

Bren Ram *Lucy's* Apocalypse:
Placing the End of the
World in Narrative

Abstract: The study of apocalypse stands to gain much from literary perspectives because imaginative narrativizing, or the practice of arranging events into temporal relationships with one another, is necessary for understanding what is meant by ‘end’ (as in ‘the end of the world’). However, narratology—the study of narrative—has a troubling tendency to misrecognize this temporal arrangement as the sole meaning-bearer when it comes to plot. In this article, I make the case for a new understanding of narrative, centering “apocalypse” as an imaginative practice. Using Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy* as a case study, I suggest that, instead of seeking universal narratological laws about worlds and their endings, apocalypse studies would benefit from an understanding of apocalypses as local and historically informed. Colonialism is a world-ending practice creates poetic and aesthetic constraints which necessitate a non-universalizable understanding of apocalypse as a condition that is visited upon people unevenly. Drawing on Caribbean thought, narratology, and recent work in apocalypse studies, I read *Lucy* to show how it is possible for a narrative to be post-apocalyptic without belonging to the genre of speculative fiction; with colonization acting as the apocalyptic event. Such a practice of reading will help clarify what is meant by “the end of the world” and make it possible to understand how “apocalypse” functions even in situations and stories that are not about disasters and cataclysms. Finally, I suggest that reading practices that center apocalyptic poetics bear decolonial possibilities in their unsettling of White, imperial futurity.

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'Apocalypse' is a literary mode. The origins of the word itself speak directly to this designation—it named a genre of ancient Jewish prophetic text, based on the first word of the *Book of Revelation* ("apokálypsis") which appears in the Christian New Testament. Moreover, though, 'apocalypse's' textuality appears through its contemporary deployment as the signifier for 'the end.' Imaginative narrativizing—that is, the literary practice of arranging events into temporal relationships with one another—is necessary for the contemplation of the end; if something is to end, it must have a temporal relationship to the world. It seems intuitive, then, that the study of the end benefit from perspectives characteristic of the study of literature, as theorists such as Frank Kermode (2000) and Paul Ricœur (1985) have suggested. After all, when a novel ends, a world ends—a diegetic world, that is, the world of a story.

Unfortunately, though, the word 'world'—as in 'the end of the'—rarely appears in studies of narrative endings. Narratology, the field of literary studies that takes as its primary object the form and structure of stories, is preoccupied with the temporal at the expense of the spatial. For the purposes of studying the apocalypse, such a temporal framing might seem prudent. However, in his incisive monograph *Tropical Apocalypse*, Martin Munro (2015) offers an exciting invitation: to consider apocalypses as locally and historically informed. Treating Caribbean history, thought, and literature (and focusing on Haiti in particular), Munro argues that to say that an apocalypse is the end of *the* world is to ignore the localized, specific worlds that have already come to an end at the hands of ecological crisis, war, famine, slavery, criminality, and colonization. Specifically, he supposes that the Caribbean apocalypse "has its own particular meanings and paradoxes [...] most notably in the sense that the apocalypse has endured for centuries, and that the end times have no apparent end" (Munro 2015, 2). This situates the apocalypse not just as a global phenomenon but also as specific and local. In the Caribbean, Munro suggests, "one has a particularly precarious situation, and a sense that the region stands at the edge of an apocalyptic abyss that is deeper and more long-standing than the one envisioned [...] for the Western world. One feels indeed that the Caribbean has been [...] living its own version of the end times for centuries" (Munro 2015, 7). While this sweeping claim applies unevenly across the Caribbean, its provocation is useful in its gesture at disturbing the smooth narrative of progress that the West applies to said region.

Jamaica Kincaid's *Lucy*, a novel about a woman who leaves the West Indies to become an *au pair* in North America, is not a Francophone text like the ones Munro analyzes, and the entirety of the novel takes place outside of the Caribbean. However, while the novel begins as Lucy arrives in the American city where she is to live, it is shaped by experiences, characters, and events that are situated non-sequentially and in a different place (that is, Antigua). As narrator, Lucy uses her past childhood experiences to contextualize and inform her present (and future) ones, with her understanding of herself rooted in a space and time that turns on the axis of colonialism. *Lucy's* plot extends beyond its first and last pages, but not in the sense that there are more narrative events not contained in its text; rather, *Lucy's* diegetic world grants it an aesthetic context which cannot be universalized due to its historical specificity. Lucy, as narrator, writes through a sense of time which is ruled by the anticipation of conclusions to come: a future that, paradoxically, coheres around endings. In other words, the only future worlds available to her are from her past: a temporal constraint placed on her by the historical condition of colonialism. Colonialism's influence on Lucy's narrative proves that a sense of endings which misrecognizes time, history, and world as separate and cordoned-off from one another is too narrow and misplaces aesthetics onto a demand for Lucy's narrative to close or satisfy. Indeed, *Lucy's* attention to endings confirms Jacques Rancière's observation that aesthetics is best understood in terms of "who can have a share in what is common to the community [which] is based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed" (Rancière 2006, 12). In other words, it suggests that the local apocalypse seeps beyond the strict bounds of narrative to inflect not just representations of disasters, endings of texts, or post-apocalyptic tales, but the ways that stories themselves are told; that is, their poetics.

