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Ending it all: Genesis and Revelation

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Abstract

Because of their brevity, many pop songs of the last 50 years seemingly elude the application of narrative theory. But the deliberate lengthening of individual tracks during the early years of progressive rock exposes them to precisely that kind of examination. One such song is 'Supper's Ready', which closes the 1972 Genesis album Foxtrot. *This allegorical 23-minute epic, abundant with references to the Book of Revelation, provides an intriguing model for the 'concept song', and confounds the listener's expectations – lyrical, musical, narrative, structural and temporal. In this article I explore the seven tableaux of 'Supper's Ready', paying particular attention to the treatment of the apocalyptic theme, apply formalist and narrative theories of interpretation, and consider ways in which the song's design demands that the listener engage with both its concept and its construction.*

In the popular music canon there are many songs whose lyrics mark a clear beginning and reach a satisfying conclusion. Opening statements of reverie ('sitting in the morning sun'), nostalgia ('I met my old lover in the street last night') and hope ('maybe the sun will shine today') are common currency, as surely as endings are defiant ('tramps like us, baby we were born to run'), optimistic ('I shall be released') and life-affirming ('every little thing is gonna be all right'). Three-minute pop music vignettes, even when lacking a narrative arc, are capable of defining boundaries and attaining lyrical closure. In literature it is claimed that 'the best beginnings are the best faked. . . . Ends are ends only when they are not negative but frankly transfigure the events in which they were immanent' (Kermode 2000, pp. 174–5). In pop music, the listener's pleasure has as much to do with the song's composition and performance as the sense that an opening reverie can lead effortlessly to isolation ('. . . this loneliness won't leave me alone'), nostalgia to world-weariness ('. . . still crazy after all these years'), and hope to resignation ('. . . everything has its plan either way').[1] The 'happily ever after' of a three-minute pop song is clearest when lyrical explorations of doubt or isolation elicit emotional resolution. Literary narratives and three-minute pop songs would seem to have little in common, but in this paper I consider beginnings and endings, musical and lyrical, in 'Supper's Ready', a canonical song of the progressive rock literature. While there are many ways of analysing such works, by applying narrative and formalist theory to this song I demonstrate that it adheres to a common archetypal structure found in universal stories, from its faked beginning to its inconclusive ending. In this way, 'Supper's Ready' serves as a good micro model for the macro analysis of other works in the progressive rock repertory.

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Given the depths possible in a formal literary narrative, it can be difficult to imagine what use narrative theory could hold for the study of popular music.[2] As Roland Barthes suggested:

> narrative is a hierarchy of levels or strata. To understand a narrative is not only to follow the unfolding of the story but also to recognise in it a number of 'strata', to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative onto an implicitly vertical axis; to read a narrative (or listen to it) is not only to pass from one word to the next, but also from one level to the next. (Barthes 1975, p. 243)

The 'traditional' pop song – verse/chorus/middle eight, three minutes' duration – would not seem capable of sustaining this multiplicity of levels. Exceptions exist, of course, but the scope of a pop song is often limited to overall effect rather than 'real' storytelling.[3] Progressive rock sought to change all that, to expand the three-minute pop song in as many directions as possible, and it did this by adopting some of the following strategies:

- Songs predominantly on the longish side, but structured, rarely improvised
- A mixture of loud passages, soft passages, and musical crescendos to add to the dynamics of the arrangements [. . .]
- Extended instrumental solos, perhaps involving some improvisation
- The inclusion of musical styles from other than a rock format
- A blending of acoustic, electric and electronic instruments where each plays a vital role in translating the emotion of compositions which typically contain more than one mood
- Multi-movement compositions that may or may not return to a musical theme. In some cases the end section may bear little resemblance to the first part of the song
- Compositions created from unrelated parts. (. . .)
  (Lucky 1998; quoted in Holm-Hudson 2002, p. 3)

Add to this list the notion of 'the concept'. Generally speaking, concept albums in the progressive rock literature attempted to link together a collection of songs through the use of extended musical structures, with some kind of narrative device or notional scheme providing a sense of coherence or unity. Much English progressive rock involved explorations of Englishness, Anglicanism and mythology, and drew inspiration from literary figures such as Tolkien and Blake.[4] The music underscoring the concept might explore symphonic structures, asymmetrical rhythms and passages of great complexity and technical skill; the entire product might then be packaged (by its cover art or other illustrative material) in such a way as to suggest visual imagery underlying the story or representing the music, in one coherent whole. Yes's *Tales from Topographic Oceans* (Atlantic, 1973) is one obvious example of such strategies, and Genesis' *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway* (Charisma, 1974) is one of the defining gestures toward a progressive rock *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

This sense of unification across a concept album via possible musical or thematic interrelationships is complicated by the temporal restrictions of the long-playing record. The two halves of a vinyl record are necessarily finite. The physical act of flipping a record over suggests to a listener that he or she is enjoying a kind of intermission, and that the second half of the recorded performance would either follow on logically from the first, as in an opera, or that the two sides were to be enjoyed as independent entities, as in a symphonic concert: thus the four movements of *Tales from Topographic Oceans*, one per side, and the subtle musical distinctions separating the exposition (sides one to two) and *dénouement* (sides three to four) of *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*.

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Not all progressive rock albums were conceptual, though many betrayed a group's interest in some aspect of literary or spiritual life. Because the original members of Genesis shared a background in the British public school tradition, there is in their early recordings an unsurprising reflection of the Englishness and Anglicanism of their early education.[5] Genesis' fourth studio album, *Foxtrot* (1972), is one such example. Although not a concept album as such, *Foxtrot* nonetheless exhibits a certain cohesion from beginning to end, and within each side:

Side one: 'Watcher of the Skies'
'Time Table'
'Get' Em out By Friday'
'Can-Utility and the Coastliners'

Side two: 'Horizons'
'Supper's Ready'

The bookends of *Foxtrot*'s first side, 'Watcher of the Skies' and 'Can-Utility and the Coastliners', foreshadow the metaphorical language of the second side's 'Supper's Ready'.[6] The two intermediary songs on the first side, 'Time Table' and 'Get' 'Em Out By Friday' paint pictures of decay, of the loss of heroic national past, and the dehumanisation of society, also prefiguring 'Supper's Ready'.[7] Within the first side, the musical grandeur of 'Watcher of the Skies' is tempered by the lyrical 'Time Table'; similarly, the dialogic character-piece, 'Get' 'Em Out by Friday' is balanced by the more sporadically dialogic 'Can-Utility and the Coastliners'. There is also a temporal balance to the first side, the more bombastic first and third tracks lasting 7.5 and 8.5 minutes respectively, the gentler second and fourth tracks lasting nearly-5 and nearly-6 minutes, respectively. On the macro level there is thus a loud/soft balance, a mixture of textures and moods, and brief forays into extended structures.[8] Even within those shorter tracks, Genesis could incorporate any number of metrical shifts, orchestral textures and organ solos; the standard three-minute pop song, in other words, was not yet their *modus operandi*.[9]

The second side of *Foxtrot* opens with the brief, acoustic guitar palate-cleanser, 'Horizons', and leads directly into 'Supper's Ready', which occupies the rest of the side. There are many examples in the progressive rock literature of long tracks with allegorical or symbolic lyrics;[10] what I wish to show here is that 'Supper's Ready' acts as a 'concept song' – an epic with internal lyrical and harmonic coherence, clearly and systematically intertextual. It embodies in its 23 minutes the progressive rock ethos – length, complexity, electric/acoustic and loud/soft contrasts, metaphorical lyrics – and maintains a certain position in the progressive rock canon as a 'stand-alone' work worthy of analysis.[11] To date little has been written about the song's lyrical content and less about its literary inspiration. Most recently, Hegarty and Halliwell have suggested that 'Supper's Ready' uses T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' as a structuring device (Hegarty and Halliwell 2011, pp. 85–6). While this is an interesting interpretation, I would argue that the clearer model is the biblical Book of Revelation. Indeed, scattered throughout 'Supper's Ready' are references to the Book of Revelation, and passages lifted almost verbatim from it.[12] More importantly, 'Supper's Ready' interprets Revelation on a number of levels – literary, metaphorical, structural – all of which I aim to illustrate here, for it is this type of intertextual concept song which presents a number of challenges to our

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assumptions about the narrative limitations of popular music. By applying literary and formalist theories to the song's narrative structure I suggest that there is potential for those limitations to be transcended.

