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ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance, Volume 53, Number 1, 2007  
(Nos. 206 O.S.), pp. 89-111 (Article)

Published by Washington State University  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/esq.2007.0003>



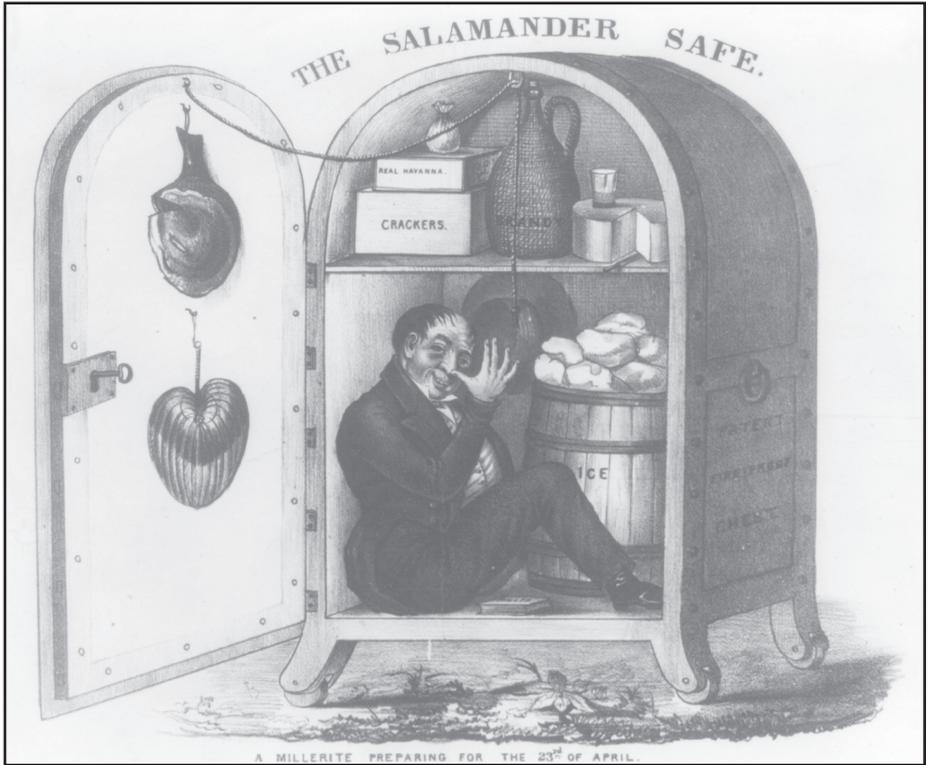
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“To Despair at the Tedious Delay  
of the Final Conflagration”:  
Hawthorne’s Use of the  
Figure of William Miller

JAMES HEWITSON

Of the figures who emerged from the Second Great Awakening, William Miller arguably produced the greatest immediate sensation. In 1831, convinced that the Second Coming was imminent, he began a strenuous preaching and writing career, reaching as many as five hundred thousand people and creating an interdenominational movement. The end of the world, Miller predicted, would occur sometime between 21 October 1843 and 21 March 1844; the final date was later amended to 22 October 1844, at which point tens of thousands of Millerites gathered on hilltops, waiting for the heavens to open and Judgment Day to begin.<sup>1</sup>

Nathaniel Hawthorne was, of course, far from being tempted toward millennial expectations of this kind. In a humorous letter to Horatio Bridge, he used the Millerite apocalypse as an image of the sort of disaster that should be visited on the nation as punishment for its negligent business practices, writing that “the system of slack payments in this country is most abominable, and ought of itself to bring upon us the destruction foretold by Father Miller.”<sup>2</sup> For him it became part of the jeremiadic tradition of affliction for transgression—that is to say, as calamity, not as spiritual fulfillment.<sup>3</sup> Hawthorne, however,



*"The salamander safe. A Millerite preparing for the 23rd of April."*  
Lithograph by Thomas Sinclair, Pennsylvania, 2 March 1843.  
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division,  
LC-USZ62-23784.

was not insensitive to the peculiarities of Miller's theories or the opportunities they offered him to clarify and articulate his own opposition to antebellum reformism in general. He referred or alluded to Miller in four stories: "The Hall of Fantasy," "Earth's Holocaust," "The New Adam and Eve," and "The Christmas Banquet." These stories were initially published separately, between 1843 and 1844, and then collected in his *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846): taken together, they constitute an analysis of the Millerite movement and part of the process through which Hawthorne addresses what he terms in the introductory "Old Manse" essay a period of "morbid activity," in which the seeming discovery of new truths and the possibility of radical social transformation "tormented" individuals with "visions" and "old delusions" (*CE*, 10:29).<sup>4</sup> Through these depictions, Hawthorne uses the figure of Miller to mount a complex attack on the idea of reform. First, to reprove reformers who attempt amelioration through secular measures, he exploits the disjunction Miller poses between the earthly and divine worlds, as well as Miller's insistence on supernatural salvation as the only true source of deliverance from social evils. At the same time, Hawthorne uses Miller's disappointment following the failure of his predictions to represent the reform impulse itself as based on a profound antipathy to humanity in general. To this end, the Millerite movement is identified with a sense of doctrinaire intolerance and propensity to violence that becomes fundamental to Hawthorne's critique of antebellum progressivism: the sheer devastation required by Miller's vision of the imminent Second Coming is made illustrative of the fundamental destructiveness of all organized efforts to ameliorate social ills, implying both that such destruction is inherent to the nature of systematic reform and that it is ultimately futile. The overly theoretical, socially disruptive aspects of Millerite theory, moreover, contribute to Hawthorne's evolving sense of the reformer figure and reach final expression in his delineation of Hollingsworth in *The Blithedale Romance*.

