sequel to his *The Angel of the Revolution*, is set in the remote future, and concerns the efforts of Ms. Romanoff, the last of her family, and a worldwide brotherhood of anarchists attempting to overthrow the Aerians, the master race which rules the world with fantastical airships. The novel ends on an apocalyptic note as a comet smashes into the Earth. The readers of 1894 loved its imaginative technology and inventions, sentimentality, and High Victorian turgid emotionalism.<sup>52</sup>

As early as 1894, H.G. Wells was contemplating the inevitable extinction of humans with his article *The Extinction of Man: Some Speculative Suggestions* for the *Pall Mall Gazette*.<sup>53</sup> In 1895 he published his classic *The Time Machine*. This work is an early example of the "Dying Earth" subgenre. The portion of the novella that sees the time traveller in a distant future where the Earth is coming to an end through the sun's death places the novel within the realm of eschatology.<sup>54</sup>

The novel has been interpreted as a cautionary fable and a bleak, allegorical rendering of an increasingly technological society precipitated by the scientific innovations, one whose future was already imperiled by growing class divisions and political ideologies which placed capital accumulation ahead of ethical considerations.<sup>55</sup>

Wells' next major work, *War of the Worlds* (1898), is an equally powerful piece of literary fiction that envisions a malevolent Martian attack on Earth, during which the intergalactic aggressors destroy London before they fall victim to a simple virus from which their extraterrestrial immune systems have no defense. The plot features one of the earliest stories that detail a conflict between mankind and an extraterrestrial race. The novel, in first-person narrative, features an extremely rich and layered text. The conflict between mankind and the Martians has been interpreted a number of ways including fears of a coming war on the continent and anxieties regarding technology unfettered,<sup>56</sup> a survival of the fittest,<sup>57</sup> and a dramatization of the ideas of race presented in Social Darwinism, in that the Martians exercise over humans their 'rights' as a superior race, more advanced in evolution.<sup>58</sup> The novel was part of new wave of future fiction of the last decades of the 19th century when stories of invasions (usually of Britain) and catastrophic future wars were popular.<sup>59</sup> The trend began in 1871 with George Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking*, a story about a surprise invasion of England by the Prussian military. Writers continued to present increasingly elaborate visions

of ever more destructive weaponry right up through the outbreak of World War I.<sup>60</sup>

The first decade and a half of the 20th century saw a sudden surge in the number of publications of apocalyptic fiction. In Gabriel Tarde's *Fragment d'histoire future* (1905) (English title: *The Underground Man*), the sun suddenly begins to flicker like a failing light bulb and becomes extinct. After a significant percentage of Earth's population freezes overnight, a new leader, Miltiades, leads the survivors to a new civilization underground. Living deep underground, the surviving humans have a perfect society where they go about nearly naked in the geothermal warmth, eat synthetic food, and devote all their efforts to aesthetic achievement.

*The Doomsman* (1906), by Van Tassel Sutphen, is set ninety years after the cataclysmic Terror of 1925. Sutphen's novel imagines a world of 2015 devolved into three tribes: the Painted People, the House People, and the marauding Doomsmen. Medieval life has returned including keeps, drawbridges, and archery with the post-apocalyptic godfather Dom Gillian ruling the giant violent metropolis of Doom. In *The War in the Air* (1908) by H.G. Wells, the latter parts of the book feature a post-apocalyptic theme involving global use of weapons of mass destruction and the war ending with no victors but with the total collapse of civilization and disintegration of all warring powers. In *The Last*

*Generation: A Story of the Future* (1908) by James Elroy Flecker, the bearing of children has become punishable by death, and consequently the human race becomes extinct.

E. M. Forster's *The Machine Stops* (1909) describes a world in which most of the human population has lost the ability to live on the earth's surface. Each individual now lives in isolation below ground in a standard 'cell' with all bodily and spiritual needs met by the omnipotent, global Machine. Finally, the Machine apocalyptically collapses, bringing civilization down with it. *The Poison Belt* (1913) by Arthur Conan Doyle, has Professor Challenger discovering that the planet is about to be engulfed in a poisonous belt of "ether". Challenger invites his friends to his home outside London, where he and his wife have laid up a supply of oxygen canisters, which may save their lives. Barricading themselves into his wife's boudoir, the adventurers debate everything from the possibilities of the universe to the abysses that lie upon either side of our material existence. Meanwhile, the world comes to a cataclysmic end.