Origins and form

Edward Said (1997, p. 5) has suggested that 'the beginning … is the first step in the intentional production of meaning'. The Bible, opening as it does with an unimpeachable sense of time and motion ('In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth'), also closes with an undeniable finality ('Amen.'). Dropping a needle at the beginning of an LP, like opening a book, is the clearest indication that a musical journey is about to begin; in much the same way that a reader's right hand signals the impending resolution of a mystery novel, the stylus of a record player indicates an impending musical conclusion of some sort. 'Supper's Ready' is restricted in scope to the last 23 minutes of the second side of a long-playing record. When the listener realises during the song that he or she is becoming involved in some kind of extended story, there is an expectation that the lyrical and musical tension will resolve within those 23 minutes. The way in which Genesis dealt with this temporal restriction, from beginning to ending, is the point I wish to consider here.

'Supper's Ready' is comprised of seven episodes, or tableaux, each of which recounts a particular series of events either witnessed or experienced by the narrator, of whom more later. The titles given to each episode do not follow any inherent logic. One could not discern the shape of the narrative by a glance at the titles alone; rather, they seem to delineate discrete movements of a larger musical suite:

(i) Lover's Leap
(ii) The Guaranteed Eternal Sanctuary Man
(iii) Ikhnaton and Itsacon and Their Band of Merry Men
(iv) How Dare I Be So Beautiful?
(v) Willow Farm
(vi) Apocalypse in 9/8 (Co-starring the Delicious Talents of Gabble Ratchet)
(vii) As Sure as Eggs Is Eggs (Aching Men's Feet)

The title of tableau vi betrays the song's only obvious literary reference, suggesting a complicated relationship between 'Supper's Ready' and its Biblical source. The titular reference in tableau vi to the compound triple metre is similarly revealing.[13] The Book of Revelation has a reputation for being a bit of a tough read. It is an epistolary book, a letter to be read aloud. Genesis are apparently suggesting that as such, it is not suited to common time.

As a framing device, Revelation begins with a statement that the author, John, bore witness to certain visions, and was told: 'write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter' (Revelation 1:19).[14] The visions that John recounts are both profound and horrible, couched in nearly impenetrable language, intended for the benefit of 'insiders' – the seven churches to whom John's letter is written, those with knowledge of the mysteries of faith.[15] John's visions are therefore held not to be hallucinations brought on by religious fervour, but some sort of universal truth understandable by the initiate.

The lyrics to 'Supper's Ready' recount in part a paranormal experience that Genesis' lyricist Peter Gabriel had in the early 1970s in the company of his first

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wife, Jill, and Genesis producer John Anthony. In the midst of a philosophical conversation late one night, Jill went into a trance, and as Peter Gabriel said:

> we saw other faces in each other. It was almost as if something else had come into us and was using us as a meeting point. The curtain flew wide open, though there was no wind, and the room became ice cold. And I did feel that I saw figures outside, figures in white cloaks, and the lawn I saw them on wasn't the lawn that was outside. [. . .] I made a cross with a candlestick and held it up to Jill when she was talking in this voice. She reacted like a wild animal and John and I had to hold her down. (Bright 1988, pp. 50–51)

In that one moment, these three 'insiders' had a battle with some dark spiritual force, and emerged unscathed, but profoundly changed. This experience is the basis of 'Supper's Ready,' and the lyrics can be read as a recollection of that night by its witnesses, or as a veiled use of that night's experience as a metaphor for the larger, universal battle between good and evil.

There are certain episodes in Revelation that in isolation have entered the popular consciousness,[16] and certainly the notion of the apocalypse was the basis for a great deal of pre-millennial tension.[17] But the imagery of the book's 22 chapters is uniquely successive: each chapter generally begins with 'and', following on from whatever preceded it, as in the following:

> And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, LORD God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. (Revelation 4:2–8)

The visions of Revelation work under the same logic as any dreamscape: time and space are suspended, and symbolism is understood on some unspoken level.

As a work of oral literature Revelation utilises certain mnemonic devices which determine its structure: the symbolic use of the number seven, for example, is one marker of time and of time remaining. Similarly, Gabriel's lyrics make use of rhetorical devices which are themselves reminiscent of oral folklore:

> The controlling power of folklore, the carrying out of its rhetorical intent, resides in the ability of the item and the performer to establish a sense of identity between a 'real' situation and its artificial embodiment. This sense of identity is engineered through the exercise of control, allowing the audience to relax at the same time it identifies with the projected situation. This is done by creating a 'psychic distance', by removing the audience far enough from the situation that it can see that it is not going to actively involve them immediately. Presented with an anxiety situation but relieved from the actual anxiety, the listener gains control, and with this limited control, relief. This relief becomes pleasure when the performance exercises control by the use of wit, by the imposition of rules and boundaries, by the creation of an imaginary world, or by some other limiting device which proclaims artifice. Such controls make the problem seem more impersonal and universal and less immediate. (Abrahams 1968, pp. 148–9)

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However real Gabriel's vision was, and however tenuous the link between the unreality of the situation and his normal waking life, the lyrics of 'Supper's Ready' speak to the listener's anxiety of mortality, and the structural play with that anxiety – Gabriel's use of surrealism and wit, the prolongation of narrative conflict, the forays into unfamiliar harmonic terrain and asymmetrical metres – enhances the listener's pleasure at the final resolution.

There is an important point to note here, about rhetorical device, hyperbole and the notion of apocalypse as a literary form. According to Craig R. Koester:

> broadly speaking, there are two types of apocalypses. Some are mainly accounts of heavenly journeys that tell how a seer ascends through celestial regions in the company of an angelic guide to see things that are inaccessible to other human beings. [...] Other apocalypses focus on the movement of history, often dividing time into periods that lead up to catastrophic upheavals, which are followed by a time of salvation, that may include the restoration of the land of Israel and the transformation of the world. (Koester 2001, p. 28)

Given the earlier reference to oral folklore, it is easy to understand apocalypse as a mode of literature recognisable by an audience through its use of certain narrative formulae and by the promise of ultimate redemption. What transpires within that literary form is interesting to note, especially as regards potential interaction with large-scale musical structure. In *The New Cambridge Bible Commentary*, Ben Witherington III states that 'apocalyptic ... is primarily a matter of the use of a distinctive form – visions with often bizarre and hyperbolic metaphors and images' (Witherington 2003, pp. 33–4). It is the term 'hyperbole' which interests me here. If there were such a thing as 'hyperbolic music', it would surely be progressive rock, with its wilfully protracted harmonies and metaphorical lyrics, an expansion of compositional scale offering potentially endless adventures in narrativity. The literary tools available to Gabriel *in excess of* 'simple pop music' allowed him to explore the (un)reality of his experience, using traditional forms and structures, and to enable his audience's understanding of his experience via those forms and structures.

As the Book of Revelation was intended to be read aloud, so is 'Supper's Ready' intended to be heard, but I would like here to consider 'Supper's Ready' as written text.[18] There are two ways of reading the lyrics of 'Supper's Ready', both of which obscure the story's origins. In the spirit of communal experience, one could enter the narrative with the assistance of the programme notes provided by Peter Gabriel for contemporary Genesis concert-goers (extracted from Spicer 2008):

I. Lover's Leap
In which two lovers are lost in each other's eyes, and found again transformed in the bodies of another male and female.