William Miller was one of the first prominent premillennialists in American culture, and his eschatology differed starkly from the postmillennialism that dominated American religious discourse from the mid-eighteenth to early nineteenth cen-

turies. In the case of postmillennialism, the millennium was expected to occur prior to the Second Coming as a result of the Holy Spirit acting upon humanity and bringing it to conformity with God. This millennium would occur within the context of human history, as a period of profound piety during which the Church would thrive. Because postmillennialism supposed that this period was to precede Christ's Second Coming, adherents sought to create a just society dedicated to the promulgation of virtue. As a paradigm for understanding history, postmillennialism made possible a synthesis between the apocalyptic scenario described in Revelation and faith in humanity's capacity for moral and material progress. It proved a means of uniting disparate groups behind a common belief in the general amelioration of society, in which the Spirit manifested itself gradually through human initiatives. For much of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, postmillennialism constituted received doctrine in orthodox Protestant churches and provided impetus for a wide range of social initiatives, including education and prohibition, the suffragette and peace movements, and legal and health reforms, as well as facilitating various scientific and technological discoveries.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, Millerites removed the millennium from the context of historical fulfillment altogether. As William Miller explained in a letter to Joseph Atwood, the millennium was to be brought about through the literal Second Coming of Christ:

And you may depend upon it my friends, that Jesus will come . . . in the year 1843 or before; in that year the prophecies will be completed the dead Saints or bodies will rise, those children of God who are alive then, will be changed, and caught up to meet the Lord in the air, where they will be Married to him. The World and all the Wicked will be burnt up, (not annihilated) and then Christ will descend and reign personally with his Saints; and at the end of the 1000 Years the wicked will be raised, judged and sent to everlasting punishment. (this is the second Death) [*sic*].<sup>6</sup>

In this formulation, the New Jerusalem was to follow, not from divinely inspired human initiatives, but from supernatural intervention, whereby Christ would personally establish his kingdom.

While Miller's idea that the Second Coming would usher in the millennium was not new, the manner in which he saw divine chronology intersecting with human history was.<sup>7</sup> He argued that this chronology would follow timetables established in the books of Daniel, Leviticus, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Revelation. Miller based his elaborate calculations upon the familiar day-year formula, in which a prophetic day is understood to mean a year in human chronology and a prophetic year to consist of 360 days (erroneously believed to be the length of a year in the Jewish calendar). Relying on Leviticus 26, in which God threatens to punish Israel seven times for its sins, Miller interpreted the phrase "seven times" to mean 7 prophetic years. Accordingly, he argued that this passage implied that God's punishment of his people would last for 7 prophetic years, or 2,520 prophetic days or 2,520 human years. This period further divided into two sections: in the first half God's people were under the dominion of "literal Babylon," or the kings of the earth; the second half—the "time, times and a half" prophesied in Daniel 12:7, which for Miller denoted 3½ prophetic years or 1,260 actual years—was to be the domain of "mystical Babylon," which Miller interpreted as the Catholic Church. Miller asserted that this whole period began with the Babylonian captivity, which he dated as commencing in 670 BC and concluding with the Resurrection and Judgment, which would thus take place between 21 March 1843 and 21 March 1844.<sup>8</sup>

Through his construction of this narrative, Miller transformed the Bible into a series of interconnected and coded prophecies, each of which pertained to Christ's Second Advent. From this perspective, the Bible as a whole became a coded communication, and the date of the Second Coming the secret meaning that, when discovered, unlocked the text to reveal a level of perfect coherence. For many of Miller's followers, belief in the chronology leading to this event became a necessary doctrine of Christian faith. Charles Fitch, for example, defined Babylon as consisting of all those who did not believe in and look for the personal return of Christ:

The sound scriptural doctrine of the personal reign of Christ on David's throne cannot now be endured [by the Protestant Church], and hence the teachers which the various sects have been heaping to themselves have turned away their ears to the groundless fable of a spiritual reign of Christ, during what is called a temporal millennium, when they expect the world to be converted; and each sect is expecting at that time to have the predominant influence.<sup>9</sup>

Because Miller approached the millennium from the perspective of a revealed chronology, he effectively removed it from the context of historical causality. Although he often referred to such historical events as the rise of the Papacy and the onset of the French Revolution to buttress his arguments, these events were reduced to signifiers, meaningful only insofar as they fulfilled prophecy. From this vantage point, history ceases to function as a redemptive process. In his *Evidence from Scripture and History for the Second Coming of Christ*, for example, Miller discusses the extensive missionary work and general increase in religious fervor occurring in the mid-nineteenth century. For him, however, this activity is significant primarily because it confirms Matthew 24:14, Daniel 12:1, and Revelation 10:1–6, which represent such an outpouring as anticipating the end—"a clear and visible sign, that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."<sup>10</sup> God's work of redemption ceases to have any organic relationship to the approach of the millennium. Instead, the prophetic history remains a distinct narrative that only intersects with human history in order to eradicate it.