One of the first literary works featuring a post-apocalyptic world ravaged by an infectious disease is Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* originally published in *London Magazine* in 1912. The story unfolds in 2073, sixty years after an uncontrollable epidemic, the Red Death, has depopulated and nearly destroyed the planet. James Howard Smith, one of the few plague survivors in the San Francisco

area, tries to impart the value of knowledge and wisdom to his grandsons before he succumbs to old age but his efforts are futile for his near-savage grandchildren live the primitive life of hunters-gatherers and ridicule his reminiscences of the past.

By the time of the book's publication, bacteriologists had demonstrated that plagues are caused by microscopic viruses, and epidemiologists and public health experts had shed light on general preventive measures to limit pandemics.<sup>61</sup> Despite these scientific developments, the public's fear of the invisible world of microorganisms was still high fueled by recent epidemics (The Russian Flu pandemic (1889-1890), San Francisco Chinatown bubonic plague (1900–1904),<sup>62</sup> Philippines cholera epidemic (1902-1904)). The book would have a heavy influence on other literary works, including *Earth Abides* by George R. Stewart in 1949, *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson in 1954, and *The Stand* by Stephen King in 1978, as well as modern blockbuster movies such as *12 Monkeys* (1995), *28 Days Later* (2002), *Carriers* (2009), and *Contagion* (2011).<sup>63</sup>

Other notable pre-1916 works of apocalyptic fiction include *The Second Deluge* (1912) by Garrett P. Serviss, *Goslings* (1913) by J.D. Beresford, and *Darkness and Dawn* (1914) by George Allan England. In *The Second Deluge*, a scientist, Cosmo Versal, warns that the Earth will be flooded to a depth of six miles as it passes through a watery nebula. The world scoffs, the scientist builds

an ark, the deluge arrives, and the world drowns while a small group of friends who trusted Versal survive by flying above the flood in a newly invented skyship. In *Goslings*, England is stricken by a plague that affects only males, resulting in the female population discovering that the ideology of male superiority has rendered them ill-fit to survive. Mr. Gosling leaves his family to pursue his sexual vices. His daughters, who lack experience and self-independence, find shelter in a matriarchal commune where their new life is threatened by the community's views on free love. In *Darkness and Dawn*, a young engineer and his secretary awake in the ruins of a Manhattan skyscraper to discover that they've been asleep for 1,500 years and humanity has degenerated into roving tribes of murderous, misshapen creatures. Together, the two must escape from New York to lay the foundations for a new civilization.

### **Rise of the Science Fiction and Fantastical Film in Danish Cinema: 1896-1916**

While the cinema arrived quickly in Denmark in June 1896, and the first Danish films were presented in December of that year,<sup>64</sup> Denmark was relatively slow in starting feature film production compared with other countries. The first Danish fiction film, the 15-minute *The Execution* (aka *Capital Execution*) was not released until 1903.<sup>65</sup> Danish films, like other European films, were to the greater

extent concerned with delineation of character, rather than with action, which was the hallmark of American film. Fantastical elements were virtually non-existent.<sup>66</sup> From 1906 to 1910, there was on average about 125 films produced per year by Nordisk Film Kompagni with little less than half reportage films and the rest comedies and dramas.<sup>67</sup>

By 1910, melodramas were losing appeal while films involving tragedy and human suffering were becoming popular. For example, the first Danish feature was the adventure film *The White Slave Traffic* (1910).<sup>68</sup> The first Danish multi-reeled film was the disaster flick *Atlantis* (1913) based upon the 1912 novel by Gerhart Hauptmann. The story concerns a doctor who travels to the United States in search of a cure for his ailing wife, and includes the tragic sinking of an ocean liner after it strikes an object at sea. The film, released one year after the sinking of the RMS Titanic, was tremendously popular with audiences.<sup>69</sup> In 1914, Dansk Biografkompagni produced the mystery *The Mysterious X*, concerning the wrongful conviction of a navy lieutenant.<sup>70</sup>

The onset of World War One struck a blow to Danish film producers as they were dependent upon foreign markets for film sales.<sup>71</sup> On August 1, 1914, in efforts to avoid being overrun by more powerful German armies, Denmark declared neutrality in the war that had opened between Serbia and Austria, then

laid mines along the Langeland Belt in event of invasion, and summoned auxiliary forces.<sup>72</sup>