II. The Guaranteed Eternal Sanctuary Man
The lovers come across a town dominated by two characters: one a benevolent farmer and the other a head of a highly disciplined scientific religion. The latter likes to be known as 'The Guaranteed Eternal Sanctuary Man' and claims to contain a secret new ingredient capable of fighting fire. This is a falsehood, an untruth, a whopper and a taradiddle; or to put it in clearer terms, a lie.

III. Ikhnaton and Itsacon and Their Band of Merry Men
Who the lovers see clad in greys and purples, awaiting to be summoned out of the ground. At the G.E.S.M.'s command they put forth from the bowels of the earth, to attack all those without an up-to-date 'Eternal Life License', which were obtainable at the head office of the G.E.S.M.'s religion.

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IV. How Dare I Be So Beautiful?
In which our intrepid heroes investigate the aftermath of the battle and discover a solitary figure, obsessed by his own image. They witness an unusual transmutation, and are pulled into their own reflections in the water.

V. Willow Farm
Climbing out of the pool, they are once again in a different existence. They're right in the middle of a myriad of bright colours, filled with all manner of objects, plants, animals and humans. Life flows freely and everything is mindlessly busy. At random, a whistle blows and every single thing is instantly changed into another.

VI. Apocalypse in 9/8 (Co-starring the Delicious Talents of Gabble Ratchet)
At one whistle the lovers become seeds in the soil, where they recognise other seeds to be people from the world in which they had originated. While they wait for Spring, they are returned to their old world to see the Apocalypse of St John in full progress. The seven trumpeters cause a sensation, the fox keeps throwing sixes, and Pythagoras (a Greek extra) is deliriously happy as he manages to put exactly the right amount of milk and honey on his corn flakes.

VII. As Sure as Eggs Is Eggs (Aching Men's Feet)
Above all else an egg is an egg. 'And did those feet …' making ends meet.

What the audience infers from these programme notes is a kind of *Alice in Wonderland* tale, where curious things happen to the two lovers, where they encounter all manner of peculiar characters and are led, apparently by the power of Parry's great hymn 'Jerusalem', back to where they started – Albion, one supposes. These actions are to some extent implicit in the lyrics themselves, but as Genesis were nothing if not a static band on stage, the programme notes were really an attempt by Gabriel to guide the audience through the various performative tricks he had developed in the early 1970s in compensation for this fact. Although Gabriel's programme notes illuminate the narrative to some small degree, I would like here to concentrate on the more widely disseminated version of the lyrics, reprinted on the *Foxtrot* album sleeve and CD re-issue, which provides only the movement titles and text. In this way we may regard the text as part of a recorded performance, quite separate from the visual dimension which, granted, was such a central facet of Peter Gabriel's live enactment of the work.[19] Table 1 reproduces the lyrics from 'Supper's Ready' alongside the passages from Revelation which they echo, to show that the song, from its title to its closing lines, utilises the metaphorical language of Revelation in both subtle and overt ways. Yet although 'Supper's Ready' borrows liberally from the image bank of the Book of Revelation, it does not seem at first to follow the biblical source's chronology. I will then propose an alignment of 'Supper's Ready' with larger, traditional narrative structures in an attempt to show a further underlying logic to the lyrical form of the song which reinforces this intertextual relationship.

In addition to the close, micro-level interplay between the lyrics of 'Supper's Ready' and the Book of Revelation, there is also a larger, macro-level relationship. That there are seven tableaux is perhaps not coincidental, for the number seven holds a particular significance in the Book of Revelation – seven churches, seven bowls, seven trumpets, seven seals. Furthermore, the lyrics read as apocalyptic literature:

> a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both

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Table 1. 'Supper's Ready' lyrics: a Biblical concordance.

'Supper's Ready' (*Foxtrot*, 1972)[a]	
	And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. *And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.* (Revelation 19:9)
i. LOVER'S LEAP Walking across the sitting-room, I turn the television off, Sitting beside you, I look into your eyes. As the sound of motorcars fades in the night time. I swear I saw your face change, it didn't seem quite right. . . . And it's hello babe with your guardian eyes so blue. Hey my baby don't you know our love is true.	
Coming closer with our eyes, a distance falls around our bodies.	
Out in the garden, the moon seems very bright. Six saintly shrouded men move across the lawn slowly, The seventh walks in front with a cross held high in hand. . . . And it's hey babe your supper's waiting for you. Hey my baby don't you know our love is true.	*Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.* (3:4) *Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.* (2:20)
I've been so far from here, Far from your warm arms. It's good to feel you again. It's been a long long time. Hasn't it?	
ii. THE GUARANTEED ETERNAL SANCTUARY MAN I know a farmer who looks after the farm, With water clear, he cares for all his harvest. I know a fireman who looks after the fire.	*And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.* (14:15–16)

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You, can't you see he's fooled you all.
Yes, he's here again, can't you see he's fooled you all.
Share his peace,
Sign the lease.
He's a supersonic scientist,
He's the guaranteed eternal sanctuary man.
Look, look into my mouth he cries.
And all the children lost down many paths,
I bet my life, you'll walk inside,
Hand in hand,
gland in gland,
With a spoonful of miracle,
He's the guaranteed eternal sanctuary.
We will rock you, rock you little snake,
We will keep you safe and warm.

And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepresses of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. (19:15)

iii. IKHNATON AND ITSACON AND THEIR BAND OF MERRY MEN

Wearing feelings on our faces while our faces took a rest,
We walked across the fields to see the children of the West,
We saw a host of dark skinned warriors
standing still below the ground,
Waiting for battle.
Fight's begun, they've been released.
Killing foe for peace. . .bang, bang, bang.
Bang, bang, bang. . .
And they've given me a wonderful potion,
'Cos I cannot contain my emotion.
And even though I'm feeling good,
Something tells me, I'd better activate my prayer capsule.

And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. (19:19) *And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths.* (9:16–18).

Fear God, and give glory unto him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters. (14:7)

Today's a day to celebrate, the foe have met their fate.
The order for rejoicing and dancing has come from our warlord.

Continued

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Table 1. Continued

iv. HOW DARE I BE SO BEAUTIFUL?
Wandering in the chaos the battle has left,
We climb up the mountain of human flesh,
To a plateau of green grass, and green trees full of life.
A young figure sits still by a pool,
He's been stamped "Human Bacon" by some butchery tool
(he is you).
Social Security took care of this lad,
We watch in reverence, as Narcissus is turned to a flower.
A flower?

v. WILLOW FARM
If you go down to Willow Farm,
to look for butterflies, flutterbyes, gutterflies.
Open your eyes, it's full of surprise, everyone lies,
like the fox on the rocks,
and the musical box.
Oh, there's Mum and Dad, and good and bad,
and everyone's happy to be here.

There's Winston Churchill dressed in drag,
he used to be a British flag, plastic bag, what a drag.
The frog was a prince, the prince was a brick,
the brick was an egg,
the egg was a bird,
Hadn't you heard?
Yes we're happy as fish, and gorgeous as geese,
and wonderfully clean in the morning.
We've got everything, we're growing everything,
We've got some in
We've got some out,

We've got some wild things floating about.
Everyone, we're changing everyone,
You name them all,

And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads (9:4)

And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter (8:11)

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We've had them here,
And the real stars are still to appear. *And he had in his right hand seven stars* (1:14)

ALL CHANGE!
Feel your body melt;
Mum to mud to mad to dad
Dad diddley office, Dad diddley office,
You're all full of ball.
Dad to dam to dum to mum
Mum diddley washing, Mum diddley washing,
You're all full of ball.
Let me hear your lies, we're living this up to the eyes.
Ooee-ooee-ooee-aa
Momma I want you now.

