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THE END OF THE WORLD IN AMERICAN HISTORY AND FANTASY: THE TRUMPET OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

> *Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost,—and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment.* Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance"

The fantastic exists in a symbiotic relation with consensus reality.[1] Yet while we acknowledge that one person's fantasy is another's reality, we often neglect to affirm that one era's reality is another's fantasy. George Landow reminds us that "fantasy and our conception of what is fantastic depend upon our view of reality: what we find improbable and unexpected follows from what we find probable and likely, the fantastic will therefore necessarily vary with the individual *and the age*" (107 emphasis added). The events of 11 September 2001, for example, once considered the stuff of fantastic novels suddenly became reality in all their appalling detail. Similarly, as I write, the number one book on *The New York Times* Best Seller list is a fantastic work, *Desecration* by Tim LaHayne and Jerry B. Jenkins—

[1] There are many definitions of the fantastic, but most rely on a contrast between our notions of how and where reality relates to the fantastic. Kathryn Hume, for instance, describes the fantastic as "the deliberate departure from the limits of what is usually accepted as real and normal" (xii) and goes on to define "*Fantasy as any departure from consensus reality*" (21).

one of the most successful writing teams of modern times. Their new novel, the ninth in the "Left Behind" series, continues the story begun some eight books ago when, in the introductory novel, the world as we know it came to a complete, abrupt end. At that "time" at the end of time, the saved were taken up into heaven in "The Rapture" while those left behind became, in novel after novel, the characters who have played out LaHayne and Jenkins' reading of the Book of Revelation.[2] That such a work should become a best seller by appealing to America's sense of an end to time and capture, thereby, a large segment of the popular American imagination should come as no surprise. After all, "America [...] is inevitably the most millenarian of all nations even though so far it has avoided the two extremes of modern millenarianism, fascism and Marxist-Leninism," as Harold Bloom contends (155).

Yet America has experienced most of the spectrum of millenarianism in between those two dictatorial polar extremes, especially in the last two centuries. Apocalypse as reality—rather than as a religious fantasy—has more than once defined United States' consensus reality. Throughout the nineteenth century "reality" in the popular imagination became for many a joining of a widespread belief in Apocalypse with an increasing belief generally in human progress.[3] Solving the problem of longitude late in the eighteenth century, for instance, opened up the entire world to exploration that led to the expansion of European empires in the nineteenth century. Progress appeared obvious given that century's unprecedented fast-paced technological innovation and change that occurred in the wake of the eighteenth century's more fundamental changes.[4] In the British

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[2] I have not studied all nine books in great detail. The triumphal tone of the volumes I did peruse appeared directed against scientists and others who could not imagine all the fantastic things that would happen—that is, become consensus reality—when the world ended with the Second Coming.

[3] These two beliefs coincided and came into conflict with a third: the disquieting scientific discoveries of "deep time" (the phrase is John McPhee's qtd. in Gould, *Full House* 18) and natural selection that altered forever humanity's view of time, this world, and humanity's place in both.

[4] "This uniquely and distinctively Lamarckian style of human cultural inheritance gives our technological history a directional and cumulative character that no natural Darwinian evolution can possess" (Gould *Full House* 222).

Museum, Karl Marx formulated his Christian heresy of unlimited progress for the masses. "In Paris, the historian Gizot drew vast audiences to his masterly lectures on the history of Europe in which he argued that the fundamental idea embedded in the word 'civilization' is progress" (Whitrow 177). In fact, the work of nineteenth-century historians, from Edward Gibbon at the beginning of the century to the Edwardians, such as William Gordon Holmes, at the end, reflected their passionate commitment to recording human progress, English supremacy, and the positive goodness of science.[5] E. B. Taylor, the Oxford anthropologist, argued in 1871 "that the history of man, as revealed by a study of the implements he has used, is indubitably 'the history of an upward development'" (Whitrow 178). The nineteenth-century missionary movement sent out men and women from England and America to save the souls and bring them into the light those in the dark of Africa, South America, and Asia. A member of one of the less fortunate races would, thanks to their efforts, be able to eat with knife and fork and "sit one day, his hair cut, washed, smoothed with macassar oil, in a huge armchair reading a paper" (Wertenbaker 30). Herbert Spencer summed up much of the current thinking in his highly influential, timely essay, "Universal Progress, Its Laws and Cause."[6] But it was Alfred Lord Tennyson, the poet laureate who best caught the temper of the times in his popular poem, "Locksley Hall":

> Not in vain the distance beacons. Forward, forward let us range.
> Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change,
> Through the shadow of the globe we sweep into the younger day;
> Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.