My aim in this article is thus twofold. First, I read *Lucy* for the local apocalypse: that is, the kind of apocalypse that is legible through the lens of colonialism as a world-ending practice that has temporal *and* spatial resonances. Second, and emerging from this first practice of reading, I seek an understanding of apocalypse as a narrative conceit that is flexible, open, and non-universalizable. Indeed, the traditional modes of studying "narrative" may be wholly inappropriate for this kind of investigation; instead, I forward poetics—defined by Lauren Berlant as "a theory-in-practice of how a world works"—as a more useful mode for understanding what is meant by the end of the world (Berlant 2011, 16). If apocalypse studies as a field of inquiry is to grow and grant understandings of non-linear, non-teleological, and non-redemptive kinds of thinking, I argue, it

must let go of the kinds of narratological parsing that would see time, place, history, and culture as independent variables. The way ‘the world’ ends in *Lucy*—while still, paradoxically, going on—gestures towards the capacious thinking that will allow us to widen our scope beyond speculative fiction and disaster stories to see the machinations of apocalypse everywhere.

The current state of narrative theory does not leave much room for considerations of plot as more than an arrangement of events in time. Narrative theorists from Paul Ricœur to Peter Brooks prefer the term “fabula,” a term which emerges from Russian Formalism. Russian Formalism was an early 20th century school of literary criticism wherein the ‘functions’ of poetic language take center stage, often in the form of diagrams and formulas, and emerges from the work of such towering figures as Vladimir Propp and Viktor Shklovsky. *Fabula* is a useful term: it refers to the chronological sequence of cause-effect events in a narrative, and thus refers to the structural components of what we might call ‘plot.’ In terms of the study of endings, this sort of form-content separation allows the end of a *fabula* to be considered separately from the end of the text in which it appears (e.g. in Christopher Nolan’s 2002 *Memento*, the death of the main character marks the end of the *fabula*, but is the first scene of the film). The term also necessitates some arbitrary determinations. For example, Guiliana Adamo supposes that the end of a *fabula* would be best considered from a “compositive and narrative” perspective whereas the end of a text—which she defines as nothing more than its last thirty “lines”—is better suited to a “stylistic and linguistic perspective” (a view which would hold that the compositive character of a narrative is not part of its style) (Adamo 1995, 87).

One of narratology’s most pervasive tropes in describing endings, though, is to liken them to deaths. In his vital essay *Freud’s Masterplot*, Brooks links the structure of narrative (beginning, middle, and end) to the structure of life (birth, life, and death). Brooks reads Sigmund Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to give psychoanalytic scaffolding to a very common tendency: to see a text’s *fabula* as mimetic of life in general, and to read a narrative as if it were a living being. From this perspective, aesthetic judgments of narrative endings depend on the play of elements such as closure, satisfaction, and fulfillment; mirroring Freud’s description of cells maintaining homeostasis: the narrative is “maintained in a state of tension, as a prolonged deviance from the quiescence of the ‘normal’ [...] until it reaches the terminal quiescence of the end” (Brooks 1977, 291). A series of ‘incorrect endings’ are threatened (in *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, will Elizabeth pursue Mr. Collins? Will she end up with Mr. Wick-

ham?) until the ending finally confirms what we've always known (she was destined to be with Mr. Darcy all along).

A focus on narrative as a series of events (*fabula*) that can be “in order” or “out of order” in a text, all leading towards a ‘terminal quiescence,’ privileges time over space and instills a sense of ‘progress’ towards the horizon of the correct ending. Kermode analyzes this supposition in *The Sense of an Ending*, in which he proposes ‘apocalypse’ (specifically, the Christian *Book of Revelation*) as a heuristic by which to read narrative endings. This theological approach is, by definition, literary. The meaning of the Greek word *apokálypsis* carries over into its English definition, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* records, first, as “[t]he ‘revelation’ of the future granted to St. John in the isle of Patmos” and “[t]he book of the New Testament in which this is recorded” and, second, “[b]y extension: Any revelation or disclosure” (*OED*, 2d edn., s.v. “apocalypse”). The more expected meaning, which would deal with the end of the world, currently exists in the *OED* only in draft form, and even then only as an extrapolation of the “events described in the revelation of St. John.” Ricœur, observing that *Revelation* is the last text of the Bible, supposes that “Apocalypse can thus signify both the end of the world and the end of the book at the same time” (Ricœur 1985, 23). The world as book, the book as world: this is the aesthetic dream of closure which animates Christian theological apocalypse (and, as a result, the narrative theories to be gleaned from such a perspective). The Christian concept of the impending end is part of a tradition which, Kermode argues, divides history into “fundamentally arbitrary chronological divisions” which “are made to bear the weight of our anxieties and hopes” (Kermode 2000, 11). By this, Kermode means that the organization of time proposed by apocalyptic eschatology (or even by temporal delineations like millennia and centuries) gives meaning to human history by implying a narratively coherent teleology. Indeed, Kermode slips back into a familiar analogy between narrative and life: “Men [sic] ... to make sense of their span [...] need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems. [...] [T]he End is a figure for their own deaths” (Kermode 2000, 7). Just like poems and novels, humans need “The End” to confirm the meaning of what has come before.