And as you listen to my voice
To look for hidden doors, tidy floors, more applause.
You've been here all the time,
Like it or not, like what you got,
You're under the soil,
Yes deep in the soil.
So we'll end with a whistle and end with a bang
and all of us fit in our places. *And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?* (6:15–17)

vi. APOCALYPSE IN 9/8 (CO-STARRING THE DELICIOUS TALENTS OF GABBLE RATCHET)

With the guards of Magog, swarming around,
The Pied Piper takes his children underground.
Dragon's coming out of the sea,
Shimmering silver head of wisdom looking at me.
He brings down the fire from the skies,
You can tell he's doing well by the look in human eyes.
Better not compromise.
It won't be easy. *And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, God, and Magog, to gather them together to battle* (20:7–8) *And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.* (13:1) *And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men* (13:13) *And fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.* (20:9)

Continued

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Table 1. Continued

666 is no longer alone, He's getting out the marrow in your backbone, And the seven trumpets blowing sweet rock and roll, Gonna blow right down inside your soul. Pythagoras with the looking-glass, reflect the full moon, In blood, he's writing the lyrics of a brand new tune. And it's hey babe, with your guardian eyes so blue, Hey my baby, don't you know our love is true, I've been so far from here, Far from your loving arms, Now I'm back again, and baby it's going to work out fine.	*Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six*. (13:18) *And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets*. (8:2) *And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound*. (8:6) *And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints*. (15:3)
vii. AS SURE AS EGGS IS EGGS (ACHING MEN'S FEET) Can't you feel our souls ignite Shedding ever-changing colours, in the darkness of the fading night. Like the river joins the ocean, as the germ in a seed grows We have finally been freed to get back home. There's an angel standing in the sun, and he's crying with a loud voice, "This is the supper of the mighty one". Lord of Lords, King of Kings, Has returned to lead his children home, To take them to the new Jerusalem.	*And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God*. (19:17) *And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*. (21:2) *And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God*. (21:10)

(CONTINUED)

[4]SUPPER'S READY Words and Music by Mike Rutherford, Peter Gabriel, Phil Collins, Steve Hackett and Tony Banks – © 1972 Stratsong Ltd – All Rights Reserved – Used by Permission.

temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world. (Collins 1979, p. 9; quoted in Bauckham 1993, p. 6)

The tender lyrics in the opening scene establish a clearly sexual relationship between the human recipients – the two lovers – and suggest the onset of a dream state shared between them, which is then outlined in the six successive tableaux. The 'otherworldly being' actually takes many forms, from the six saintly shrouded men of tableau i, to the Guaranteed Eternal Sanctuary Man of tableau ii, to the angel standing in the sun of tableau vii: the first prefigures the otherworldly action; the second – a false prophet – challenges it; and the third offers a glimpse at eschatological salvation. There would seem therefore to be an innate internal coherence in 'Supper's Ready'. The narrator moves from situation to situation, receiving visions and insight from various otherworldly beings, all under the aegis of some sort of dream state. The song's narrative arc returns to familiar territory, and the listener enjoys an ostensibly happy ending. But there are other ways of interpreting this narrative, which remove it from the realm of dreams or Biblical allegory, and place it more firmly in a literary tradition. For this reason it is instructive to turn to a formalist theory of narrative structure, and to plot the action of 'Supper's Ready' against more universal tropes.

Interpretive tools

Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* is a useful tool for the interpretation of 'Supper's Ready', in part because it helps to whittle down what seems an unruly cast of characters into a very concise roll call.

Just as the characteristics and functions of deities are transferred from one to another, and, finally, are even carried over to Christian saints, the functions of certain tale personages are likewise transferred to other personages. Running ahead, one may say that the number of functions is extremely small, whereas the number of personages is extremely large. This explains the two-fold quality of a tale: its amazing multiformity, picturesqueness, and color, and on the other hand, its no less striking uniformity, its repetition. (Propp 2005, pp. 20–21)

Propp proposed that all folktales conform to a set pattern: a preliminary situation (in this case the separation of the lovers' bodies from their spirits); followed by a 'mischief or lack' (the introduction of the Guaranteed Eternal Sanctuary Man and the ensuing battle); and finally the closing of what had been opened by mischief (here the reunion of the lovers and the ascent to the New Jerusalem). The lovers end where they began; the narrative seems to have a happy ending, and the horrors that they witnessed in tableaux two through six have been resolved by angelic proclamation. Indeed, despite the many minor peculiarities of the 'Supper's Ready' narrative, there is a decidedly traditional sense to much of the action.

The lovers in 'Supper's Ready' encounter more than one other character, however, and Propp's catalogue of *dramatis personae* and their functions is similarly exhaustive:

We have seen … that one character in a tale is easily replaced by another. These substitutions have their own, sometimes very complicated, causes. Real life itself creates new, vivid images which supplant tale personages. The epos of neighboring peoples exerts its influence, as does written literature, religion (Christianity for example), and local beliefs. The tale at its core

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Table 2. A tabulation of the tale.

Table I: The initial situation			**'Supper's Ready' tableaux**
1	Temporal-spatial determination ('in a certain kingdom')	i	The sitting-room
2	Composition of family	i	Two lovers
8	Prophecies, forewarnings	i	Six saintly shrouded men
9	Well-being, prior to complication	i	Refrain; 'it's good to feel you again'
10–15	The future hero (inc. nomenclature, sex; spiritual qualities)	ii	The farmer who looks after the farm
16–20	The future false hero (inc. nomenclature, sex; spiritual qualities in comparison with the hero)	ii	The fireman who looks after the fire
Table II: The preparatory section			
27–29	Interdictions[a] (inc. person performing; form; motivation)	ii	'he's fooled you all'; 'he's a supersonic scientist'
30–32	Violation of an interdiction	ii	'a spoonful of miracle'
33–35	First appearance of the villain (inc. nomenclature; manner of inclusion into action)	ii	The Guaranteed Eternal Sanctuary Man; 'he's here again'
43	The villain's deceptions	ii	'we will rock you, rock you little snake'
Table III: The complication			
46–51	Villainy (inc. motivation; villain's disappearance)	iii	'host of dark-skinned warriors'
58–60	The seeker's or hero's entry into the tale	iii	First person singular and plural used interchangeably in tableau iii
Table IV: Donors			
70	Journey from home to the donor	iii	'we walked across the fields'
71–77	Donors (inc. manner of inclusion; nomenclature; dwelling; physical appearance; peculiarities of external appearance on the scene; hospitality shown)	iii	'the children of the West'; presumably the 'they' in the battle scene of tableau iii
Table V: From the entry of the Helper to the end of the First Move			
82–89	The helper (magical agent) (inc. wisdom of the helper)	iii	The magical potion that 'they' give 'me'; could involve the 'prayer capsule'
90	Delivery to the appointed place	iv	Post-battle chaos
91	Forms of arrival	iv	Climbing up the mountain of human flesh
92	Details of the setting of the object sought for (inc. description of far-away kingdom)	iv	'a plateau of green grass and green trees full of life'
107	Marking (personage; manner)	iv	The young figure sitting still by the pool; stamped 'human bacon'

Continued

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Table 2. Continued

Table V: From the entry of the Helper to the end of the First Move			
110–113	The false hero (of second type – water-carrier, general) (inc. nomenclature; forms of appearance)	v	Winston Churchill (in drag); frog (prince/brick/egg/ bird); all that was real is now unreal
114–119	Liquidation of misfortune or lack (inc. role of helper; means)	v	Bodies melting: 'mum to mud to mad to dad'; bodies now 'deep in the soil'
120	Return	v	'we'll end with a whistle, end with a bang, and all of us fit in our places'
Table VI: Beginning of the Second Move			
	From a new villainy to the arrival – repetition of the preceding; same headings	v	Largely acoustic transition; ends with reference to Guaranteed Eternal Sanctuary man
Table VII: Continuation of the Second Move			
128	Unrecognised arrival (inc. to another tsar's domain)	vi	Apocalypse in 9/8 is in progress at the beginning of tableau vi; viewed from uncertain vantage point
129–131	Unfounded claims of the false hero (inc. person performing; forms of claims)	vi	The dragon coming out of the sea
132–136	The difficult task (inc. the person who sets it; actual motivation)	vi	'Pythagoras with the looking-glass reflects the full moon'
137–140	Resolution of the task	vi	'In blood he's writing the lyrics of a brand new tune'
141–143	Recognition (inc. means of summoning the true hero)	vi	'hey babe'; return to refrain from tableau i
147–148	Transfiguration (personage; manner of transfiguration)	vii	Lovers' souls igniting; 'shedding ever-changing colours'
149–150	Punishment (personage; manner of punishment)	vii	Angelic proclamation brings implicit suggestion that evil is vanquished
151	Wedding	vii	The lovers are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb

Source: Propp (2005, Appendix I, pp. 118–27).