In contrast, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Emily Dickinson in the United States distrusted progress believing

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[5] Holmes linear model of history supported his belief in "the ultimate culmination of Greece and Rome in resistance to the barbarian hordes from the East, and the birth of the British Empire" (Hart 21).

[6] "Spencer arrived at his concept of evolution—as the trend towards increasing differentiation coupled with integration by giving greatest generality to the idea of progress as the product of advancing division of labor, which Adam Smith has made into a commonplace among economists" (Anderski 8n1). But Spencer's definition of the evolutionary process appears more applicable to human society than it does to the flora and fauna of nature.

that at its best it was a mere will of the wisp. "Society never progresses" pronounced Emerson in "Self-Reliance" (279). Thoreau seized on the more concrete, almost sacred inventions of the telegraph and the railroad to convey his point: "We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate" (*Walden* 36).[7] Worse, he ridiculed the notion that we have to get somewhere on the highly prized railroad: "We do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us" (63). He described himself instead as "a sojourner in civilized life" (1)—a rare figure in the highly energetic, get-up-and-go America of the nineteenth century.

Emily Dickinson also vigorously disagreed that humanity was enjoying "the younger day." In her vision of the world, God approves of the death and destruction that she saw all around her from the cemetery behind the house where she lived to the robin on the front walk or to the early spring flowers.

> A bird came down the Walk—
> He did not know I saw—
> He bit an Angleworm in halves
> And ate the fellow, raw
>
> (328 lines 1-4)

> Apparently with no surprise
> To any happy flower
> The Frost beheads ... it at its play
> In accidental power—
> The blond Assassin passes on—
> The Sun proceeds unmoved
> To measure off another Day
> For an Approving God.[8] (1024

But rather than sharing Dickinson's vision of omnipresent death, American millenarianism saw the then-current notions of progress as evidence that time's arrow—along with the humans on it—was

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[7] "The wit [in Thoreau's remark] resides in the way means (telegraph) and ends (communicating something important) jostle each other" (Gifford 117).

[8] Robert Frost continues this attack on cosmic order in "Design"—a poem very much in the spirit of Dickinson.

heading straight for the Heavenly City. And, even more important, the fact that time's arrow followed such a progressive line also meant that that line could and must have a stop in apocalypse.[9]

Apocalypse requires, by definition, that time be viewed as finite, linear, and directional. If time were to continue into infinity, then there could be no Last Things, no Last Judgment, obviously, no End of the World, and certainly no "Rapture." To be credible, therefore, Apocalypse depends upon time being finite. Time must also be linear rather than an unending circle, spiral, or whatever.[10] Time's arrow thus becomes is a string of unique events between the two fixed points of creation and termination. Moreover, time must proceed in the direction of a Day of Judgment. This last requirement of directionality derives from the belief that the Other World will occur only with the Eschaton rather than being always present upon death. F. Crawford Burkitt in the Schweich Lectures of 1913 delineates the necessary difference between this pre- or non-apocalyptic notion of the Other World as a *place* and time as continuous with the apocalyptic notion of the Other World not as a place but as a *time to come*, that is, coming into existence only at the end-stopped line. He illustrates this difference by contrasting the non-apocalyptic Other World as seen in Dante's *Commedia* with the apocalyptic one pictured in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. In Dante's vision, as people die, they enter serially the Other World, much as they entered the Underworld of Greek and Egyptian mythology. There is no waiting.[11] Death, or his surrogate, ushers the person before the Judgment Seat where the deity consigns him or her to the Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso, or Limbo.

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[9] "Time for Christians began with the Creation and would end with Christ's Second Coming. World history was bounded by these two events. [...] our modern concept of history, however rationalized and secularized it may be, still rests on the concept of historical time which was inaugurated by Christianity" (Whitrow 65).