Hawthorne's most sustained discussion of Miller appears in the story "The Hall of Fantasy." In this text the narrator travels to the world of fantasy, which is inhabited by numerous social theorists who propose a series of improbable reforms intended to inaugurate a new age on earth.<sup>11</sup> After hearing several such proponents elaborate their schemes, he comes to William Miller, also an inhabitant of the hall, who is, the narrator's guide observes, advocating "one theory, that swallows up and annihilates all others." That theory, of course, is "the

destruction of the earth" (*CE*, 10:181, 183). The guide compares Miller favorably to the other reformers they have met earlier, who are attempting to create an earthly millennium exclusively through human effort: "They look for the earthly perfection of mankind, and are forming schemes, which imply that the immortal spirit will be connected with a physical nature, for innumerable ages of futurity. On the other hand, here comes good Father Miller, and, with one puff of his relentless theory, scatters all their dreams like so many withered leaves upon the blast" (*CE*, 10:181–82). The absolute partitioning of the material and spiritual worlds would make irrelevant all of the approaches to amelioration seeking to locate the millennium in the context of historical development. This would include the reform movements of the antebellum period, as well as scientific and pseudo-scientific developments that were expected by some exponents to have world-changing consequences, such as mesmerism, magnetism, and electricity.<sup>12</sup>

The narrator's engagement with Miller is cautious, and he establishes his areas of concurrence and difference with care. This is significant, because it is through this process that Hawthorne develops his own understanding of how divine impulses make themselves manifest in human affairs and, by implication, his larger rationale for dismissing other reformers. He does not discuss Miller's theories in any depth and, in fact, exaggerates Miller's own opposition to secular reform, expressing distrust of any intermingling of the spiritual and material worlds and noting that the apocalypse may be the only way of "getting mankind out of the various perplexities, into which they have fallen" (*CE*, 10:182). The idea of requiring direct divine intervention in order to achieve lasting change, when coupled with the obviously absurd examples of improvement offered by the other reformers, emphasizes the insufficiency of human efforts at reform, as well as the problem of the continuity between spirit and matter assumed by many postmillennial initiatives.<sup>13</sup> For these reasons, the narrator is sympathetic to Miller's representation of divine transformation as fundamentally distinct from human agency.

Despite this area of large accord, the resolution Miller proposes is represented as less than satisfactory. In particular,

the narrator objects to the Millerite reading of the millennium because it effectively negates human history:

Yet I could wish that the world might be permitted to endure, until some great moral shall have been evolved. A riddle is propounded. Where is the solution? The sphinx did not slay herself, until her riddle had been guessed. Will it not be so with the world? Now if it should be burnt to-morrow morning, I am at a loss to know what purpose will have been accomplished, or how the universe will be wiser or better for our existence and destruction. (*CE*, 10:182)

Here the world is a kind of puzzle that suggests a solution, and the termination of its history through a premillennial Second Coming would seem to undermine the rationale for its very being.

The idea of the earth as a question that should lead to an answer would appear to support the idea of reform and, by implication, the contribution reformers' efforts make to this enterprise. It is important to note, however, that the narrator describes the solution to this riddle as a matter of future discovery, and not as self-evident. Although Hawthorne does not develop this thought here, in such texts as "The Great Stone Face" and "The Procession of Life" he argues that, because humans are incapable of grasping or anticipating the direction of Providence, it is necessary to approach social amelioration as openly and intuitively as possible:

Though the heart be large, yet the mind is often of such moderate dimensions as to be exclusively filled up with one idea. When a good man has long devoted himself to a particular kind of beneficence—to one species of reform—he is apt to become narrowed into the limits of the path wherein he treads, and to fancy that there is no other good to be done on earth but that self-same good to which he has put his hand,

and in the very mode that best suits his own conceptions. (*CE*, 10:217–18)

Because reformers articulate the good in a particular context, their understanding of it is necessarily limited. By so restricting themselves they run the danger of becoming monomaniacal in pursuit of their goals and ignoring how their activities relate to the actual nature of human experience. To be effective, the reformer's "scheme must be wrought out by the united strength of the whole world's stock of love, or the world is no longer worthy of a position in the universe" (*CE*, 10:218). It must be inspired by a desire for good that is predicated, not on particular ends, but on empirical findings—based on the needs of people in their immediate situations while being universal in application. This approach to reform remained consistent throughout Hawthorne's career and is evident in his later discussion of abolition in *The Life of Franklin Pierce*, where he argues that, while slavery is clearly wrong, attempting to end it would do more damage than the institution itself: slavery is "one of those evils which divine Providence does not leave to be remedied by human contrivances, but which, in its own good time, by some means impossible to be anticipated . . . when all its uses shall have been fulfilled, it causes to vanish like a dream" (*CE*, 23:352). Accordingly, its elimination is not to be sought through coherent action, but must be trusted to the future. Hawthorne elaborates this position in "Chiefly about War Matters": "No human effort, on a grand scale, has ever yet resulted according to the purpose of its projectors. The advantages are always incidental. Man's accidents are God's purposes" (*CE*, 23:431).<sup>14</sup> As such, while Hawthorne retains the idea of some better future state, he redefines the debate over social perfection by adducing, not moral imperatives, but the insufficiency of humanity to accomplish any ends that it sets for itself: whatever meaning the world may have is something humans are incapable of divining.<sup>15</sup>

Pressed by his guide in the Hall of Fantasy to defend his partial repudiation of Miller's premillennialism, however, the narrator reformulates his objections. Instead of discussing perfectionist schemes and their viability, he pleads his love for the manifest world:

The poor old Earth! . . . What I should chiefly regret in her destruction would be that very earthliness, which no other sphere or state of existence can renew or compensate. . . .