[a]An interdiction can be defined as 'exclusion from church sacraments'. In this sense, the Guaranteed Eternal Sanctuary Man, as false prophet, 'supersonic scientist', is clearly in breach of the laws of the Church.

preserves traces of very ancient paganism, of ancient customs and rituals. The tale gradually undergoes a metamorphosis, and these transformations and metamorphoses of tales are also subject to certain laws. It is all these processes that create a multiformity which is exceptionally difficult to analyze. (Propp 2005, p. 87)

It should not be surprising, therefore, to see Gabriel mixing mythology with history, Biblical imagery with paganism. In fact, the unusually malleable sense of

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time and logic in 'Supper's Ready' nonetheless betrays a clearly systematic process, oddly in tune with Propp's morphology (Table 2).[20] The keywords in Propp's tabulation – prophecies, hero, villain, journey, delivery, recognition, transformation – are sufficient in themselves to mark the various tableaux of 'Supper's Ready'. That there is some sort of micro-level logic to what initially appears, both in Genesis' programme notes and the *Foxtrot* liner notes, to be nothing more than another of Gabriel's fanciful stories, suggests that the song's resonance with the structure of the folk tale should not be overlooked. But it is the song's open and extended reference to that *other* literary source which demands further attention.

According to Richard Bauckham (1993, p. 57), in the Book of Revelation:

> John's vision (1:9–22:9) is framed by a prologue (1:1–8) and an epilogue (22:6–21…). There are a number of literary ways in which the prologue and the epilogue correspond. One of these is that the divine self-designation at the end of the prologue (1:8) corresponds to the self-designation by Christ near the beginning of the epilogue (22:13). These two verses correspond further in that each is preceded by an announcement of the parousia (1:7: 'Behold, he is coming …'; 22:12: 'Behold, I am coming …'). If 1:8 and 22:13 correspond in this way, 1:17 and 21:6, placed respectively towards the beginning and toward the end of the vision, also correspond, so that the four tests form a chiastic arrangement (A-B-B′-A′). […] The chiastic pattern can be set out as follows:

A	**B**	**B′**	**A′**
1:8	1:17	21:6	22:13
end of prologue	beginning of vision	end of vision	beginning of epilogue
God	Christ	God	Christ
Alpha and Omega		Alpha and Omega	Alpha and Omega
	first and last		first and last
		beginning and end	beginning and end
connection with parousia (1:7)	connection with new life (1:18)	connection with new life (21:5–6)	connection with parousia (22:12)

That there is a recapitulation in 'Supper's Ready' at the end of tableau vi – the lovers returned, their souls spinning into eternity – could similarly reveal an overarching structure to the song akin to a chiastic pattern. Such a pattern would then reveal four overall stages to the song: the prologue, the introduction of a false prophet in a pagan world, the battle between good and evil, and the epilogue (Table 3).

As in Bauckham's model, there is a musical overlapping of the prologue and vision, and the vision and the epilogue: the return to narrative reality in the epilogue

Table 3. Chiastic pattern in 'Supper's Ready'.

A	**B**	**B′**	**A′**
Tableau i. verse 2	**i. verse 2**	**vi. last verse**	**vi. last verse**
End of prologue	Beginning of vision	End of vision	Beginning of epilogue
7 men in moonlight	Guaranteed Eternal Sanctuary Man	The beast	Angel in the sun
'your supper's waiting'			'this is the supper'
Connection with love	Connection with Anglicanism	Connection with Englishness	Connection with love

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is accompanied by a recapitulation of the musical material from the first and second tableaux. It is as though the dream sequence of tableaux two through six was necessary for the unification of the two souls, as though only through trials and tribulations could the narrator realise the depth of his worldly love. Regardless of movement title or programme note, this unification is also clear musically. In the prologue, Peter Gabriel doubles his own voice at the octave, straining at the limits of his range, suggesting perhaps the enactment of both the male and female characters. With the return to familiar musical material in the epilogue, the lead vocal is no longer doubled; Peter Gabriel's solo voice represents the two lovers, no longer separated by an uncomfortable octave, but joined in the colourful upper reaches of Gabriel's chest voice.[21] The listener is thus granted thematic and lyrical closure.

Imminence, delay, finality

'Supper's Ready' adheres to one or more common narrative patterns which resolve according to certain structural formulae, understood by the listener on the cultural as well as subconscious levels. But it can't be as easy as all that. In fact, the more one picks apart 'Supper's Ready', the more problematic it becomes structurally, musically and lyrically, and the less likely one is to gain a sense of closure when the New Jerusalem finally comes around. There is first the basic confusion regarding the narrative voice. In his recordings with Genesis, Peter Gabriel often suggested dialogue by alterations in his accent, vocality and range;[22] but it is not always clear here – and perhaps it should be – which character is speaking in the first person and which is being addressed in the second. Some members of Genesis have claimed that the lyrics are the weakest part of 'Supper's Ready';[23] the problems certainly arise right at the outset. The prologue appears to start midstream: 'walking across the sitting-room' – walking from where? Why? The motion is then followed by an action: 'I turn the television off'. This grammatical structure is common to most of the tableaux of 'Supper's Ready': 'wearing feelings on our faces … we walked across the fields'; 'wandering in the chaos … we climb up the mountain'. On the one hand, this seems to serve lyrically the same function as Revelation's continual 'and … this happened; and … then that happened', suggesting a lyrical form which Frank Kermode likens to

> a duration (rather than a space) organising the moment in terms of the end, giving meaning to the interval between *tick* and *tock* because we humanly do not want it to be an indeterminate interval between the *tick* of birth and the *tock* of death. (Kermode 2000, pp. 57–8)

In these terms, the arpeggiated guitar pattern underscoring the prologue of 'Supper's Ready' suspends those first lines in an uncomfortable, unresolved moment:

tick Walking across the sitting room
tock I turn the television off
tick Sitting beside you
tock I look into your eyes

On the other hand, and more problematically, the prologue, beginning as it does mid-action, also begins mid-harmonic progression.[24] Rather than providing a period of tonal establishment, Genesis are dropping their listeners into the middle

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Table 4. Summary of harmonic and structural analyses.

Tableau	Action/effect	Josephson's 'Harmonic matrices and symphonic analogies'	Spicer's 'Large-scale strategy and compositional design'
i	Prologue; beginning of vision	A-C-E-F# to B♭-D-F; contrasting themes represent lyrical male–female dialogue	Tonal ambiguity *à la* Schumann's *Dichterliebe*; short cadential pattern in E major, modulating to B♭ major (#IV) in mm 6–8
ii	Rock context: first entrance of drum kit	A-C-E/A-D-F# to A-C#-E; folkish bridge leading to fanfare-like apotheosis of tableau i feminine theme	Largely A major environment with common Mixolydian progression: VII-IV-(I)
iii	Narration in 1st person plural	C-E-F# to D-F#; thematic reminiscence of tableau i culminating in toccata-style battle scene	D major jam; militaristic snare-drum figure; only stereotypical 'rock-sounding' electric guitar solo in song
iv	Narration in 1st person plural; absence of rhythm section; recitative-like vocal line	C-E-F#-A; static slow movement	Tonal ambiguity, though vague G major environment: IV^{7}-$VII^{ø4/3}$; I^{7}-$\#IV^{4/3}$
v	Babylon; 12/8 metre	A♭; scherzo with trio (and repeated scherzo)	Large ternary form; A♭ minor tonality; Phrygian bass figure
vi	3rd verse marks end of vision/return to material from tableau i; dense texture; 9/8 metre	C-E-F#-A to B♭-D-F; folkish bridge leading to toccata-like climax and recall of tableau i feminine theme	Harmonic, rhythmic structures similar to 'Augurs of Spring' from *The Rite of Spring*; E-F#-B pattern underscoring 'Emersonian' organ solo; tonality modulates from E to B♭ major at return of tableau i refrain
vii	Epilogue; lyrical passages taken from Revelation	A-C#-E-F#; recapitulation of tableau ii apotheosis and tableau i harmonies; A major catharsis	'the most explicit intertextual reference of the entire piece: a recasting of William Blake's "Jerusalem"'; ends in A major

of an extended tritone relation, from E to B♭. The beginning of 'Supper's Ready', to paraphrase Frank Kermode, is somewhat faked.