[10] A striking exception to the linearity of most apocalyptic thinking is Bishop Burnett who postulated time as circular beginning with the Creation and returning via the Eschaton. See *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1680) the frontispiece of which Stephen Jay Gould analyses in some detail in *Time's Arrow* (see especially 20–59).

[11] The continuous movement of the dead to the Other World provides a staple of literature from Homer to the present. See, for example, Tom Stoppard, *The Invention of Love* (1998) or Michael Frayne, *Copenhagen* (1998). The latter is discussed in detail by Nick Ruddick in *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* (415–31, see especially 423–26).

For Dante in his vision, Apocalypse becomes impossible—let alone predictable—since although the dead are judged in an Other World, both time and judgment are continuous.

In Michelangelo's fresco, on the other hand, all the dead from all of time are summoned to appear before the throne of God on one future Day of Judgment. Burkitt points out the radically different orientation between these two beliefs. If the Other World is a place, then

> individuals enter one by one when they die; the conception of the Last Judgment, on the other hand, makes the Other World a *time*, an era, which all individuals experience simultaneously, a "Divine Event to which all Nature moves." It is this Divine Event that is set forth by the Apocalypses. The doctrine of the Apocalypses is the doctrine of the last Judgment. (2)[12]

Reinhold Neibuhr, in his remarkable study, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, discusses the differences between those cultures and societies that expect a Messiah and those that do not (see especially volume I). A similar distinction might be drawn between those apocalyptic societies and cultures that expect a last Judgment—often within the believer's lifetime—and those non-apocalyptic societies that do not. Irish culture, for example, does not expect a Last Judgment being firmly rooted in a view of the Other World as a place similar to Dante's that one enters serially upon death. United States culture by and large accepting as consensus reality the apocalyptic belief in the Other World as occurring only at the End of Time, on the other hand, does expect a Last Day of Judgment.[13]

Believers in Apocalypse, whenever it is predicted to occur, exhibit total devotion to this idea. "The emotional effect of apocalyptic writing, as exhibited in the great series which extends from the Book of Daniel to the Apocalypse of Baruch, is that everything is subordinated to the announcement of the End. Everything leads up to

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[12] Once an End to Time is granted, once a Last Day is accepted, Apocalypse becomes possible. And once Apocalypse becomes possible, then it is but a short step to predicting when it will occur, and from there another short step to the rise of millenarianism.

[13] "A nation whose quasi-official high priest is the reverend Billy Graham, author of *Approaching Hoofbeats: The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, is rather clearly more likely than most other countries to have strong intimations of the Millennium" (Bloom).

the Judgment and to the New Age that follows it" (Burkitt 47, see also Bloom). From this belief, it is but a short yet necessary step to proselytizing. "[...] the Apocalyptist's part is to stimulate his comrades by sketches of the future" (Burkitt 48). The United States in the nineteenth century thus echoes and re-echoes with exhortations from one or another apocalyptic or millennial group to their fellow citizens to turn and follow their leader before it is too late. In part, this phenomenon paralleled and influenced the Great Revival and other lesser revivals that swept across nineteenth century America. "A radical alternation of American religion commenced with the start of the nineteenth century [...]. Enormous frontier revivals surged on into the cities, and premillennialism accompanied the revivals" (Bloom 223). Against this surge, Dickinson with her different view of reality retreated to her upper room wanting no part of such enthusiasm:

> Some keep the Sabbath going to Church—
> I keep it, staying at Home—
> With a Bobolink for a Chorister—
> And an Orchard, for a Dome—
>
> Some keep the Sabbath in Surplice—
> I just wear my Wings—
> And instead of tolling the Bell, for Church,
> Our little Sexton—Sings.
>
> God preachers, a noted Clergyman—
> And the sermon is never long,
> So instead of getting to Heaven, at last—
> I'm going all along (324)