. . . Come what may, I never will forget her! Neither will it satisfy me to have her exist merely in idea. I want her great, round, solid self to endure interminably, and still to be peopled with the kindly race of man, whom I uphold to be much better than he thinks himself. (*CE*, 10:183, 184–85)

The earth should continue to exist, then, because it is the proper sphere for human happiness and the context in which humanity best realizes its potential for excellence. This sense of the value of the manifest world and of the human life it houses is, moreover, what Miller purportedly lacks. The narrator notes the “expostulating cry of a multitude against the consummation, prophesied by Father Miller,” while observing that “the motives of the crowd for desiring its continuance were mostly so absurd, that, unless Infinite Wisdom had been aware of much better reasons, the solid Earth must have melted away at once” (*CE*, 10:183). The key points emphasized are that the earth itself may have a value not liable to logical analysis but nonetheless felt by its inhabitants, and that Miller himself seems deaf to their cries, or feels they are not important. Hawthorne’s discussion of Miller’s resolution focuses not on the prophet’s understanding of the nature of redemption but rather on the crudeness with which he superimposes his apocalyptic time-frame on human existence and his seeming indifference to the destruction required by his theory.

The narrator’s rhetorical shift in this passage is significant because it indicates the next phase of Hawthorne’s employment of the Miller figure—that is, as a means of analyzing the psychological motives that lead reformers to try to improve society. In this context, Miller is no longer distinguished from other reformers who propose equally profound societal transformations, and he comes to stand for the reformer figure in general. By focusing on the destruction inherent to Miller’s theory and

his apparent disregard for the aspirations of humanity, Hawthorne reimagines him as motivated less by his desire for divine revelation than by the need to have his prophetic timelines vindicated. Moreover, that the confirmation of his theory requires a cataclysm emphasizes a fundamental antagonism, in which the success of reformist agendas can only be realized through the annihilation of the existing world and the future spiritual insights it may offer. The violence of Miller's Second Coming is not exceptional, then, but indicative of the monomaniacal zeal Hawthorne assigns to reform movements generally.

This phase of Hawthorne's engagement with Miller unfolds in two related stories, "Earth's Holocaust" and "The New Adam and Eve," both of which draw upon Miller's apocalyptic scenario. "Earth's Holocaust" describes a giant bonfire, in which everything in the old world is burned in order to liberate humanity from its past. While the story does not specifically mention Miller himself, this fire is an analogue to the global destruction he expected.<sup>16</sup> The fact, however, that it is produced by reformers attempting to perfect the manifest world reemphasizes the rhetorical linkage between the pre-millennial and postmillennial aspirations to social perfection implied by Hawthorne in "The Hall of Fantasy": in "Earth's Holocaust" the reformers themselves work to create the kind of cataclysm foretold by Miller. The fire is initially fueled by obviously disposable things, such as old newspapers and magazines—records of the ephemera of history. From this the crowd proceeds to burn everything associated with civilization and culture: all signs of rank and privilege, as well as alcohol, tobacco, instruments of war and tools of punishment, and finally every literary and religious text ever written. Despite the magnitude of this undertaking, however, it has no power to effect significant change. Even after everything in the old world has been burned, a spectator, who may be the devil, notes that the reformers have neglected to address the human heart, the cause of the ills that have infested society: "unless they hit upon some method of purifying that foul cavern, forth from it will re-issue all the shapes of wrong and misery—the same old shapes, or worse ones—which they have taken such a vast deal of trouble to consume to ashes" (*CE*, 10:403).

Given the reformers' failure to achieve their aims, the aspect of "Earth's Holocaust" that stands out most prominently is the sheer destruction their endeavors have produced, which Hawthorne represents as motivated by frustration with the nature of humanity itself. As one bystander remarks, the reformers "will first fling us in, and finally themselves" (*CE*, 10:388). This urge to cleanse the earth so violently in order to effect an immediate millennial transformation, moreover, constitutes a common bond between Miller and the story's reformers. In both cases, the reductive emphasis upon the fulfillment of an abstract, overriding vision of how individuals and the world should be leads to the desire to see everything consumed by flames. By implication, of course, the fact that a world-consuming cataclysm is common to both Miller's system and the efforts of the secular reformers suggests that Miller himself is driven by similar dissatisfactions, and that his vision of the apocalypse is the literal articulation of the violence motivating all such transformational initiatives.