Surely with such harmonic uncertainty, the overall structure of 'Supper's Ready' will lead the listener through the battle of good and evil – and what could be more evil than the tritone? – to the safety of a properly ecumenical key, say, E♭ major? Mark Spicer and Nors Josephson have published harmonic and structural analyses of 'Supper's Ready' which help to shed some light here on the overall musical structure of the song, outlining the relationship between the first two and last two tableaux, and the static nature of the fourth and fifth (see Table 4).[25]

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As the middle section, the fourth tableau should represent the height of tension built thus far, and signal the *dénouement* toward the recapitulation. The listener has by this point heard about ten minutes of progressive apocalypse, and perhaps subconsciously sensed the midpoint of the work, or physically seen the record needle halfway through the track. The listener has been introduced to the Guaranteed Eternal Sanctuary Man (the Antichrist, by another name), witnessed a battle between the believers and the non-believers, and in the third tableau 'the foe have met their fate'. But it is unclear whether good has yet triumphed over evil. In Propp's terminology, the listener has reached the end of the First Move. It is at this point that the energy dwindles and the musical action that accompanied the battle scene dies away. There is in effect a fade-out in the middle of the song, and the listener is left wanting some kind of harmonic – not to say narrative – resolution.[26] When the curtain rises again, the lovers find themselves in the midst of a scene of desolation, and the listener joins them in a vaguely familiar harmonic terrain, oddly devoid of any melodic comfort.

There is a startling parallel to note here. At the midpoint of the Book of Revelation, there is a sudden shift to the story of two unnamed martyrs:

> And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. [...] And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. (Revelation 11:3, 5–7)

There is a common supposition that these martyrs appear in chapter 11 as representations of Peter and Paul, who bore Christian witness in Rome, the heart of the evil empire. According to one interpretation the martyrs' witness is actually an allegory for the crucifixion itself, and when in Revelation this interlude of the two witnesses ends, there is an earthquake, followed by the sounding of the seventh trumpet.[27] It is at the midpoint of 'Supper's Ready' that the narrative voice shifts from the first person singular to the first person plural – from the various first-hand accounts of experience and vision, the third tableau recounts the two lovers witnessing a battle. The lovers, separated from their earthly bodies, have found themselves in an earlier time, where 'the farmer who looks after the farm' – Jesus – is challenged by 'the fireman who looks after the fire' – the Antichrist. As in Revelation, this interlude ends in Babylon:[28] the fifth tableau, 'Willow Farm', 'ends with a whistle, ends with a bang, and all of us fit in our places', and thus begins the Apocalypse in 9/8, the most direct paraphrasing of the Book of Revelation, with the seventh trumpet about to sound.

It may be too much to suppose that Peter Gabriel built 'Supper's Ready' around narrative markers in the Book of Revelation, but it is useful to consider the extent to which the listener is fooled by this series of actions. The break in the musical and figurative action in the fourth tableau, the closed form of the fifth and the onset of the Apocalypse in 9/8 in the sixth suggest structurally a hitherto unexpected cyclical pattern to 'Supper's Ready': from spiritual epiphany, through war, to peace, and back again. It also calls to mind Bauckham's discussion of the greater meaning encoded in Revelation's inherent sense of tension:

> [E]schatological delay is as much a feature of Revelation as eschatological imminence. It is written into the structure of the book. From the moment the martyrs cry, 'How long?' and are told to wait a little while longer (6:10–11), the reader – and more especially, the hearer

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of an oral performance of Revelation – becomes conscious of the tension of imminence and delay, as the End is constantly approached but not definitively reached. Disappointingly moderate series of warning judgments progress rather slowly towards the expected climax in the final judgment. The interludes between the sixth and seventh seal-openings and between the sixth and seventh trumpet-blasts both symbolize and explain the delay. In the crucial chapters 10–11, we learn that there is to be no more delay for the sake of further warning judgments (10:3–6) and that there is to be a delay lasting the symbolic period of three-and-a-half years (11:3), for the sake of the church's prophetic witness to the world. John here creates his own version of the tension between eschatological imminence and eschatological delay that runs through the whole apocalyptic tradition. The logic of imminence is that God's kingdom must come. Evil is triumphant and the righteous suffer: surely this contradiction to God's purpose cannot continue indefinitely? (Bauckham 1993, pp. 157–8)

Imminence and delay work on obvious harmonic levels as well: a piece cannot be felt to end until a resolution is reached, or until the listener senses a logical end to the musical propulsion. The 'suffering of the listeners' is relieved by an acknowledgment of the rightness of the tonic or, in 'Supper's Ready', by the arrival at tableau vii.[29]

This leads me to the final point I wish to make, about the end of the world, and the end of 'Supper's Ready'. Apocalyptic literature 'envisages eschatological salvation'. The arc of 'Supper's Ready', which leads the listener through various battles and stages of spiritual uncertainty, is designed to offer the listener hope at the end of the final battle of good and evil. At the moment of final judgment, the lovers are returned to each other's arms, and everything is 'going to work out fine'. That cycle seems to have reached closure: we are back in familiar musical terrain; where there were two voices there now is one, and the angel of Revelation is signalling an end to worldly troubles. Surely this is the end of the epic? Well, yes and no. Yes, because we've been brought to what we hear as a lyrical and harmonic resolution of the 22 preceding minutes; no, because we have also been conditioned to expect a brief lull in the action before the commencement of another phase in the cycle. Furthermore, the album's liner notes leave us dangling in a rather unusual way. Between the final line of text, 'to take them to the new Jerusalem', and the album credits, we have '(CONTINUED)'. Compounding this lyrical inconclusion, rather than allowing their listeners a properly religious, final plagal cadence, Genesis opt again for a fade-out.[30]

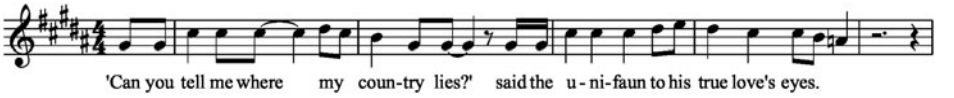
This is in one sense satisfying – the implied endlessness of this musical ending is akin to the *et in saecula saeculorum, amen* of so many liturgical works, and the listener therefore envisions the New Jerusalem as the 'world without end'. But maybe '(CONTINUED)' implies something altogether different. The end of 'Supper's Ready' does something towards changing our understanding of the beginning of the song: as Kermode might say, it 'frankly transfigures the events in which they were immanent' (Kermode 2000, pp. 174–5). The listener was not aware, as Gabriel 'walked across the sitting-room', that he would ultimately be led to the New Jerusalem. But the lack of closure – the characters are still in motion as the music fades away – is essentially a more realistic way to end an allegorical story, albeit one based on an actual experience. Loose ends may seem tied up, but the listener's interest is piqued by the further implications of '(CONTINUED)', of 'what happened next'. As Kermode suggests:

The books which seal off the long perspectives, which sever us from our losses, which represent the world of potency as a world of act, these are the books which, when the drug

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wears off, go on to the dump with the other empty bottles. Those that continue to interest us move through time to an end, an end we must sense even if we cannot know it; they live in change, until, which is never, *as* and *is* are one. (Kermode 2000, pp. 179)

Given earlier patterns in the piece, the listener cannot assume that the themes of 'Supper's Ready' are finite. Indeed, the listener need only take one step forward, to the first moments of Genesis' subsequent studio recording, *Selling England by the Pound* (1973), to discover what happens next (see Example 1).[31]



Example 1. 'Dancing With the Moonlit Knight'.