One of the most famous of the nineteenth century millennial movements, the one that radically, successfully challenged consensus reality and that had the longest lasting consequences occurred before the Civil War early in the century. The apocalyptic preaching of William Miller of New York became the basis for a widespread, popular religious revival movement throughout the Northeastern United States and the Midwest that later also swept through part of England. "The estimated number of Millerites has varied from 10,000 to over one million. We will never know the exact number," believes David L. Rowe, historian and biographer of William Miller, but whatever the exact numbers, he concludes, "Millerism was a mass

movement" (2). In addition, the Millerite movement "used truly modern professional methods of propagation: newspapers, itinerant speakers, and professional organizers, both lay and religious. Truly, Millerism was the religious analogue of the Whig's successful professionalization of American politics" (Rowe 2). Miller, himself, a devoted student of the bible, concluded from his study that the Second Coming of Christ was imminent. The world would end "on or about" 1843. This was no fantasy but an immanent reality. Miller based his predictions on carefully worked out, mathematically exact charts—all based on his thorough reading. "Miller transmuted history into eschatology, seeing the past as apostasy and the future as apocalypse" (Butler 191). Of course, there was the difficulty that all his assumptions about the bible, its contents, and his literalist reading of it were faulty—even though most of them remain popular today with a large segment of the United States population. Miller's fundamental error was attempting to read myth and story as a scientifically exact description of the origin and nature of the world, which for most people like Miller meant universe, since he and his followers equated planet Earth with the universe. Equating the Earth with the universe and reading the myths and stories in Genesis as literally true, Miller then added a symbolic reading of the "prophetic" biblical books. A day mentioned in the "prophetic" books was read as a year of current Earth time. Miller then compounded his error by making detailed, elaborate, and usually quite accurate calculations but all based upon similarly weak premises. The prophetic charts of his followers, Charles Fitch and Apollos Hale, like those of Joshua V. Himes were in turn based upon Miller's prophecies. They remain a marvel to read and interpret (see illustration in Arthur, 44–45).

In making such elaborate calculations, Miller was following the well-tried method of several prophetic predecessors. The most famous, Archbishop James Ussher, in 1650 had gone through much the same process in Ireland. Ussher's predictions were destined to become almost synonymous with Apocalypse and millennialism well into the twentieth century. In *Annals of the Old Testament*, "by translating the myth/metaphor of the creation into the literal realm of calendar and clock time" Ussher calculated that creation occurred at exactly 9:00 in the morning, 26 October 4004 B. C. E. (Gifford 72)

and the end of the world would occur exactly six thousand years later on a Thursday in October 1997. Although his was only one among many such calculations, it became one of the most famous, one of the most notorious because, like Miller's, it was one of the most exact. In giving a definite date—though one far in the future—Ussher, like Miller two centuries later, left himself open to ridicule by those who did not sympathize with his warnings. Since Ussher's date lay almost three and a half centuries in the future, it had, however, all of the advantages but none of the disadvantages of being precise. It was obviously neither demonstrable nor provable. In contrast, Miller's date for the end of the world lay well within his life expectancy and that of most of his followers. Sometime before 1831 when he began to preach on the end of the world, he "added up the prophetic numbers and found that the sums converged on 1843" (Doan 123). "I found," he wrote later in his three volume *Works*, "in going through the Bible, the end of all things was clearly and emphatically predicted, both as to time and manner. I believed; and immediately the duty to publish this doctrine, that the world might believe and get ready to meet the Judge and Bridegroom at his coming, was impressed upon my mind" (1.12 qtd. in Rowe 21). Based on his belief, he began to preach that the world would end "on or before" 1843. But even that prediction was not specific enough for his followers. Only when an exact date was agreed upon did Miller gain an extensive following and only then did his movement acquire real authority. As several historians of Millerism have noted "the power of the Millerite message increased in tandem with its immediacy. The promise and threat of meeting the Lord at any moment brought audiences to a pitch of excitement. [...] The result was the astounding impact that has led historians to consider the great revival of 1843–1844 as essentially inspired by Millerism" (Doan 122). Cries of "1843! 1843!" echoed from Miller's great revival tent. "For most Millerites, mention of 1843 served as a reminder of a supernatural order so real as to be almost palpably, physically present" (Doan 123).

Some well to do farmers sold or gave away their farms, their clothes, and other possessions, others did not plant crops because the end was indeed at hand. "In the words of John Chrysostom, virginity made plain that 'the things of the resurrection stand at the door'"

(Peter Brown qtd. in Bloom 162). Nor was there a need to heed the biblical admonition to "sell all ye have and give it to the poor" for both the poor and the rich along with the moderately well off were now all living in the End of Time and none had need of the things of this world.