The sense that large changes like these do not address humanity's actual situation, and that they are diametrically opposed to its spiritual destiny, receives stronger emphasis in "The New Adam and Eve," published in February 1843, near the beginning of the period in which Miller believed the Second Coming would occur. This story, which again uses a Millerite frame, takes place after humanity has been removed from the earth, leaving the planet vacant. Rather than describing the experiences of those who have been conducted to another sphere, however, it concentrates on a couple—the new Adam and Eve—created to repopulate the now-deserted planet. That Hawthorne is uninterested in the fates of those who have left, and instead focuses on the beginning of a new race on earth, reiterates his consistent concern with the immediate consequences of reform: for him, structural or institutional change does not begin to address either humanity's propensity to vice or its potential for amelioration.<sup>17</sup> Although the new Adam and Eve are the products of nature and so innocent, as yet, of the crimes and errors that have formed contemporary culture, they are not immune to the vicious tendencies that engendered this condition. There is evidence throughout the

text that they and their descendants are destined to reenact humanity's corrupt history of greed and vanity. Stopping by an abandoned dry-goods store, they become captivated by the sight of each other draped in expensive fabrics. Later, they see their reflections in a mirror for the first time and are "pleased and satisfied with gazing at themselves." In a library they again show a propensity to make the same mistakes as the city's previous inhabitants: Eve, by "feminine instinct," begins looking at a book of "fashionable poetry," and Adam lifts a large folio and "grasps vainly at he knows not what" (*CE*, 10:257, 264). The narrator's descriptions further heighten the sense that the couple's progeny are doomed to repeat the errors of the past. In a bank, Adam wonders at the possible reasons for stockpiling bank notes and speculates, "Perhaps, hereafter, we shall be moved to do the like." When the couple leaves the library without being able to understand any of the books they have seen, the narrator anticipates the time when "the second Adam's descendants shall have collected as much rubbish of their own" (*CE*, 10:262, 266).

As in "Earth's Holocaust," then, nothing truly significant has been accomplished despite the magnitude of the changes that have occurred. At the same time, however, amid this repetition of error, there is a sense that some form of spiritual knowledge is possible. The couple desires to find a place where they may live together under the gaze, as Eve states, of a "Great Face, with a beam of love brightening over it, like sunshine," which suggests an impetus to integrate their earthly and devotional lives (*CE*, 10:252). At the end of the story they take refuge in the Mount Auburn cemetery. The narrator notes that even in their new existence the idea of death "is in them," but adds, "were they to choose a symbol for him, it would be the Butterfly soaring upward, or the bright Angel beckoning them aloft, or the Child asleep, with soft dreams visible through her transparent purity" (*CE*, 10:267). These images symbolize the intersection of the divine and earthly spheres: they bind the human race to carnal existence and its elemental capacity for spiritual evolution. It is precisely this sense of the divine, expressed in natural images, that grounds Hawthorne's own valuation of the material world and his sense of humanity's

potential for progress. It is this form of communication, moreover, that Miller's premillennialism, and by implication the theories of reformers at large, are represented as failing to acknowledge.

William Miller's final appearance in Hawthorne's fiction takes place in "The Christmas Banquet," which describes a feast given each year for "ten of the most miserable persons that [can] be found" (*CE*, 10:285). The guests are all individuals who, for various reasons, have become so frustrated and jaundiced that their lives are torment. The narrator remarks that, on one occasion, "a plain old man in black attracted much of the company's notice, on the supposition that he was no other than Father Miller, who, it seemed, had given himself up to despair at the tedious delay of the final conflagration" (*CE*, 10:302). Hawthorne's emphasis is again significant: Miller is disappointed, not because his expectations for supernatural salvation have failed, but because his hopes for the destruction of the world have not been fulfilled. As such, Hawthorne implicitly depicts Miller as a misanthrope, whose very interest in regeneration derives from a deep antipathy to life itself. The violence Miller imagined being visited upon the earth is ascribed to his deep disgust with the existing world, rather than to any love for a new one. He accordingly becomes one with other such misanthropic figures in Hawthorne's fiction who veil morbid suspicions or desires for self-aggrandizement behind the guise of individual purity or high mission: Goodman Brown, for example, who becomes convinced of his neighbors' iniquity and during prayers "scowl[s], and mutter[s] to himself . . . and turn[s] away" (*CE*, 10:89); and Richard Digby, in "The Man of Adamant," who forsakes society altogether and looks back at it to see "whether the fire and brimstone [will] not rush down from Heaven at once, now that the one righteous man ha[s] provided for his own safety" (*CE*, 11:162).

Miller's presence at the banquet, however, represents more than Hawthorne's final verdict on the hidden motivations for his apocalypticism. Many of his fellow guests are idealists and advocates of progress, whose collective motivations together form a composite image of the reformer. The guests include a man who, in his "early youth, had trusted mankind too much,

and hoped too highly in their behalf, and, in meeting with many disappointments, had become desperately soured," and who now occupies himself with collecting reasons to abhor humanity, although each fills him with renewed sorrow (*CE*, 10:288). Another guest is "a theorist, who ha[s] conceived a plan by which all the wretchedness of earth, moral and physical, might be done away, and the bliss of the millennium at once accomplished"; when his scheme does not win popular assent he is "smitten with as much grief as if the whole mass of wo [*sic*] which he was denied the opportunity to remedy, were crowded into his own bosom" (*CE*, 10:302). Together such characters illustrate how, in Hawthorne's analysis, the impulse to reform derives from frustration and impatience with the manifest world and leads to fantasies of apocalyptic violence. From this perspective, Miller's rigid separation of the ideal and manifest worlds, the abstract manner in which he determined his prophecies, the doctrinaire certitude with which he presented his theories, and the rigidity with which his followers rejected opinions that differed from their own—all come to exemplify the narrow sectarianism that Hawthorne believed shaped reform movements generally. Miller's hopes for a great cataclysm are the logical consequence of his dissatisfaction with humanity and only a more fully realized version of the hatred and misanthropy general to reformers.