Go one step further, and *The Lamb*, whose marriage supper we witnessed at the end of 'Supper's Ready', … *Lies Down on Broadway*, at the heart of modern-day Babylon. With each step a new beginning, each ending a mere pause, Genesis not only extend the narrative arc of 'Supper's Ready', they extend the narrative thread of their entire output. The promise of the New Jerusalem – be it England's green and pleasant land or a more heavenly place – is yet to be fulfilled.

Endnotes

1. 'Born to Run' (Bruce Springsteen), 'I Shall Be Released' (Bob Dylan), 'Three Little Birds' (Bob Marley), '(Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay' (Steve Cropper / Otis Redding), 'Still Crazy After All These Years' (Paul Simon), 'Either Way' (Jeff Tweedy).
2. For more on narrativity and progressive rock, see Moore (2001, Ch. 3), Nicholls (2004, pp. 100–42), and particularly Nicholls (2007, pp. 297–315).
3. There are certainly 'mini dramas' confined to the 'traditional' three-minute pop song format, which nonetheless possess a strong sense of narrative thrust: 'Babooshka' by Kate Bush (*Never For Ever*, EMI, 1980), 'Labelled with Love' by Squeeze (*East Side Story*, A&M, 1981), Bruce Springsteen's 'Nebraska' (*Nebraska*, Columbia, 1982), and Rufus Wainwright's 'The Art Teacher' (*Want Two*, Geffen, 2004), to name but a few.
4. For an in-depth analysis of these themes in progressive rock, see Macan (1997), Holm-Hudson (2002) and Hegarty and Halliwell (2011).
5. Founding members Tony Banks, Mike Rutherford and Peter Gabriel met as pupils at Charterhouse School in Surrey. As a central component of Charterhouse's student life, Banks, Rutherford and Gabriel would have been required to attend school chapel three times during the week as well as on Sundays. They would have developed a certain familiarity with the Bible, and a sense of the King James version as central to the English literary tradition. As I hope to show here, this formative education would have seeped naturally into their early musical output. For more background see the band's autobiography (Banks *et al.* 2007).
6. The title, 'Watcher of the Skies', might suggest a Christian metaphor, but the lyrics suggest a type of post-apocalyptic morality tale: 'Judge not this race by empty remains / Do you judge God by his creatures when they are dead / For now the lizard shedded its tail / This is the end of man's long union with Earth.' This can be linked to the post-apocalyptic imagery in tableau iv of 'Supper's Ready'. 'Can-Utility and the Coastliners' invokes the legend of Cnut the Great ('By our command, waters retreat / Show my power, halt at my feet / But the cause was lost / Now cold winds blow'), and could be easily interpreted as a *memento mori* meditation.
7. The lyrics of 'Time Table' contrast an imagined scene around 'a carved oak table' in a bustling castle hall ('A time of valour, and legends born / A time when honour meant much more to a man than life') with the same hall in modern times ('Gone the kings and queens now only the rats hold sway'). The lyrics to 'Get' Em out By Friday' are structured around a dialogue between an Orwellian corporate overlord, one of his minions, and a tenant in one of his properties, with other assorted *dramatis personae*. The final lines ('Land in your hand you'll be happy on earth / Then invest in the Church for your heaven') distil much of the topical material of the

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first side of *Foxtrot*, the general scepticism, or questing for spiritual truth, also being an undercurrent of 'Supper's Ready' on side two.

8. In support of the earlier metaphor, the *Foxtrot* track listing conforms to standard orchestral programming practice: 'Watcher of the Skies', with its extended instrumental introduction, acts as a kind of overture; 'Time Table', the chamber work with tacet brass and percussion; 'Get' Em Out By Friday', the awkwardly placed, recently commissioned work, a kind of psychotic *concerto grosso*; and finally 'Can-Utility and the Coastliners', the breath-restoring return to lyricism and functional harmony before the well-earned intermission. 'Horizons' serves as the evocative second-half opener; the programme concludes with 'Supper's Ready', the full orchestral tone poem, the ticket-seller, the crowd-pleaser.
9. Lead singer Peter Gabriel's departure from Genesis in 1975, following the tour to promote *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*, signalled a shift in the band's direction, and by the early 1980s Genesis began to enjoy a chart presence in the UK and US with a string of Top 10 singles off their studio albums *Duke* (1980), *Abacab* (1981), *Genesis* (1983) and the multi-platinum *Invisible Touch* (1985). The band's youthful dalliance with three-minute pop songs, as evidenced on their first album, *From Genesis to Revelation* (1969), while interesting to note for its exploration of the Fall of Man in several bite-sized, three-minute pieces, is not indicative of the more determined chart presence of their later line-up.
10. See, for example, King Crimson's 'The Court of the Crimson King' (*In the Court of the Crimson King*, 1969) and Van der Graaf Generator's 'A Plague of Lighthouse Keepers' (*Pawn Hearts*, 1971).
11. Spicer (2008, pp. 313–44) and Josephson (1992, pp. 67–92) are the two primary academic treatments of 'Supper's Ready', both of which deal primarily with structural and harmonic issues. My intention here is to expand on the analytical treatment of 'Supper's Ready' by focusing on the song's narrative structure.
12. Mention should be made here of Aphrodite's Child's *666* (1971), a progressive rock setting of the Apocalypse. Its chapter titles alone – 'The Four Horsemen', 'The Seventh Seal', 'The Beast', 'Seven Trumpets', etc. – provide a very clear narrative outline and obvious reference points. I am interested in 'Supper's Ready' for those markers which it *does not* provide, and for that reason I am avoiding drawing any parallels, musical or spiritual, between the two musical works.
13. Space prevents me from offering a more thorough musical analysis of 'Apocalypse in 9/8', but it must be noted that many of the sonic and structural characteristics of tableau vi typify progressive rock in general, and apocalyptic themes in particular. At 15:38 there is a gradual transition to the nine-quaver pattern (16:14) that underpins the extended organ solo beginning at 16:20. The juxtaposition of these two conflicting rhythmic ideas (Tony Banks on the organ providing a pastiche Keith Emerson duple-metre Baroque étude, everyone else banging along in nine straight quavers) serves as a sonic evocation of the apocalypse, with chaos ultimately ceding to order. The tension between the 4/4 feel of the flute (17:59) and organ and the continued 9/8 pattern in the guitars and drums builds to a climax at 18:47 with a broadly caricatured combination of satanic imagery: the composite tritone effect between the keyboards (C) and guitar/bass ostinato (E-F#-B), a brief hint of backmasking (18:48–18:52), and Peter Gabriel's voice returning at 18:53 with the first line of the second stanza of the tableau, '666 is no longer alone'. The continuation of the tension – the 4/4 feel of Gabriel's declamation pitted against the insistent 9/8 accompaniment – is in effect an enactment of the battle of good (9/8 representing the metre of 'divine perfection', three pulses each divided into three) and evil (at this point the lyrics are deeply embedded in the biblical source). The tension is ultimately released at 19:29, with the lyric 'a brand new tune': the sound of a (synthesised) heavenly choir now descending onto the texture as from above, supplanting Gabriel's voice and accompanying the band toward its ultimate metrical resolution at 20:05.
14. All Biblical passages are taken from the King James version.
15. In *The Genesis of Secrecy*, Frank Kermode (1979) unravels the meaning of 'interpretation', beginning with the Biblical description of parables as 'stories *told to them without* – to outsiders – with the express purpose of concealing a mystery that was to be understood only by insiders' (Kermode 1979, p. 2).
16. I am reminded here of the 'End of the World' sketch from *Beyond the Fringe* (Original Broadway Cast recording, Capitol, 1962), which begins:

    q. How will it be, this end of which I once heard you speak, Brother Emin?

    a. It will be as 'twere a mighty rending in the skies, you see, and the mountains shall sink and the valleys shall rise, and great shall be the tumult thereof, I should think.

    q. Will the veil of the temple be rent in twain?

    a. Well, the veil of the temple's always rather dodgy, but it should be rent asunder about two minutes before we see the sign of the manifest flying their whatnot up in the sky.

    q. And will there be a mighty wind then?

    a. Certainly there will be a mighty wind. If the word of God is anything to go by. . . .
17. An important work to cite here is Cohn (1970).
18. There are certainly pitfalls in the attempt to elevate song lyrics to the vaulted status of poetry, although that approach is often warranted (and rewarding). For examples of close readings of song lyrics which illuminate process and meaning, see Ricks (2003) and Griffiths (1997). I am not considering 'Supper's Ready' for its poetic content, but rather for its meta-structure. For

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more on the micro-structural analysis of song lyrics, see Griffiths (2004, pp. 39–59).