Kermode's interpretation is textually rooted. The apocalyptic texts which made it into the Bible, *Daniel* (in the Old Testament) and *Revelation* (in the New), use prophecy *ex ēventū* to grant legitimacy to their predictions and to periodize history in a way that grants it an overarching narrative. Like Brooks, who observes that a narrative's ending “determines, shapes, necessitates” its content (Brooks 1977, 284), Kermode argues that the expectation of an apocalyptic end-time causes people to make “imagi-

native investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle” (Kermode 2000, 17). These coherent patterns, borne out of attempts to predict the second coming of Christ, persist despite the failure of the apocalypse to appear. So, Kermode concludes, “[i]ncreasingly the present as ‘time-between’ came to mean not the time between one’s moment and the Parousia [second coming], but between one’s moment and one’s death. This throws the weight of ‘End-feeling’ on to the moment” (Kermode 2000, 25). Unfortunately, though, Kermode leaves the difference he assumes between theological apocalypses and literature unquestioned. Ricœur’s interpretation of his study makes the astute observation that this new interpretation of ‘time-between’ could indicate “the conversion of the imminent end into an immanent end” which is an important distinction that allows the apocalyptic to appear in other places than the end of a story (Ricœur 1985, 24). However, it does not seem that Ricœur is speaking of an apocalyptic poetic structure; instead, he stops at the reader’s expectation of a coming end to the text they are reading.

But what if the “end” has occurred before the events of the novel even commence? *Lucy* is the ideal case study for such an investigation because it shows how the Caribbean apocalypse—as Munro describes it—ripples beyond geographic (and narrative) borders to create implications elsewhere. Kincaid herself has treated this very topic in her essay collection *A Small Place*, which invites readers to consider the legacies of colonialism as it manifests in the contemporary tourism economy: “people cannot see a relationship between their obsession with slavery and emancipation and their celebration of the Hotel Training School” (Kincaid 1988, 55). A richer reading of *Lucy* emerges when “apocalypse” becomes a non-universal way of understanding endings, instead probing the conditions of possibility under which certain apocalyptic poetics become legible. Put simply, the connection between worlds and endings is, first and foremost, an aesthetic one, which, in turn, relates to what it is possible to see, experience, and comprehend.

The aesthetics of endings plays out in *Lucy* when the main character considers her relationship to colonialism. As a child, her chafing against her “place” on Antigua springs not from a civil scene but from a scene in choir class:

I had realized that the origin of my presence on the island—my ancestral history—was the result of a foul deed; but that was not what made me, at fourteen or so, stand up in school choir practice and say that I did not wish to sing ‘Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves; Britons

never, never shall be slaves,” that I was not a Briton and that until not too long ago I would have been a slave. My action did not create a scandal; instead, my choir mistress only wondered if all their efforts to civilize me over the years would come to nothing in the end. At the time, my reasons were quite straightforward: I disliked the descendants of the Britons for being un-beautiful, for not cooking food well, for wearing ugly clothes, for not liking to really dance, and for not liking real music. If only we had been ruled by the French: they were prettier. (Kincaid 1990, 135–36)

Here, Lucy links her “presence on the island” and her “ancestral history” together so closely that they don’t even need a conjunction to bind them (just a dash). However, the “foul deed” of colonialism is not the motivator for her disobedience; indeed, she indicates, tongue-in-cheek, that colonization by the “prettier” France would have been acceptable. Her discontent, figured in scenes of poetry and music, is of a specifically aesthetic character that is particular to her—e.g. the Britons don’t “really” dance or like “real” music, by Lucy’s standards, but by *their* standards she remains uncivilized. The colonial project of aesthetic discipline can only be “wonder[ed]” at “[a]t the time” [by the choir mistress], and then retrospectively evaluated “in the end.”

This passage makes a few very elegant and complicated connections: the historical conditions of British colonialism have determined Lucy’s presence on the island and the aesthetic regime imposed upon her, and as a result her aesthetic tastes are informed by historical conditioning. But the temporal character of those conditioned aesthetics coheres around the difference between “in the end” and “[a]t the time” (which is, in this passage, a period: a mark at the end of a sentence, a span of narrative time—or, as Jacques Derrida would put it—“[t]he unheard difference between the appearing and the appearance [between the ‘world’ and ‘lived experience’]” (Derrida 1976, 65). If the aesthetic experiences demanded of Lucy cannot be separated from their time, their history, and their world, then neither should *fabulas* be divorced from worlds and histories in which they occur, and which also come to a kind of apocalyptic end when the novel does.