*The Blithedale Romance* constitutes Hawthorne's most sustained and distinctly articulated treatment of reform and the reformer figure. While his portrait of Hollingsworth accords with the type of reformer Hawthorne established in his earlier fiction, it reveals many traces of his earlier descriptions of Miller, underscoring how specific features of Miller's theory became essential to Hawthorne's understanding of reformers in general. In Hollingsworth, the nature and consequences of reformist tendencies receive fuller delineation, and Hawthorne's analysis of the orientation he saw in Miller finds completion. Like the character of Miller in the short stories, Hollingsworth focuses all his hopes for reformation on a grand scheme that is independent of human aspirations in general. The Blithedale community establishes itself on a nondoctrinaire basis; Coverdale, the novel's narrator, describes its members as the "very

first that have essayed to carry on [their] mortal existence, in love, and mutual help!" Hollingsworth, however, like Hawthorne's reformer figures generally, expresses impatience with this broad approach to social progress because, he declares, "there is not human nature in it!" (*CE*, 3:132). The Blithedale ideal is unsatisfactory, in his view, because it is too indefinite in its formulation and too dependent on the power of general influence, with regard to both the way the community is to evolve and the impact it is to have on the world. Although Hollingsworth does not elaborate this point further, in the context of Hawthorne's earlier depictions of reformers, his concerns suggest a lack of faith in humanity's own better impulses and its capacity for some kind of spiritual evolution.

Rejecting Blithedale's mandate, Hollingsworth attempts to seize control of the community in order to dedicate it to his own project for world amelioration, which involves the creation of an experimental prison.<sup>18</sup> Although the novel does not provide a detailed account of Hollingsworth's project, it clearly possesses the same degree of abstract complication as Miller's elaborate apocalyptic prophecies. Coverdale professes himself overwhelmed by the organizational precision and completeness of Hollingsworth's plans:

So plausible looked his theory, and, more than that, so practical; such an air of reasonableness had he, by patient thought, thrown over it; each segment of it was contrived to dove-tail into all the rest, with such a complicated applicability; and so ready was he with a response for every objection—that, really, so far as logic and argument went, he had the matter all his own way. (*CE*, 3:131)

Hollingsworth, like Miller, has constructed a rigid and overly articulated scheme that divides him from the world, and he requires other characters to accept his vision in its totality. This vision becomes the focus of his adoration, taking the place of significant relationships with individuals. Coverdale notes the misplaced love that Hollingsworth lavishes on his scheme:

"I have seen him, a hundred times, with a pencil and sheet of paper, sketching the façade, the side-view, or the rear of the structure, or planning the internal arrangements, as lovingly as another man might plan those of the projected home, where he meant to be happy with his wife and children" (*CE*, 3:56). Hollingsworth's plan for reform becomes the equivalent of Miller's apocalypse: it is the single event that will bring redemption to the world, and it will be imposed on human history as abruptly and brutally as the Millerite Second Coming.

Both Miller's and Hollingsworth's visions are predicated on their rejection of the manifest world and its possibilities and complications. In the character of Hollingsworth, however, Hawthorne develops a more specific analysis of the psychological motivations leading to such an orientation and amplifies the consequences of this abstract approach to renewal. Coverdale observes that Hollingsworth has "surrendered" himself to "an over-ruling purpose," which has made him "not altogether human" (*CE*, 3:70). In a key passage, Coverdale elaborates on how this obsessive sense of purpose feeds self-isolation and becomes a form of egoistic self-aggrandizement.<sup>19</sup> Such a cause

does not so much impel [its advocates] from without, nor even operate as a motive power within, but grows incorporate with all that they think and feel, and finally converts them into little else save that one principle. . . . They have no heart, no sympathy, no reason, no conscience. They will keep no friend, unless he make himself the mirror of their purpose. . . . They have an idol, to which they consecrate themselves high-priest, and deem it holy work to offer sacrifices of whatever is most precious, and never once seem to suspect—so cunning has the Devil been with them—that this false deity, in whose iron features, immitigable to all the rest of mankind, they see only benignity and love, is but a spectrum of the very priest himself, projected upon the surrounding darkness. And the higher and purer the original object, and

the more unselfishly it may have been taken up, the slighter is the probability that they can be led to recognize the process, by which godlike benevolence has been debased into all-devouring egotism. (*CE*, 3:70–71)

These reformers justify their devotion to their schemes by confusing them with God's providence. The religious terminology Coverdale uses—"convert," "idol," "high-priest," and "Devil"—suggests the degree to which Hollingsworth has imbued his plan and thus himself with divine sanction. That he is described as working against a backdrop of "surrounding darkness," however, underlines the fact that his scheme is conceived in isolation from the real aspirations of the world and only serves its creator's own needs.