But 1843 came and went without incident as did 21 March and 3 April 1844, the other "two popular dates for Christ's return" (Butler 195). After this first disappointment "the so-called 'seventh-month' faction, made up of youthful, under-educated 'radicals,' usurped or bypassed Millerite leadership, and by August predicted the Second Advent on October 22, 1844" (Butler 196). Miller himself eventually agreed to this new date. Some Millerites and their followers gathered on the high places on that day in October so to be among the first to greet the Second Coming and welcome the New World. But the faithful had once again to endure yet another disappointment. This time, no one recalculated the figures and no one reprogrammed the Big Event. Instead, in a state of shock, they returned to their homes and communities and painfully re-began their lives. (See Butler for an excellent account of their reactions and action.) They had expected the Second Coming in 1844 but would receive instead the American Civil War.

Ironically, the widespread acceptance of Miller's prophecy of the end of all time coincides with the dawning of the understanding of two of the most extraordinary scientific discoveries about the extent and nature of time. Both would undermine completely the very possibility of Apocalypse—except for fantastic fiction. James Hutton and Charles Darwin discovered that time, far from being a finite arrow pointing towards The End, was potentially infinite and virtually without direction pointing towards nothing but the indefinite future. The geologist's discovery of "deep time" extended the life of the universe from thousands past millions into billions of years. "Time which measures everything in our idea, and is often deficient to our schemes," wrote Hutton, "is to nature endless and as nothing; it cannot limit that by which alone it had existence; and as the natural course of time, which to us seems infinite, cannot be bounded by any operation that may have an end" (Hutton qtd. in Mitchison 9). Charles Lyell in his highly influential *Principles of Geology* (1830) linked Hutton's

discovery at the end of the eighteenth century to Newton's discovering the immensity of space:

> Such views of the immensity of past time, like those unfolded by the Newtonian philosophy in regard to space, were too vast to awaken ideas of sublimity unmixed with a painful sense of our incapacity to conceive a plan of such infinite extent. Worlds are seen beyond worlds immeasurably distant from each other, and beyond them all innumerable other systems are faintly traced on the confines of the visible universe. (qtd. in Gould, *Arrow* 2)

Lyell and Hutton together forced a confrontation with the concept of deep time. A concept so alien to human experience that it was not until well into the nineteenth century that it became generally accepted in the scientific community. Moreover, most people even today appear unable to comprehend this concept except through metaphor. "John McPhee has provided the most striking metaphor of all (in *Basin and Range* [1980]): Consider the earth's history as the old measure of the English yard, the distance from the king's nose to the tip of his outstretched hand. One stroke of a nail file on his middle finger erases human history" (Gould, *Arrow* 3).

A second ontological shock occurred with Darwin's discovery and publication of the principle of natural selection. Darwin's idea, that local adaptation could, over time, lead to the creation of an entirely new species, came into conflict with received wisdom which often meant simple biblical literalism. All species were present at the initial creation as described in Genesis. "Each one is perfectly adapted to its place in the world, according to the wisdom of God" (Wertenbaker 35). All were accounted for in Noah's Ark, according to the literalists. God had not created anything new since the time described in Genesis. Darwin's local adaptation—he studiously avoided using the word, "evolution" until forced to by Herbert Spencer's popularization—vastly increased the world's time by postulating continuous creation over eons. Such seismic shocks to popular, received wisdom and belief proved exhilarating to the scientific community.

> Who could ever match the thrill of the earlier discovery vouchsafed to geologists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, that time comes in billions ... rather than thousands of years. Once geology grasped this great reform, no other intellectual reconstruction could ever again be so vast. And whatever the

> excitement and pleasure of new discoveries made every year by biologists, no one will ever again experience the ultimate intellectual high of reconstructing all nature with the passkey of evolution—a privilege accorded to Charles Darwin, and now closed to us. (Gould, *Full House* 224–25)