The school figures often as a site of colonization in *Lucy*. At school, she was forced not only to sing *Rule, Britannia* but also to memorize and recite William Wordsworth’s *Daffodils*. This encounter further establishes poetics as the primary way she figures colonial difference and the time lag that constitutes those aesthetic experiences. After she recites the poem at the age of ten, “everybody stood up and applauded with an enthusiasm

that surprised me, and later they told me how nicely I had pronounced every word, how I had placed just the right amount of special emphasis in places where that was needed, and how proud the poet, now long dead, would have been" (Kincaid 1990, 18). This sentence, a series of temporally-related phrases strung loosely together by commas, indicates that the content of Wordsworth's poem is not as important as Lucy's ability to imitate Britishness. Lucy's relationship to the text of the poem occurs on a purely aesthetic and performative level, that is, her ability to speak herself, as a colonized subject, into being. The value of her performance, communicated to her "later," is measured in terms of her voice (pronunciation, emphasis, etc.) and also in terms of how pleased "the poet, now long dead, would have been." The conditional perfect tense situates the aesthetic value of Lucy's performance in terms of the retrospective meaning granted to it by a figure who is no longer alive. The "foul deed" of colonization determines everything available to Lucy for the aesthetic construction of her sense of self. The *Daffodils* recitation separates her temporally and physically from the aesthetic experience expected (and demanded) of her: by the time she sees daffodils in person, Lucy is an adult. Aesthetically, Lucy constantly finds herself arriving in "a world that has already been made for her" by the colonial project (Joseph 2002, 674). Poetics, then, is a practice of world-making as well as world-destroying.

'Poetics' is a slippery term; my reading here emerges from the work of Édouard Glissant, whose *Poetics of Relation* takes a uniquely placed and historically legible approach to the concept. For Glissant, poetics is best understood as the process by which "each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (Glissant 1997, 11). He critiques structuralist approaches to poetics, accusing them of an obsession with language itself. This narrowness betrays a disinterest in the 'world;' "[r]ather than discovering or telling about the world, it is a matter of producing an equivalent, which would be the Book, in which everything would be said [...] [...] The world as a book, the Book as world" (Glissant 1997, 25). Here the resonances with Kermode's invocation of the Bible as the story of everything, from beginning to end, ring through even this secular reading. Glissant is skeptical of universalizing claims which would say "the Book" is a metaphor for all of life, all of time, and so on. Instead, he forwards a kind of poetics that is informed by the history of colonialism and the global movement of people and capital, with the anthropological "discovery of the other" losing its charm to the "end of the world [...] in the geographical sense" (Glissant 1997, 26). In other words, what is poetically apocalyptic in terms of history is imperialism; the very notion that the sun would never set on the British empire, for instance. With no more

“world”—no more Other—poetics reaches an impasse of meaning, leaving behind nothing but the kind of meaningless repetition and aesthetic homogeneity that makes Lucy's school have all the children sing *Rule, Britannia*.

Interestingly, Munro classes Glissant among the “least apocalyptic” of his Caribbean contemporaries, because he is interested more in the “silence and absence” constituted for the region by colonialism than in the drama of apocalypse (Munro 2015, 13)¹. However, “apocalypse” does not have to mean hopeless cataclysm. Jessica Hurley, one of today's foremost thinkers dealing with the notion of “apocalypse” as a narrative tool, suggests a theory of apocalypse that lets go of the redemptive progress narrative in favor of radical futurelessness. According to the imperialist narrative of progress, the present is the necessary and unchangeable condition for the future; if we seek a practice of reading that is anti-colonial, then reading apocalyptically might mean allowing our relationship to the future to become murky. In other words: “If the dominant culture pairs White heterosettler futurity with minority futurelessness along a determinately teleological timeline, then cutting out the future from this timeline becomes a way of disrupting the temporal structures that organize social domination” (Hurley 2020, 23). To break out of the colonial poetics that Glissant criticizes, apocalyptic poetics could be “a potent force in redefining reality against colonial norms” (Hurley 2020, 191).

Hurley's suggestion that “apocalypse” could be a useful decolonial heuristic is striking. However, as an Americanist, she is working through the lens of North American settler colonialism, which operates on an understanding of space (westward expansion) and time (the realization of manifest destiny) which is distinct from the imperialism visited upon the Caribbean. What I glean from her work is, first, that the specifics of space and time that are local to a narrative are essential to the way apocalypse emerges in it; secondly, that “apocalypse [can be] defined not by the sudden absence of the future but rather by the impossibility of constructing any mechanism by which we might imagine a specific future or futures” (Hurley 2020, 191). It is my project to examine what narrative theory stands to gain from the centering of poetics as practices of world-making that are uniquely textual. Instead of proposing an alternate theory of narrative, my aim is to show the fissures where the existing progress-driven structure closes futures off from itself.