In efforts to appease aggressive neighbors and protect shipping interests, the Danish government passed an Act prohibiting media attacks on governmental decisions in matters of exports and imports and forbid all attempts to antagonize feelings against nations at war.<sup>73</sup> About 1915, following the Danish government's new laws on media censorship, Nordisk Film Kompagni issued a set of rules for screenwriters, emphasizing what was not wanted in screenplays submitted to the company. Scripts on historical films, chivalry films, national films, and films which disparaged royal persons, public authorities, clergymen or officers were no longer being accepted. All films had to have an interesting original trick that formed the chief attraction of the film.<sup>74</sup> These new rules paved the way for the rise of fantastical and science fiction films in the country, features such as *Verdens undergang* and the *Sky Ship* (1917) a film about an engineer who builds a spaceship, flies to Mars, discovers a race of people who have never known war, then flies back to Earth with the high priest's daughter to preach the gospel of peace.<sup>75</sup>

The use of the comet in *Verdens undergang* as the instrument of doom causing tidal waves, flooding, and unnatural lightning storms that destroy Earth when it passes too close is not surprising considering comets have long been used

as harbingers of disaster in apocalyptic literature since Poe's 1839 short story. Other likely influences on the use of a comet as a plot device are the Tunguska fireball and Halley's Comet. On June 30, 1908, a large asteroid flattened 2,000 km<sup>2</sup> (770 sq mi) of forest near the Stony Tunguska River, in Yeniseysk Governorate, now Krasnoyarsk Krai, Russian Empire which caused wide media attention.<sup>76</sup> In 1910, Halley's comet was the subject of great public concern. The comet's calculated close passage to Earth raised concerns when astronomers realized that the Earth would pass through the comet's 25-million-kilometre-long tail which contained cyanogen, a deadly poison. The discovery was made through spectroscopy on February 7, 1910 at the Yerkes Observatory.<sup>77</sup>

With fears of poisonous gases being emitted from the comet's tail, some people sealed the chimneys, windows and doors of their houses, while others confessed to their crimes or even committed suicide. Merchants sold comet pills and oxygen bottles, while church services were held for large crowds.<sup>78</sup> The event would be the first time that an outburst of flame in the sky would be captured by means of photography and passed as a visual heritage to future generations. The sales of binoculars and telescopes increased dramatically and the advertising market quickly associated the image of the comet with various products including perfume, soap, coffee, corsets and furniture.<sup>79</sup> The 1910 apparition of Halley's Comet amidst the outburst of the media and advertising industry truly transformed it into "the world's first international media event."<sup>80</sup>

Cinematic influences on the development of *Verdens undergang* can be traced to the rash of films on comet subjects that were released around the time of the passing of Halley's Comet. *The Comet* (1910) starred Ziegfeld Follies star Anna Held as the head of an animated flying comet.<sup>81</sup> In the *Comet* (aka *Frightened by the Comet*) (Italian title: *La Paura della Cometa*) (1910), produced by Società Italiana Cinesa, a scientist predicts disaster upon the arrival of a comet. The inhabitants of the town take refuge but the comet passes without ill effect and the scientist is ridiculed. In *How Scroggins Found the Comet* (1910), directed by David Aylott and starring Charles Bolton, an amateur astronomer buys a telescope only to find out that the comet he had discovered using the device was a mere boy's rocket.<sup>82</sup> In *MacNab Visits the Comet* (1910), the astronomer MacNab sees a lovely vision appearing from a huge comet that throws kisses at him. The astronomer inflates a dressing gown and floats up into space where at the comet a young lady appears. She leads the astronomer into a room of dancing girls. Eventually, old Father Time shows up, the vision disappears, a new arrival shoots the astronomer, and MacNab falls back to Earth landing in bed when he wakes up and realizes it was all a dream.

In *Cupid and the Comet* (1911), directed by female director Alice Guy-Blaché, a telescope inquiring the skies for a great apparition on the night of the passing of Halley's Comet unveils to the owner his daughter's forbidden romance through the telescope. The father's attempts to break the couple up by taking her

clothes ends in failure as the daughter steals her father's pants and elopes, leaving the parent arriving at the ceremony dressed in his daughter's clothes.<sup>83</sup> While it is left to conjecture whether Blom or his Danish production staff viewed these comedies, most of these films were distributed widely. The sheer number of films with narratives involving comets reveals their popularity with audiences, and the reception of these film in the trade literature would almost assuredly have not gone unnoticed by Nordisk Film Kompagni.