William Miller, of course, never saw his apocalypse, but *Blithedale* provides an indication of the kind of satisfaction Hawthorne imagines him expecting from it. Hollingsworth ultimately seeks his own vindication, which for Miller would consist in the confirmation of his own apocalyptic timelines. In both cases, personal validation can only be achieved at the expense of the world itself. Hollingsworth, like other reformers in Hawthorne's writings, has blinded himself to the destructive nature of his initiatives. *Blithedale*, however, ends with Hollingsworth creating the conflagration that Miller had predicted: in attempting to realize his plans for global renewal, he destroys the Blithedale community and ruins the lives of all of those with whom he is involved.<sup>20</sup> This apocalyptic resolution, which Miller's theory made manifest, reveals the violence that Hawthorne saw as underlying all such progressive efforts. Upon witnessing the devastation he has caused, Hollingsworth repents, but the damage leaves him with a sense of desolation akin to Miller's at his own failure to dictate the nature of divine intercession in human affairs. For Hawthorne, this common misery is both the origin and consequence of all efforts to promote specific reform initiatives.

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## NOTES

1. For discussions of the Millerite movement, see Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1950); David L. Rowe, *Thunder and Trumpets: Millerites and Dissenting Religion in Upstate New York, 1800–1850* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985); Michael Barkun, *Crucible of the Millennium: The Burned-Over District of New York in the 1840s* (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1986); Ruth Alden Doan, *The Miller Heresy, Millennialism, and American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1987); and Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, eds., *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth-Century* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987).
2. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Letters, 1813–1843*, vol. 15 of *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, ed. Thomas Woodson et al., 23 vols. (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1984), 681. All references to Hawthorne's writings are to this edition, hereafter cited as *CE*, with volume and page number. In *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), James R. Mellow briefly remarks on Miller's importance for Hawthorne: "this disgruntled prophet makes a doomed passage through Hawthorne's fiction, like a meteor that consumes itself in the process" (235).
3. For a sustained analysis of the jeremiad and its use in early American history, see Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1978). Also see Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1975); and James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1977).
4. For a discussion of the social and religious movements to which Hawthorne is referring, see Jonathan Cook, "New Heavens, Poor Old Earth: Satirical Apocalypse in Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse*," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 39 (1993): 209–51.
5. For detailed descriptions of postmillennialism's contribution to nineteenth-century progressivism, see Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1977); and Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985). In *The Black*

- Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002), John Stauffer discusses the postmillennial dimensions of radical abolitionism in antebellum America. For specific examinations of the relationship between postmillennialism and social and scientific thought in the nineteenth century, see the following works by James H. Moorhead: *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860–1869* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1978); “Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Reassessment of Millennialism in American Religious Thought, 1800–1880,” *Journal of American History* 71 (1984): 524–42; and *World without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880–1925* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1999). See also Jean B. Quandt, “Religion and Social Thought: The Secularization of Postmillennialism,” *American Quarterly* 25 (1973): 390–409.
6. William Miller to Joseph Atwood, 31 May 1841, Jenks Collection of Adventual Materials, Aurora University, Aurora, IL.
  7. Eschatological speculation has a long and complex history in Christian thought. The relationship between early eschatological theories and nineteenth-century postmillennialism and premillennialism, however, is a matter of debate. In his seminal article “Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology,” *Church History* 28 (March 1995): 25–40, C. C. Goen asserts that Christian eschatology in early America was premillennial or amillennial and locates the beginning of the postmillennial tradition with Edwards’s *History of the Work of Redemption* (1739, published 1774). Later critics have disputed Goen’s thesis, arguing that pre-Enlightenment eschatological expectation was focused on Christ’s increasing spiritual presence in the world, and that it was not until the early nineteenth century that premillennialism and postmillennialism were codified as distinct modes of interpretation that defined religious communities. For a fuller discussion of these issues, see John F. Wilson, “History, Redemption, and the Millennium,” in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 131–41. For more on nineteenth- and twentieth-century premillennialism, see Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, Belknap Press, 1992); and Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875–1925* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979).
  8. Miller provides a detailed breakdown of this history in *Views of the Prophecies and Prophetic Chronology: Selected from Manuscripts of William Miller with a Memoir*

of *His Life* (Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842): "The Babylonians bear rule over Israel and Judah 140 years, Medes and Persians 205 years, the Grecians 174 years, and the Romans before the rise of Papacy 696 years; making in all of the four kingdoms 1215 years that the people of God were in bondage to the kings or rulers of these kingdoms. The Papacy began her time, times and a half, which lasted until 1798, being a period of 1260 years; which added to the 1215 years of the kings, before mentioned, make 2475 years; wanting 45 years to complete the 'seven times.' And then the kings of the earth must consume the papal power and reign 45 years to complete the 'seven times;' which added to 1798, when the last of the ten kings broke loose from the power of Papacy, and again exercised their kingly power, . . . ends 1843. . . . Thus this 45 years accomplishes the 'time, times, and a half,' which the kingdoms of the earth were to exercise their authority in 'scattering the power of the holy people,' being 1260 years. And Papacy, or mystical Babylon, accomplished her 'time, times, and the dividing of time,' being 1260 years, between A.D. 538 and 1798, in 'wearing out the saints of the Most High and thinking to change times and laws.' And both together make 2520 years, beginning before Christ 677, which taken out of 2520, leaves 1843 after Christ, when captive Zion will go free from all bondage, even from death, and the last enemy conquered, the remnant out of all nations saved, the New Jerusalem completed, the saints glorified" (46).