In *Lucy*, for instance, the daffodils figure in a closed aesthetic loop that shows that the future has been, apocalyptically, cut off. Mariah, the white woman for whom Lucy works in the United States, brings her to a field of daffodils she thinks her *au pair* might enjoy. She thinks they are

¹ It is also worth noting that his work is mainly concerned with the “incomplete liberty” of the French Caribbean, of which Antigua is not a part (Munro 2015, 13).

about to share in a common experience: a universal experience of beauty. However, Lucy reacts negatively by describing her childhood experience: “Mariah, do you realize that at ten years of age I had to learn by heart a long poem about some flowers I would not see in real life until I was nineteen?” (Kincaid 1990, 30). History has placed an aesthetic barrier between the two women, with one side of the barrier creating the conditions under which a common experience becomes impossible. Lucy explains: “I had cast her beloved daffodils in a scene she had never considered [...] [S]he wanted me to love this thing—a grove brimming over with daffodils in bloom—that she loved also” (Kincaid 1990, 30). Mariah situates herself as part of the regime demanding particular aesthetic experiences of Lucy, but access to the experience of viewing daffodils is something from which Lucy has been separated—both temporally, in that she would not see them for years, and spatially, in that they were not in Antigua—by colonialism. What is visible and audible, to both of them, is daffodils in the abstract and the words of Wordsworth’s poems; but their spatio-temporal social difference renders their common experience anything but common. Colonial aesthetics is an attempt to fold everyone into having access to the ‘common’—in this instance, the daffodils—but the political bar placed over subjects of colonization is also an aesthetic one (and one specific to the physical distribution of sensible aesthetic experience). So, when she tries to explain herself to Mariah, Lucy can only ask herself: “Where should I start? Over here or over there?” (Kincaid 1990, 29).

Lucy’s sense of temporality itself is overwritten by colonial history. This is evidence that endings and futurity are poetic categories: what is available to Lucy for the construction of her future is controlled by aesthetic qualities. When remembering a woman named Sylvie from her childhood, Lucy begins with a description of Sylvie’s face: “she had a scar on her right cheek, a human-teeth bite. It was as if her cheek were a half-ripe fruit and someone had bitten into it, meaning to eat it, but then realized it wasn’t ripe enough” (Kincaid 1990, 24). The bite mark is a result of a quarrel with another woman which sent Sylvie to jail, but Lucy supposes that “the mark on her face bound her to something much deeper than its reality, something that she could not put into words” (Kincaid 1990, 25). Lucy’s conviction is colored by Sylvie’s frequent use of the phrase “years ago, when I was young,” which Lucy recalls often in her adult life (Kincaid 1990, 22). A series of temporal figurations informs Lucy’s memory of this woman. First, that Sylvie’s cheek was like a “fruit,” which the “someone” had, ‘after’ biting it, realized that it was not yet ‘ripe’ for biting. Lucy sees the mark as an indicator of a premature valuation, the inverse of the time-lag value she experiences with *Daffodils*; something happened to Sylvie before she

was ready, and the time at which it did happen and the time at which it becomes important to her (if it ever does) do not match.

When Sylvie talks about her youth, she adopts a tone of voice which sounds “heavy and hard,” and Lucy remembers, “I came to think that heavy and hard was the beginning of living, real living; and though I might not end up with a mark on my cheek, I had no doubt that I would end up with a mark somewhere” (Kincaid 1990, 25). Her childhood self proposes a future in which her life—the life that she is, ostensibly, living during the “present” of her narrative’s *fabula*—will become real. Not only does she mark a “beginning” for the future, however, but also an “end”—an understanding that, at the end of her life, she will “end up with a mark.” However, the mark itself is more than its reality, indicating that a temporal disjoint separates Lucy and Sylvie from the kinds of aesthetic experiences available to someone like Mariah. What it signifies, as Lucy observes, is “much deeper than its reality.”

The conditions for Lucy’s life becoming “real” and “heavy and hard” are pain, emigration from her homeland, and, ultimately, adulthood. As she remembers Sylvie, she finds herself, for the first time, able to take a retrospective attitude on her past, reflecting, “I could now look back at the winter. It was my past, so to speak, my first real past—a past that was my own and over which I had the final word” (Kincaid 1990, 23). The temporal figurations here are intricate. She repeats her past experiences as memory, but her childhood self also repeats the future life she expects to live after meeting Sylvie. She remembers anticipation of a future event—at the same time, she looks forward to a time at which she can look back. This is reminiscent of the traditional narratological understanding of endings, and even the apocalyptic anticipation of the end of history, at which time a pattern of meaning in preceding historical processes will be discernible. The end of the story will allow the middle of the story to start making sense. Lucy envisions the ending of her life as being “mark[ed]” by pain, but also envisions her present as only intelligible in terms of her past. The aesthetic marks which Lucy is able to discern transform the present into something which exists exclusively as a difference between the past and the future; thus, it is a poetic category, but also a category of Kermode’s “time-between,” throwing the “end-feeling” into the present even as that present moment slips away. It converts her life’s and narrative’s ending, as Ricoeur predicts, from being “imminent” to “immanent.”