Nearly all of the comet films produced during the period of 1910-1915 were comedies, except for two notable exceptions: *At the Dawning; or, The Fear of the Comet* (1910) and *The Comet* (1910) produced by Kalem Company. In *At the Dawning*, a French film produced by Société des Etablissements L. Gaumont, a baron who has kidnapped a nobleman's daughter is convinced by a monk that an approaching comet means that the end of the world is coming at dawn. In terror, the baron returns the daughter to the nobleman and begs for forgiveness. The end of the world does not come, the monk intercedes for the baron and we see them all enter the church quite happy. In the latter film, a film short of approximately 20 minutes in length,<sup>84</sup> a comet impacts Earth causing exploded automobiles, burned buildings, farms and rural areas, and the world's population going underground to escape the heat and search for water. The last scene depicts a panoramic view of a world in ruins.<sup>85</sup> Kalem's production is notable for being the first film featuring an end-of-the-world scenario and the news of the box office success of the motion

picture may have reached the production offices at Nordisk Film Kompagni where a decision was made to begin production of a feature length film on a comet-based apocalyptic film on a grander scale.<sup>86</sup>

### **Summation**

*Verdens undergang* launched a new film genre, introduced new film techniques, advanced the art of motion picture special effects, and influenced narratives found in other films.<sup>87</sup> The film was the product of the apocalyptic narrative tradition evidenced by the figure of the religious prophet, the faithful praying atop the hill, and the use of the comet as an instrument of divine retribution for sin. The birth of apocalyptic cinema was the result of a series of antecedents and causative forces dating back to the birth of the apocalyptic literary tradition around 200 BCE. The rise of premillennialism and prophets of doom were accompanied by a distrust in human self-determination, and a growing disillusionment that advances of mankind were not going to result in a utopia. Major crises, natural disasters and wars during the period 1880-1910 were being published in increasing numbers by an ever-growing press. The result was the near future was being envisioned in terms of social disintegration, violence, war and ultimate catastrophe. The explosion of fiction publications on end-of-the-world themes between 1886 and 1910 revealed to early filmmakers a strong public appetite for apocalyptic plots.

With comets traditionally being used in literature as harbingers of doom and with the 1910 passing of Halley's Comet causing global fears, films began appearing with comets as plot devices.

The scenes of mayhem and destruction that are found in Blom's film would be frightfully familiar to a generation caught up in the most violent conflict in history. Not surprising is that the comet was headed for northwestern Europe, the geographical location where the conflict of World War One was being most bitterly waged. The film was successful because the production fed on real anxieties and reflected the gloom of its time, whilst offering a glimmer of hope that the virtuous would be spared God's wrath. Finally, changes within the Danish film industry with respect to audience interest in plots involving human tragedy accompanied by demands on screenwriters made by Nordisk Film Kompagni with respect to film content favored producing films such as *Verdens undergang* featuring plots involving fantastical elements and special effects, resulting in the birth of the sub-genre of apocalyptic feature films involving celestial collisions, films that now include *The Day the Sky Exploded* (1958), *Meteor* (1979), *Deep Impact* (1998), *Armageddon* (1998), and *Melancholia* (2011).

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<sup>1</sup> Dale Sherman, *Armageddon Films FAQ: All That's Left to Know About Zombies, Contagions, Aliens, and the End of the World As We Know It* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2013), 36-38.