But not everyone so reveled in these discoveries. Barely had the nineteenth century ended and a new century dawned when George McCready Price, refusing to accept either the concept of deep time or the concept of natural selection, originated "the pseudoscience known to its adherents by the oxymoron 'scientific creationism.' [...] Price wished to affirm biblical literalism by an inductive approach based strictly on fieldwork" (Gould, *Arrow* 23). His book, *The New Geology* (1923) remains a clear reaction against this new knowledge that humans were no longer at the pinnacle of creation but were a local response to local conditions—conditions created over billions and billions of years. Still in print today, Price's book is regularly cited in debates in state legislatures of the United States. More shamefully still, some of those states have mandated the study of oxymoronic "scientific creationism."[14] In the most millenarian of nations, large numbers of people at the beginning of the twenty-first century still deny the truth of the revelations of geologic time and natural selection. Many imitate those who, at the end of the nineteenth century, fled to the safety to millenarianism and McCready's ironically titled, "new geology." Despite the seismic shocks of the Copernican, Newtonian, and Galilean revolutions, despite the discovery of "deep time" and Darwin's discovery that local adaptation to change produces new species, the popular view of time in the United States remains that of the record of human progress leading to Apocalypse.[15]

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[14] The editor-in-chief of the *Scientific American* thought the "creationism" enough of a real and present danger to devote several pages to an extensive article "15 Answers to Creationist Nonsense" (62–69). One of the most appalling statistics in the accompanying essay was the revelation that according to a substantial study over fifty percent of Americans actually believe that human beings have been on the earth for less than 10,000 years! This nonsensical belief is maintained at a time when serious debates attempt to decide where in a range of between three and seven million years ago humans actually did first appear.

[15] But it might be well to recall that there is also a Flat Earth Society in the United States with official headquarters in Ann Arbor, Michigan that maintains in all seriousness that the rotundity of the earth is but an illusion.

At the end of the twentieth century, as at the end of the nineteenth, a significant number of Americans still expected a new Age to dawn and many believed the New Age would coincide with the new century and the new millennium. The current Age of Agony would then be over "by God's victorious intervention on behalf of His saints, when He comes, or sends His Representative to come, to set things right" (Burkitt 7). The early "Christians expected the visible return of their lord to judge the nations: they received instead the Roman Empire itself" (Burkitt 13).[16] Other, more current, expectations such as the "Rapture" depicted in LaHayne and Jenkins have also been thwarted. Those who, at the end of the nineteenth century, expected Apocalypse to coincide with the arrival of the new century, received instead World War I and the twentieth century of wars. What do the current crop of millenarians, estimated at over ten million Americans, expect? Popular culture, popular religion, popular cults, and the morning newspaper all give answers: besides The Rapture, there is also Childhood's End, The Age of Aquarius, Jonesville, Waco, and/or children slaughtering other children with automatic weapons on school playgrounds.

Separating fantasy from reality often proves difficult. Looking back to the nineteenth century Millerite movement from a twenty-first century vantage point, for instance, the outstanding characteristic appears to be the participants' religious commitment, rather than their foolishness. Although speaking of a vastly different experience, Thoreau describes exactly the Millerites:

> Every man has to learn the points of compass again as often as he awakes, whether from sleep or any abstraction. Not till we are lost, in other words, not till we have lost the world, do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations. (*Walden* 118)

In time, many Millerites found themselves, realized they were still in the world of reality and not of the fantastic and so reached an accommodation with what had failed to occur. The physical non-event now known as the Great Disappointment was slowly, painfully

[16] So certain were many of the early Christians of Christ's eminent return that they, like Paul, never bothered to date their letters.

transformed into an event of deep metaphysical significance.[17] Ellen White, for instance, the Adventist visionary "linked the delay of the Advent to the need for morally improving God's people" (Butler 201). These Adventist and former Millerites followed a well-established pattern in moving from Apocalypse to Gnosis or from looking without to looking within. "Prophetic religion becomes apocalyptic when prophecy fails, and apocalyptic religion becomes Gnosticism when apocalypse fails, as fortunately it always has and, as we must hope, will fail again" (Bloom 30). The Millerites began with prophecy, continued with apocalypse, and when apocalypse failed in the Great Disappointment, they looked within themselves. That inner faith became, in turn, the basis for the establishment of a new religion. Kenelm Burridge, a sympathetic observer of millenarian movements describes the value of such experience. "Whether as fool, fraud, saint, respectable bourgeois, farmer or tycoon, the pain of the millennium belongs only to man. It is why he is man, why, when the time comes, he has to make a new man" (qtd. in Butler and Numbers xx).