Lucy’s understanding of endings comes as simultaneous contemplation of the past and the future, both drawn into the present. She repeats not only past actions but present and future ones, collapsing the distinction between the three while retaining the sense of a ‘linear’ narrative.

Narratology falls short of being able to fully theorize the complexity of Lucy's temporal experience. The traditional understanding (here exemplified by Ricoeur) proposes that, for a plot to be successful, it must be composed of whole, complete actions arranged symmetrically in time: "An action is whole and complete if it has a beginning, a middle, and an end; that is, if the beginning introduces the middle, if the middle with its reversals and recognition scenes leads to the end, and if the end concludes the middle" (Ricoeur 1985, 20). Brooks and Kermode, too, both emphasize the "reversals and recognition scenes" of the middle, but in near-opposite ways. Brooks argues that they make the ending inevitable by providing narrative deviations which the plot must correct into a linear beginning-end structure, while Kermode sets up the opposite causal relationship, arguing that "peripeteia depends on our confidence of the end; it is a disconfirmation followed by consonance" (Kermode 2000, 14). The mimetic relationship between life and narrative which Ricoeur sees would imply that life, too, would have to follow either Kermode's or Brooks' interpretation of the middle. Real life events would either strive for ending consonance, as Kermode would insist (the apocalyptic myth "projects its neat, naïve patterns on to history" as it is prolonged further and further); or they would gain meaning only retrospectively, 'after' the end, at which point one cannot but see a chain of events as leading inevitably to its current state (Kermode 2000, 14).

This notion that the most important function literature can play is to be mimetic of 'real life' is pervasive but misguided. It elides the power of literature to create and end its own worlds, firstly, but secondly—and perhaps more importantly—it relegates the aesthetic to the level of 'style' (as opposed to the substance of *fabula*). If poetics—that process by which things such as worlds and identities are built—is taken seriously, the fullness of a text's relationship with time emerges. When we free literature from the responsibility of mimesis, a variety of apocalyptic opportunities emerges. Firstly, it becomes possible to read texts that are not themselves figurations of disasters or apocalypses, broadening the scope of the field. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the conditions of possibility under which a work emerges become part of the work itself. What it is possible to experience, on an aesthetic level, is—we learn from Glissant—historically constrained. This means that 'apocalypse' and endings look different for different texts, and the poetic conditions under which the world of a story can emerge are not universal. Therefore, it is not possible to study the apocalypse without first asking "apocalypse for whom?" Worlds end in uneven ways. The narratological approach to poetics, for example that of Tzvetan Todorov, who seeks "knowledge of the

general laws that preside over the birth of each work,” misses both this locality and also the specific textual qualities that produce stories’ endings (Todorov 1981, 6). The endings of novels are mimetic neither of human deaths nor the end of “the” world: they are invitations to investigate the ways textual artifacts can redistribute or change the terms of what it is possible to imagine.

To better illustrate the connection between novel endings and apocalypse, I turn towards the end of the novel, wherein Lucy begins to contemplate death and temporality as occurring in the context of writing. The end of her life and the end of the novel are not the same thing; indeed, the difference between them is so important that it structures, basically, the entire text. Where the end of Lucy’s life is an event in her future that she will not be able to experience, the end of *Lucy* the novel appears as an explicitly textual and aesthetic object. The writing of letters becomes extremely important here, with the communicative disconnect between Lucy and her mother taking textual form. She receives the letters by reversing the temporal demands they make on her: “One day a letter arrived for me, and written all over the envelope in my mother’s beautiful handwriting was the word urgent. To me the letter might as well have written all over it the words ‘Do not open until doomsday’” (Kincaid 1990, 115). Her animus towards her mother appears in the form of a temporal disconnect. Letters already take time to travel across oceans; what was “urgent” at the time Lucy’s mother wrote the letter might already have passed the brink at which Lucy knowing it would matter. Lucy’s charming invocation of the apocalyptic is worth noting: by “until doomsday,” she means “never.” So there are three layers of temporality at work, here: “One day,” “urgent,” and “until doomsday.” Neither of these registers are connected with one another, because none of them are operating in the same place. “One day” is in the US; “urgent” in Antigua; and “until doomsday” nowhere, never.

Lucy’s struggle to break free from the hold her mother has on her helps contextualize and situate the disconnect between these temporal registers. Her relationship with her mother is complicated, to say the least, and when she tries to explain it to Mariah, the well-educated American gives her a copy of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*. The book does nothing for her. Lucy insists on the singularity of her experience: “my mother was my mother and [...] society and history and culture and other women in general were something else altogether” (Kincaid 1990, 131–32). What she learns from this encounter is that “for ten of my twenty years, half of my life, I had been mourning the end of a love affair, perhaps the only true love in my whole life I would ever know” (Kincaid 1990, 132).