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- <sup>2</sup> Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 364.
- <sup>3</sup> Paolo Cherchi-Usai, "The Scandinavian Style," in *The Oxford History of World Cinema*, ed. by Geoffrey Nowell Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 154.
- <sup>4</sup> Delia Enyedi, "The Comet Tail: Celestial Apocalypse in Silent Cinema," *Ekphrasis. Images, Cinema, Theory, Media*, Issue 2 (2012), 50-51.
- <sup>5</sup> Alan Larson Williams, *Republic of Images* (Westport, Ct: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1992), 163.
- <sup>6</sup> Enyedi, "The Comet Tail," 53.
- <sup>7</sup> John W. Martens, *The End of the World: The Apocalyptic Imagination in Film and Television* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: J. Gordon Shillingford Publishing Inc., 2003), 89.
- <sup>8</sup> Charles P. Mitchell, *A Guide to Apocalyptic Cinema* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001), 1.
- <sup>9</sup> Kylo-Patrick R. Hart and Annette M. Holba, ed., *Media and the Apocalypse* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), 167.
- <sup>10</sup> See generally, Hans Chr. Johansen, *Danish Population History, 1600-1939* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2002).
- <sup>11</sup> See generally, Erik Ulrichsen and Ebbe Neergaard, *Danish Cinema* ([Copenhagen]: Danske selskab, 1963).
- <sup>12</sup>J.N. Kish, "U.S. Population 1776 to Present," accessed February 12, 2016, <https://www.google.com/fusiontables/DataSource?dsrcid=225439#rows:id=1>.
- <sup>13</sup> B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 9.
- <sup>14</sup>Patricia King Hanson and Alan Gevinson, eds., *The American Film Institute Catalog, Feature Films, 1911-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
- <sup>15</sup> Rachael Low, *The History of the British Film 1914-1918* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1997), 66-94.
- <sup>16</sup> Release dates and short descriptions of these films can be found in: Wheeler Winston Dixon and Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *A Short History of Film* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013).
- <sup>17</sup> *The Story of the Kelly Gang* (at around 60 min) is considered to be the first dramatic feature film, and was released in Australia in 1906 (Brian McFarlane, Geoff Mayer, and Ina Bertrand, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 473).
- <sup>18</sup> Heinz Kiecksee, *Die Ostsee-Sturmflut 1872: Schriften des Deutschen Schiffahrtsmuseums* (Heide, Westholsteinische Verlagsanstalt Boyens, 1972).
- <sup>19</sup> F. Lücke, *Versuch einer vollständigen Einleitung in die Offenbarung Johannis und in die gesamte apokalyptische Literatur* (Bonn: Weber, 1832).
- <sup>20</sup> The other major religious faiths have their own versions of end time events yet none of these have managed to successfully permeate their traditions into contemporary literature, film and popular culture. Hindu eschatology follows the Vaishnavite tradition to the figure of Kalki, or the

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tenth and last avatar of Vishnu or Shiva names of the Supreme Being in Hinduism and before the age draws to a close, and Harihara simultaneously dissolves and regenerates the universe. Islamic eschatology studies Yawm al-Qiyāmah ("the Day of Resurrection") or Yawm ad-Dīn ("the Day of Judgment"), the final assessment of humanity by Allah ("God" in Islam and Arabic), consisting of the annihilation of all life, resurrection and judgment. Buddhist eschatology is dominated by two major teachings: the appearance of Maitreya and the Sermon of the Seven Suns.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew E. Arterbury, W. H. Jr. Bellinger, and Derek S. Dodson, *Engaging the Christian Scriptures: An Introduction to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing, 2014), 131-133.

<sup>22</sup> Zdravko Stefanovic, *Daniel: Wisdom to the Wise : Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2007), 29-34.

<sup>23</sup> James J. Bloom, *The Jewish Revolts Against Rome, A.D. 66-135: A Military Analysis* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 3.

<sup>25</sup> M. Smith, "On the History of *Apokalyp̄tō* and *Apokalyp̄sis*," in D. Hellholm, ed., *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1983), 9-20.

<sup>26</sup> Book of Revelation 14:19.

<sup>27</sup> Philip Schaff, *The Complete Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Church Fathers Collection* (Catholic Way Publishing, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Bernard McGinn, *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

<sup>29</sup> John Howard Smith, *The First Great Awakening: Redefining Religion in British America, 1725-1775* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015), 3-7; Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), i-xviii.

<sup>30</sup> Nancy Cott, "Young Women in the Great Awakening in New England," *Feminist Studies* (Autumn 1975), vol. 3, No. 1/2, p 15.

<sup>31</sup> Mervyn F. Bendle, "The Apocalyptic Imagination and Popular Culture," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 11 (Fall 2005), 1-15.

<sup>32</sup> Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957).

<sup>33</sup> George M. Fredrickson, "The Coming of the Lord: The Northern Protestant Clergy and the Civil War Crisis" in *Religion and the American Civil War*, Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Reagan Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 110–30.

<sup>34</sup> The nineteenth century also saw the development of a new type of premillennialism, dispensational premillennialism, with the founding of the Plymouth Brethren denomination in Great Britain and Ireland by J. Nelson Darby. In the US, the dispensational form of premillennialism was propagated on the popular level largely through the Scofield Reference Bible and on the academic level with Lewis Sperry Chafer's eight-volume Systematic Theology.