The Millerites believed in the reality of Apocalypse enough to make it the center of their lives and they were willing to risk all for their belief. Ironically, in their own way, and out of their Great Disappointment, they, too, like Thoreau, Dickinson, and Emerson had to "front [...] the essential facts of life" (Thoreau 62). The central, essential fact was the failure of their millennial beliefs. The world was no different on 23 October 1844 than it had been on 22 October except for their Great Disappointment. The earth and humans on it remained the product of billions of years of evolutionary activity. There would be no progress, no following time's arrow to the very End of Time, to the Day of Judgment, to the Parousia. Turning away from failed prophecy to gnosis, many Millerites followed a pattern of self-knowledge and self-reliance expostulated by Emerson, and embodied in the lives and works of Emerson, Dickinson, and

[17] Butler describes how "these Adventists believed that on the fateful tenth day of the seventh month Christ [...] had come not to earth but had moved from the holy to the most holy place in a heavenly sanctuary. The "cleansing of the sanctuary" [a typical Millerite millennial belief] had not referred to Christ's Second Coming but rather to the investigation of the sins of God's people in preparation for the end of the world" (200).

Thoreau.[18] Emerson advocated self-reliance, being "empowered by eloquence and vision" (Bloom 16), rather than being distracted by the "popgun" of Apocalypse that sounds like "the crack of doom" ("The American Scholar" 64). Rather than simplistic literalism, Dickinson endorsed telling "all the Truth but tell it slant— / Success in Circuit lies [...] The Truth must dazzle gradually / Or every man be blind—" (1129). Thoreau juxtaposed to a belief in the End of Time, a belief in being "anxious to improve the nick of time. [...] to stand on the meeting of two eternities, the past and the future, which is precisely the present moment" (10). If those 'ladies of the land weaving toilet cushions against the last day" were "injuring eternity"(4), the best remedy was not to believe that eternity would arrive next week or next month or next year with the Second Coming that was fantastic but to fill every minute of today so that one would have a sense of life and having lived that would be reality. "I went to the woods," Thoreau confessed, "because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived" (62). To do so he went fishing in the stream of time rather than progressing along the arrow of time to the End of Time.

Against this nineteenth-century backdrop of unrealized apocalypse, Jenkins and LeHane's multi-volume twentieth- twenty-first-century sequential novel would appear even more fantastic were it not for the authors obvious, if unstated, commitment to an immanent apocalyptic moment. Missing from their work, however, is a date similar to Miller's "1843" or Ussher's October 1997—a definite time-certain for

[18] Of those Millerites who stayed in the advent movement, who went beyond the pain and disappointment, some found new dedication and experienced religious awakening that resulted in a dramatic renewal of Shakerism, the establishment of the Church of the Seventh Day Adventists, and, later, the beginning of the Jehovah's Witnesses. As the advent historian, Jonathan Butler contends, "Like every other millenarian movement, Millerism met with obvious failure, and yet out of this failure eventually emerged another of the American sectarian success stories [...]. [The] durable, complex, and established Adventist sect [...]" (190). Rather than a belief in either Progress or Apocalypse, the lesson of Millerism appears to lie closer to those to be derived from a reading of Emerson's essays or Dickinson's poetry or, especially of Thoreau's *Walden*. "Not till we are lost [...] do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations" (Walden 118).

the end of time. Were any such similar dates to appear in these novels —and there are still more volumes to come—then the whole series would align itself not with the literature of the fantastic but with the consensus reality of their millennial community of true believers and readers.[19] But such a departure from the fantastic has its dangers, for that consensus reality would, in turn, have to assimilate the inevitable disappointment "when apocalypse fails, as fortunately it always has [...]" (Bloom 30). Meantime, such novels help illustrate the fluidity of meaning in the very terms "the fantastic" and "reality."

Notes

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[19] Pollsters estimate that there are about 10 million premillennialists among us, that is, people who expect Jesus to return, in his resurrected body, before he then inaugurates a thousand-year kingdom on earth, over which he will rule. Yet the premillennialists are only a small fraction of believers; rather more than 100 million American adults expect a Second Coming of Jesus, even if they do not necessarily believe that he will found Kingdom of God in this world" (Bloom 219–20).

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