19. In advance of the following lyrical dissemination I would like to draw the reader's attention to the recurring lines in tableau i: '… And it's hello babe with your guardian eyes so blue / Hey my baby don't you know our love is true.' This is the only moment in 'Supper's Ready' approaching a refrain (it returns in tableau vi), and is clearly derived from the Tin Pan Alley school of lyric-writing ('blue' rhymes with 'true'). Indeed, this refrain almost acts as diegetic music, as a pop song recalling the narrator to the real world amidst the unexpected metaphysical action. As the one gesture toward 'standard pop music writing', this also marks the only point in the performance of the song when Peter Gabriel would actually dance, affecting some version of the Twist, presumably in the guise of the second lover in the scene.
20. Table 2 represents an abbreviated version of Propp's 'Materials for the Tabulation of the Tale' (Propp 2005, Appendix I, pp. 118–27), which itemises 'all the elements of the fairy tale', in order to enable comparison between texts and the study of 'the transformation and metamorphosis of each element'. For purposes of concision I have included what I consider the relevant steps from each of Propp's seven tables, along with his generic descriptions of the characters associated with each move, as they relate to the narrative arc of 'Supper's Ready'.
21. Although the 'split' vocal line of the opening tableau is not strictly the melodic material which returns in the epilogue (the lines 'can't you feel our souls ignite' take their melody from the Guaranteed Eternal Sanctuary Man section of tableau ii), it is important to note the dialogic effect at the end of tableau i as it relates to the opening of tableau vii. In tableau i Peter Gabriel's voice remains in the lower register for the lines 'I've been so far from here / Far from your warm arms'; 'It's good to feel you again' is sung an octave higher, as though in the voice of a second character; Gabriel returns to the lower register for 'It's been a long long time', then whispers 'Hasn't it?'. Put together, these lines suggest an intimate reunion of two lovers. Gabriel's delivery of the similar lyrical material at the end of tableau vi at the top of his vocal range ('I've been so far from here / Far from your loving arms …') provides the emotional resolution of the early dialogue, and a return to familiar musical territory.
22. Side one's 'Get' 'Em Out By Friday' is a good example of this.
23. In an early interview with Tony Tyler, drummer Phil Collins said that '"Supper's Ready" was left till last, really. Peter was rushing through the lyrics while we were putting down the backing tracks. Perhaps more time would have made it better.' See *New Musical Express*, 18 November 1972. It should be noted here that 'Willow Farm' was a pre-existing lyric which Genesis decided to include in 'Supper's Ready' for reasons of expedience more than lyrical cohesion. See Banks *et al.* (2007).
24. A transcription of this moment can be found in Spicer (2008, pp. 321–2).
25. I include this *précis* Spicer (2008) and Josephson (1992) to highlight the variations possible in aural processing of 'Supper's Ready' and, in the case of Spicer, a complementary suggestion of the (literary) intertextual dimensions of the piece. I will leave the authors' distinctive harmonic analyses to the reader's (and listener's) subjective interpretation.
26. This echoes Edward Macan's suggestion that progressive rock draws 'on nineteenth-century symphonic music's fondness for building up tension until a shattering climax is reached, abruptly tapering off, then starting the whole process anew'. See Macan (1997, p. 44).
27. John M. Court proposes that 'Peter and Paul represent the foundation on which the association of Moses and Elijah in a context of suffering and death can be built. There is continuity and essential identity between Nero, as the beast of chapter 11 and "Nero Redivivus", as the beast of chapters 13 and 17. And finally the combination of the symbolic "cities" behind the setting of Rome represents the result both of the historical activity of Peter and Paul and of the reinterpretation of the Antichrist tradition. […] The scene is the siege and fall of Jerusalem, the forty-two months of the Flavian war from A.D. 67 to 70 which the Seer reinterprets in accordance with his overall theme. The scene changes, moving further back, but pausing at the closely related episode of the witness of Peter and Paul in Rome, their witness and their martyrdom in the 1260 days from A.D. 64 to 67/8. Within this account, with its traditional and historical allusions, there is also a reference back to a more distant event, the Crucifixion in Jerusalem, an event which provided the example the martyrs are following. The "interlude" ends with the earthquake, and then the seventh trumpet sounds.' See Court (1979, chapter 4: 'The two witnesses').
28. Although 'Willow Farm' was a pre-existing song in Genesis' repertoire, and thus not written specifically for a deeper narrative purpose in 'Supper's Ready', I believe it represents Babylon here if only for its sudden registral shift, the almost nonsensical lyrics, and the placement of certain metonyms of Englishness – Winston Churchill, the British flag – in altered reality.
29. Nors Josephson and Mark Spicer are at odds here. Josephson says that 'parts 5–7 also outline a large-scale linear descent, eb … – a, that fully resolves the Phrygian-style Bb-A cadences first introduced in section 1, just as the romantic love lyrics at the close of 1 and 6 eventually yield to the apocalyptical fervor of the A-major catharsis in part 7' (Josephson 1992, p. 85); Mark Spicer argues that 'like turn-of-the-century symphonic works (as with Mahler) and many other progressive rock works, "Supper's Ready" exhibits an *open* key scheme: it begins (albeit loosely) in E major and ends in A major. One might be tempted to interpret these framing keys as exhibiting a large-scale dominant-to-tonic relationship.

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Accordingly, the "Apocalypse in 9/8" could be viewed as a gigantic prolongation of the dominant that prepares for the arrival of A major as the home tonic in the final tableau. When Christ finally does "return to lead his children home" in the seventh tableau, he is actually leading them to the sanctuary of the subdominant' (Spicer 2008, pp. 99–100).

30. There are important points to make here about contemporary live performances of 'Supper's Ready'. In a 1973 performance from Bataclan (available sporadically on YouTube), Genesis end 'Supper's Ready' with a *ritard* and final cadence. It is clear in this performance that Peter Gabriel is under considerable vocal strain by the finale. In subsequent performances, such as that recorded for the French ORTF *Melody* show in 1974 (again, often available on YouTube), the final section is transposed down to G major, and Gabriel is audibly less exhausted. In this performance Genesis enact a brief fade-out, in keeping with the studio recording. The implications of this tonal shift on the large-scale analyses by Spicer and Josephson are significant, but are beyond the purview of this article to explore more fully. I am grateful to the anonymous reader of this article for his/her insights into this aspect of the live performances of 'Supper's Ready'.
31. 'Dancing With the Moonlit Knight', music and lyrics by Tony Banks/Phil Collins/Peter Gabriel/Steve Hackett/Mike Rutherford. I offer this brief musical example to show the lyric's musical context. Given the complexity of 'Supper's Ready', it is interesting to note the relatively clear, 'folk' nature of the melody of 'Dancing with the Moonlit Knight', which suggests a return to the acoustic, pastoral themes of progressive rock as a natural contrast to the later bombast of 'Supper's Ready'.

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