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Dispensational premillennialism holds to the pre-tribulation return of Christ, which believes that Jesus will return to take up Christians into heaven by means of a rapture immediately before a seven-year worldwide tribulation. This will be followed by an additional return of Christ with his saints (Herbert W. Bateman IV, "Dispensationalism Tomorrow," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. by Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 315-16).

<sup>35</sup> Philip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes*. Volume I: History of Creeds (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1877), 676; "Millenarianism," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1087.

<sup>36</sup> Craig L. Blomberg and Sung Wook Chung, *A Case for Historic Premillennialism: An Alternative to "Left Behind" Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009), xii-xiv.

<sup>37</sup> Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), an account of one man's experiences of the year 1665, in which the Great Plague or the bubonic plague struck the city of London, has been cited by some authors as the first apocalyptic work of fiction. However, the work cannot be considered apocalyptic fiction because there is no credible global threat posed by the plague. Rather the cataclysm is confined to the London area.

<sup>38</sup> Hugh J. Luke, "Introduction," in *The Last Man*, by Mary Shelley (Lincoln, Nebraska: U of Nebraska Press, 1965), xxi.

<sup>39</sup> Luke, "Introduction," xxi.

<sup>40</sup> Killis Campbell, "The Origins of Poe", in *The Mind of Poe and Other Studies* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc., 1962), 169; David L. Rowe, *God's Strange Work: William Miller and the End of the World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans: 2008), 138.

<sup>41</sup> Edwin Emerson, *Comet Lore: Halley's Comet in History and Astronomy* (New York: Schilling Press, 1910), 61-62.

<sup>42</sup> John C. Brandt and Robert D. Chapman, *Introduction to Comets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 18.

<sup>43</sup> David Ketterer, *New Worlds For Old* (New York: Anchor, 1974); Richard Abanes, *End-time Visions* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1998); Frederic Baumgartner, *Longing for the End* (New York: Palgrave, 1999); David Katz and Richard Popkin, *Messianic Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1999); Eugene Weber, *Apocalypses* (New York: Vintage, 1999); Bendle. "The Apocalyptic Imagination and Popular Culture."

<sup>44</sup> Other events include: First Boer War (1880-1881), Johnstown Flood (1889), Panic of 1893, Spanish-American War (1898), Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901), Mount Pelee Eruption (1902), Second Boer War (1899-1902), Philippine-American War (1899), Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905), sinking of the Titanic (1912) and First World War (1914-1918).

<sup>45</sup> In 1899, there were 1,610 daily newspapers in the United States but by 1909 there were 2,600 (Adam Woog, *A Cultural History of the United States Through the Decades - The 1900s* (San Diego, California: Lucent Books, 1998)).

<sup>46</sup> Baumgartner, *Longing for the End*, 194.

<sup>47</sup> Norman Rosenthal, *Apocalypse: Beauty and Horror in Contemporary Art since 1900* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2000); Roger Manley, *End is Near!: Visions of Apocalypse, Millennium*,

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and *Utopia* (Los Angeles, CA: Dilettante Press, 2006); Natasha F.H. O'Hear and Anthony O'Hear, *Picturing the Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation in the Arts Over Two Millennia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>48</sup> Gary Westfahl, ed., *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy: Themes, Works and Wonders*, Volume 3 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005), 1213-1215; David G. Hartwell, "Introduction," in *The Purple Cloud*, by M.P. Shiel (Boston: Gregg, 1977), v-xviii.

<sup>49</sup> John Clute, "Introduction to the Bison Books Edition," *The Purple Cloud*, by M.P. Shiel (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), v-xii.

<sup>50</sup> Sam Moskowitz, "The World, The Devil, and M.P. Shiel," in *Explorers of the Infinite*, by Sam Moskowitz (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1963), 142-156.

<sup>51</sup> Aris Mousoutzanis, *Fin-de-Siècle Fictions, 1890s-1990s: Apocalypse, Technoscience, Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 60.

<sup>52</sup> Trish Ferguson, ed., *Victorian Time: Technologies, Standardizations, Catastrophes*, Palgrave Studies in Nineteenth-Century Writing and Culture (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 157.

<sup>53</sup> H.G. Wells, "The Extinction of Man: Some Speculative Suggestions," *Pall Mall Gazette*, September 25, 1894, nr. 59, 3.

<sup>54</sup> Simon J. James, "Witnessing the End of the World: H.G. Wells's Educational Apocalypses," *Literature and Theology* 26(4) (2012), 464.