9. Charles Fitch, *Come out of Her, My People: A Sermon* (Rochester, NY: J. V. Himes, 1843), 10–11.
10. William Miller, *Evidence from Scripture and History for the Second Coming of Christ: About the Year 1843; Exhibited in a Course of Lectures* (Boston: B. B. Mussey, 1840), 289.
11. In "The Old Manse," Hawthorne refers to the stories in *Mosses from an Old Manse* as seeming like "the scattered reminiscences of a single summer" and invites the reader to listen as he reads from a manuscript (*CE*, 10:33–35). The assumption underlying this invitation is that the narrator is in fact Hawthorne and that the stories may be read as constituting internally consistent cultural criticism.
12. For discussion of Hawthorne's treatments of these issues, see Taylor Stoehr, *Hawthorne's Mad Scientists: Pseudoscience and Social Science in Nineteenth-Century Life and Letters* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978); Samuel Coale, *Mesmerism and Hawthorne: Mediums of American Romance* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1998); and Harvey L. Gable Jr., *Liquid Fire*:

*Transcendental Mysticism in the Romances of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998).

13. The question as to whether Millerism—and premillennialism in general—presupposes or encourages political passivity has received a great deal of attention. Hawthorne himself represents Miller's theory as essentially abolishing the need for secular reform. While such a conclusion would seem to be implied by Miller's descriptions of the apocalypse, many Millerites did not interpret it in this manner. Barkun notes that Miller himself was a strong reformist and that many of those joining the movement were from abolitionist and communitarian backgrounds, and while he consistently argued that the only solution to social evils was to be found in the Second Coming, he remained strongly sympathetic to reformism in general (*Crucible*, 98–101). Stauffer argues too that while Millerites would often reject institutional reform, they nonetheless remained actively committed to social causes: "Like many other radicals, they sought to 'come out' from corrupt institutions and churches, and tended to rely on individual and local (rather than national) efforts to reform society" (*Black Hearts*, 106). He also observes that, in some instances, adherents accepted Miller's prophetic dating but nonetheless expected the Millerite Second Coming to inaugurate a postmillennial golden age on earth (109).
14. For more on Hawthorne's responses to slavery and the abolition movement, see Larry J. Reynolds, "'Strangely Ajar with the Human Race': Hawthorne, Slavery and the Question of Moral Responsibility," in *Hawthorne and the Real: Bicentennial Essays*, ed. Millicent Bell (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2005), 40–69.
15. For this reason, the only reformers Hawthorne sanctions are those who work for some general improvement without imposing any theory as to how society should function. In "Procession," Hawthorne includes a parade of reformers who have truly benefited humanity, but the list restricts itself to individuals who have attempted to alleviate human suffering as directly as possible: it includes those who "have wandered about the earth, with pictures of bliss in their imagination, and with hearts that shrank sensitively from the idea of pain and woe, yet have studied all varieties of misery that human nature can endure"; philanthropists who have endeavored to help people through personal service or financial donations; and finally "men who have spent their lives in generous and holy contemplation for the human race." These are "the apostles of humanity" and "the genuine benefactors of their

- race" (*CE*, 10:216).
16. Cook has noted a number of apocalyptic analogues for the reformers' fire, including the falling stars mentioned in Matthew 24:29, Mark 13:25, and Revelation 6:13, 8:10 and 9:1, as well as the lake of fire that consumes the unjust in Revelation 20 ("New Heavens," 219).
  17. The emphasis on embracing natural and familial affections as a means to spiritual growth in "Adam and Eve" is consistent with Hawthorne's general hostility to any effort to achieve greater purity at the expense of human sympathies. In "The Shaker Bridal," for example, he views Shaker efforts to achieve saintliness with scorn: the Shakers, according to his narrator, have "overcome their natural sympathy with human frailties and affections"; their dance is an effort to "alienate the enthusiast from earth, and bear him onward to heavenly purity and bliss" (*CE*, 9:424, 419). At the story's conclusion, the character Martha Pierson dies because her "heart [can] endure the weight of its desolate agony no longer," evidence that the Shaker regimen and its artificial restrictions only lead to alienation and despair (425).
  18. For more on the state of prison reform in the antebellum period, as well as the significance of Hawthorne's treatment of this issue in *The Blithedale Romance*, see Stoehr, *Hawthorne's Mad Scientists*, 225–48. For a specific discussion of the prison in Hawthorne, see E. Shaskan Bumaz, "Fictions of the Panopticon: Prison, Utopia, and the Out-Penitent in the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne," *American Literature* 73 (2001): 121–45.
  19. The extent to which Coverdale can be viewed as a spokesperson for Hawthorne is subject to dispute. On reformism, however, Coverdale articulates positions that are consistent with those expressed in Hawthorne's short fiction; and many of Coverdale's observations come directly from Hawthorne's own journals, as Brenda Wineapple notes in *Hawthorne: A Life* (New York: Knopf, 2003), 249.
  20. Hollingsworth, of course, does not literally destroy Blithedale, and the community continues to exist for a period after the narrative has come to an end. However, for the principal characters of the novel, the ideal expressed by Blithedale is destroyed by his machinations.