This scene clarifies two things. First, that Lucy's experience cannot be universalized; it is only legible in the context of her specific experiences and relationships. Second, that the "end" of her most important relationship—indeed, the relationship that structures her life and sense of intimacy with others—has already occurred, long before the novel began. Obsessed with compartmentalizing her life into periods and sections, Lucy's splitting of her life in half orients it towards that always looming but never arriving "doomsday," the gravitational center of her mother around which her life revolves. The poetic conditions under which love and relationships become possible have already been foreclosed upon. And so, the novel proceeds from after the end.

Lucy's turn towards textuality and writing maintains this sense of having occurred after the end. Note how the words and phrases that establish timing and pace clamor in this passage:

I had not been opening the letters my mother had been sending to me for months. In them she tried to give me a blow-by-blow description of how quickly the quality of her life had deteriorated since I had left her, but I only knew this afterward—after I had learned of my father's death, written to her and sent her money, and then opened the letter she sent in reply. For if I had seen those letters sooner, one way or another I would have died. I would have died if I did nothing; I would have died if I did something. (Kincaid 1990, 139)

Lucy is a deeply reflective text. The novel's narrator, Lucy, spills a great deal of ink trying to parse out her relationship to time; but this passage in particular brims with temporal disconnects. Her mother's attempts to give her a "blow-by-blow" (real-time) account of her life is thwarted by her daughter's unwillingness to participate in the informational exchange of writing "for months." Lucy only learns that she'd been trying to do this "afterward—after" she'd learned her father died. Then she writes (giving a false address, thereby cutting off contact forever), "and then" opens the letters. Information is introduced out of order, both to Lucy (in the *fabula*) and in the form of the sentences, because Lucy and her mother are no longer operating in the same worlds. Each world has its own temporal register, its own aesthetic, and so is cut off from what is common (i.e. the world of Mariah, in which de Beauvoir can explain the relationship between Lucy and her mother). What has ended is the world in which the information in the letters is relevant: the relationship ("love affair") between the two women. As the repetition in the end of the passage indicates, the meeting of those worlds would have meant death.

Temporality, urgency, and death: all of these thematic resonances gesture towards the apocalyptic, but the aspect of local apocalypse I want to draw out emerges in Lucy's reaction to the news of her father's death. First, she realizes how committed she had been to a vision of her present life continuing on without change: "I had never imagined my parents dying. When I told Mariah this, she said that no one ever thinks their parents will die, ever, and I had to suppress the annoyance I felt at her for once again telling me about everybody when I told her something about myself" (Kincaid 1990, 139). After insisting on the non-universalizability of her experience, she imagines the end of her life as being grounded, physically, in her past:

I noticed how hard and cold and shut up the ground was. I noticed this because I used to wish it would just open up and take me in, I felt so bad. If I dropped dead from despair as I was crossing the street, I would just have to lie there in the cold. The ground would refuse me. To die in the cold was more than I could bear. I wanted to die in a hot place. The only hot place I knew was my home. I could not go home, and so I could not die yet. (Kincaid 1990, 140–41)

At this point in the narrative, Lucy has passed through the endings of many things. The end of her childhood, firstly, is the object of much introspection, but she has also learned that her father has died; so his life is over, and so is the threat that she might break the promise she had made to herself never to see him again. Her relationship with Mariah, her employer, has disintegrated, and her friendship with her roommate Peggy is nearing its closure. She projects these endings into the future to imagine her own death. Although she has relentlessly been trying to escape Antigua and the colonial constraints it has placed on her, she still sees her life as captured and bookended by it. And not just Antigua as a political, historical, or social phenomenon: Antigua as a hot place, the only hot place she knows. She cannot die "yet" due to the nature of the US as a cold place, and also because she cannot return "home." She draws her past into her future to explain the conditions for her own demise. She does not have the imaginative tools available to think of a different hot place in which to die; again, the only worlds available to her for her future are from her past. This is a constraint placed on her as a result of her colonized history—a history which marks her as *being from somewhere*, barring her from accessing a free, universal sense of place. Her desire that the ground "just open up and take [her] in" reflects the connection of time (the future) to place (the ground). The ground is "cold and shut up;" she can't access a sense

of belonging to it, and it would “refuse” even her dead body. Since she feels alienated in this place, the death she imagines for herself would close the aesthetic loop of her past. Her future is her past; her life ended the moment she set foot on US soil (which is, not coincidentally, the moment the novel begins).

If narrative is a metaphor for life, just as the ground is a metaphor for place, then the entirety of *Lucy's fabula* takes place in what can only be considered a postapocalyptic landscape. The novel is what emerges from the futurelessness that colonialism has left for her. This is, of course, not to say that the novel lacks meaning or temporality, far from it. The novel is simply uninterested in traditional narrative notions of progress, closure, or ‘terminal quiescence.’ Where a narratological perspective might work to untangle the order of events in the story, my approach attends to the textual features (the poetics) that bear traces of colonialism as a world-ending practice. In this text, the future is not guaranteed, nor is it universally legible. Where Mariah’s future without her cheating husband beckons, crowded with possibilities, Lucy’s future has already been made for her; with predetermined aesthetic experiences (like the daffodils) and a sense that something very important has already come to an end. The apocalypse is local—‘was’ local—and it would be impossible to understand without privileging that locality.