<sup>55</sup> Julian Cornell, "All's Wells that Ends Wells: Apocalypse and Empire in The War of the Worlds," in *A Companion to Literature and Film*, ed. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

<sup>56</sup> Cornell, "All's Wells that Ends Wells."

<sup>57</sup> Jack Williamson, "The Evolution of the Martians" in *War of the Worlds: Fresh Perspectives on the H.G. Wells Classic*, ed. Glenn Yeffeth (Dallas, TX: BenBella, 2005), 189-195.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Parrinder, *Learning from Other Worlds* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 137.

<sup>59</sup> From 1871 to 1914, 60 works of fiction for adult readers describing invasions of Great Britain were published.

<sup>60</sup> Cecil D. Eby, *The Road to Armageddon: The Martial Spirit in English Popular Literature, 1870-1914* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988), 11-13.

<sup>61</sup> G. Rosen, *A History of Public Health* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

<sup>62</sup> Philip A. Kalisch, "The Black Death in Chinatown: Plague and Politics in San Francisco, 1900-1904." *Arizona and the West*, 14(2) (1972), 113-136.

<sup>63</sup> Michele Augusto Riva, Marta Benedetti, and Giancarlo Cesana, "Pandemic Fear and Literature: Observations from Jack London's The Scarlet Plague," *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, Vol. 20, No. 10 (October 2014), 1753-1757.

<sup>64</sup> Uffe Stormgaard and Søren Dyssegaard, *Danish Films* (Copenhagen: Danish Film Institute and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 1973), 30.

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- <sup>65</sup> John Sundholm, ed., *Historical Dictionary of Scandinavian Cinema* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2012), 4.
- <sup>66</sup> Stormgaard and Dyssegaard, 32.
- <sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 34
- <sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>69</sup> Erik Ulrichsen, *Introduction to Atlantis* (Copenhagen: Det Danske Filmmuseet, 1958).
- <sup>70</sup> Forsyth Hardy, *Scandinavian Film* (London: The Falcon Press, 1952), 2.
- <sup>71</sup> Stormgaard and Dyssegaard, 39.
- <sup>72</sup> J.H.S. Birch, *Denmark in History* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975), 392.
- <sup>73</sup> Birch, *Denmark in History*, 395.
- <sup>74</sup> Ebbe Neergaard, "The Rise, the Fall, and the Rise of Danish Film," *Hollywood Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Spring, 1950), 219-220.
- <sup>75</sup> Stormgaard and Dyssegaard, 44.
- <sup>76</sup> Vladimir Rubtsov, *The Tunguska Mystery* (Astronomers' Universe) (New York: Springer Science + Business Media LLC, 2009), 1.
- <sup>77</sup> Michael Benson also argues that *Verdens undergang* was a delayed reaction to Halley's Comet's last passing in 1910 (Michael Benson, *Vintage Science Fiction Films, 1896-1949* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2000), 13).
- <sup>78</sup> Gunter Faure and Teresa M. Mensing, *Introduction to Planetary Science. The Geological Perspective* (New York: Springer, 2007), 437.
- <sup>79</sup> Robert Burnham, *Great Comets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 183.
- <sup>80</sup> Burnham, *Great Comets*, 183.
- <sup>81</sup> Eve Golden, *Anna Held and the Birth of Ziegfeld's Broadway* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 144.
- <sup>82</sup> Keith M. Johnston, *Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction* (London: Berg, 2011), 63.
- <sup>83</sup> Karen Ward Mahar, *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 50.
- <sup>84</sup> 680 feet in length.
- <sup>85</sup> Douglas Alver Menville and R. Reginald, *Things to Come: An Illustrated History of the Science Fiction Film* (New York: Times Books, 1977), 20; Gene Wright, *Who's Who & What's What in Science Fiction : Film, Television, Radio, & Theater* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1985), 87.
- <sup>86</sup> August Blom, head of production at Nordisk Film, made production decisions based on the public's fascination with contemporary events. In 1913, he directed the previously mentioned feature *Atlantis* based on the 1912 sinking of the Titanic which had received widespread media attention in the newspapers and on film (see: Stephen Bottomore. *The "Titanic" and Silent Cinema* (Hastings: The Projection Box, 2000)).

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<sup>87</sup> While both Blom and Gance's films claimed inspiration from Flammarion's novel, the striking similarities in the narratives in both films leaves little doubt that Gance took some of his inspiration for his narrative from the Danish production.

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