Where the writing of letters creates the conditions for understanding the past, the novel ends with a gesture at an unknowable textual future as Lucy writes in a journal Mariah has given her. Throughout the story, Lucy has grappled with her “desire to imagine [her] own future” (Kincaid 1990, 91). Through writing, she has the power to create textual representations of herself, reflect on her ambitions, or work through her feelings about her past. But the novel ends with these sentences:

I wrote my full name: Lucy Josephine Potter. At the sight of it, many thoughts rushed through me, but I could write down only this: “I wish I could love someone so much that I would die from it.” And then as I looked at this sentence a great wave of shame came over me and I wept and wept so much that the tears fell on the page and caused all the words to become one great big blur. (Kincaid 1990, 163–64)

“Blur” is an extremely evocative final word for a text, especially a text of first-person narration. It’s almost a genre convention for a semi-autobiographical bildungsroman to end with its main character discovering her proclivities as a writer, beginning to narrativize her own experience through the practice of self-writing. However, what we get isn’t quite a

narrative: it's a desire about love and death. Knowing that she considers her relationship with her mother the "only true love" she might ever experience, this is a desire about letting go of the past and embracing some kind of new, future relationship that would spell her demise. For her, love and death, and the intensity of both, are the same. The desire is, in its anticipation of an end to come, apocalyptic; it is also apocalyptic in its foreclosure. "I wish I could," writes Lucy implying that, currently, she cannot. This future is not yet available to her—she cannot narrativize, cannot predict—and so is left in a state of apocalyptic futurelessness.

The sense of the apocalyptic working through this passage also appears in the textual persistence of the narrative after its *fabula* ends. Instead of seeing the end of the text as the end of *Lucy's* diegetic world, this passage figures the end as an opening into a new mode of textual being (new writing in a blank journal). Lucy opens a new "world" under the header of her name, with the blankness of the journal gesturing at an unknown openness. Her ending is, as in the passage about the ground, a wish for a particular kind of ending which has not yet arrived because the aesthetics for it have not yet become available. The narrative time-between continues, even when the novel's *fabula* does not.

Reading *Lucy's* ending through an apocalyptic lens reframes the analogy most proper to narrative endings from life-endings to world-endings. As Kermode (2000) rightly argues, the apocalyptic mythos strongly structures our sense of time and space and that influence also colors the aesthetic emergence of literature as non-mimetic art. However, Hurley's criticism remains salient: that Kermode's theorization of the narrative apocalypse depends on "an imagined future that provides the outer limit of time such that we can see time whole" (Hurley 2020, 19). If we begin from the position of Munro (2015)—that, for a region such as the Caribbean, the apocalypse has already occurred—then the future can only be one of two things. First, it could be a continuation of the slavery, imperialism, ecological devastation, criminality, and war that have produced the conditions for the present. This would be the case for a universalizable understanding of narrative wherein all aesthetics are assumed to be equally accessible to everyone from anywhere i.e. the continuation of the present towards an imaginary future perspective from which we can look back and "see time whole."

Second, though, it could be something else. Understanding the local apocalypse helps us understand that time, history, and world are intertwined in narrative endings, and the aesthetic work which those endings do is not so narrow as to indicate closure or consonance. For Lucy, futurelessness—the blankness of the journal and her inability to under-

stand what futures could await her—do not trap her into replicating the same harmful patterns that have left her here. The only futurity she's ever known is that of imperialism; her refusal to participate in that imaginative project might, as Hurley suggests, be a decolonial possibility.

This last point might feel like a bit of a stretch, but allowing the future to become murky and directed towards a discontinuity with the present might be the only way forward. Reading Glissant, Gary Wilder suggests that “nonhistory, tormented chronology, a painful sense of time, and a prophetic vision of the past [...] could be transformed into a critical capacity” insofar as they “[produce] opacities that cannot be seized and clarified” (Wilder 194 and 201). Discontinuity, opacity, and disruption mark the ‘end’ of one kind of history; that is, the “tormented chronology” of the colonial project. As far as narratology goes, apocalypse is the best way to introduce this discontinuity. Rather than seeing a narrative as an inevitable progression towards a predetermined end, apocalyptic poetics pays attention to non-teleological textual practices that probe the relationships between time and space. Indeed, the deeper reading begins with the idea that the end of a novel's *fabula* does not mark its only, nor its most important, end. As a growing field, apocalypse studies must be attentive to the specificity, locality, and constructed nature of the narratives it studies. Each “ending” invoked might be the start of a new post-apocalyptic literary landscape. Indeed, in *Lucy*, the most important endings—the colonization of Antigua, the end of Lucy's “love affair” with her mother, and her departure from her homeland—occur long before the novel begins. *Lucy's* first line shows how it begins ‘after’ all this, after the endings, at what appears to be the brink of a new story: “It was my first day” (Kincaid 1990, 3).

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