Still Writing Backwards: Literature After the End of the World

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> Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it.
> Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*

The role of apocalypse in post-45 culture is a point of unusual convergence in the notoriously non-convergent currents of theories of postmodernism. The first sentence of Fredric Jameson's definitive *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* establishes a paradigm that has received little critique from scholars either of postmodernism or of apocalyptic thought: that postmodernism is equivalent to post-apocalypticism. "The last few years," Jameson writes, "have been marked by an inverted millenarianism in which premonitions of the future, catastrophic or redemptive, have been replaced by senses of the end of this or that (the end of ideology, art, or social class; the "crisis" of Leninism, social democracy, or the welfare state, etc., etc.); taken together, all of these perhaps constitute what is increasingly called Postmodernism" (1). For Jameson, what defines postmodernism is not what Frank Kermode called in 1968 "the sense of an ending" that was still to come, but the sense that an ending has already occurred, and that we have somehow outlived it. Post-apocalypse even promises to make sense of a term that has become almost impossible to define: "the frequently remarked upon awkwardness of the term "postmodern" might not be so awkward after all," Daniel Grausam claims, "naming as it does an age that introduced the possibility of there being no future from which it might be reassessed; "postmodernism" introduces the possibility that it only comes after, never before" (17). Postmodern life comes after the end of all of the thises and thats; "the explosion has already

occurred" (Baudrillard 34). The rise of post-structuralism and its polysemous perversity in the work of Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, and Julia Kristeva (among others), the unmooring of history from its role as knowable past and workable grand narrative in the theories of Linda Hutcheon, Jean–François Lyotard, and Hayden White (again, serving only as a representative sample here), and particularly the combination of these new conceptual apparatuses in the depthless world of synchronous simulacra described by Jean Baudrillard, have all worked to establish the postmodern moment as occurring at, in Francis Fukuyama's words, "the end of history." In James Berger's oft-cited summary, "[a] sense of crisis has not disappeared, but in the late twentieth century it exists together with another sense, that the conclusive catastrophe has already occurred, the crisis is over (perhaps we were not aware exactly of when it transpired), and the ceaseless activity of our time—the news with its procession of almost indistinguishable disasters—is only a complex form of stasis" (xiii).[1]

Seen from the perspective of post-apocalypticism, it is easy to see why postmodernism has been decried as politically defeatist.[2] What hope of radical political change, especially for the better, can arise within a historical moment that encompasses only "a complex form of stasis?" Yet, as Jameson goes on to say in *The Political Unconscious*, "history is what hurts" (88), and apocalyptic critics also depend on painful historical events to establish a particular kind of post-traumatic, post-apocalyptic postmodernism. This use of historical catastrophes to establish the end of history is not unproblematic. Placing "the Holocaust, for example, or Hiroshima, or American slavery, the American Civil War,

1. Teresa Heffernan and Elizabeth K. Rosen follow Berger in the easy transition from postmodern to post-apocalyptic. Grausam performs a necessary corrective by insisting on a more complex relationship between history and literary form, arguing that postmodernism's obsession with problematic endings is a result of a historical situation in which the possibility of the world ending at any time is at the forefront of the social imaginary.

2. Christopher Norris's summary of the "postmodernist line" is typical of this argument; he defines it as "the notion that truth and reality are simulated values, products of an infinitised textual 'freeplay', so that nothing could count as an effective critique of past or present ideologies and systems of representation" (38). I find this assumption that critique cannot be effective if it can itself be deconstructed problematic; I also take seriously Cindy Patton's assertion that a reading of postmodern culture as failing to put forward a political agenda "despite the cultural activism of black British and Euro-American gay movements raises important questions about what—and whose—issues count as politics" (128).

the French Revolution, the war in Vietnam and the social conflicts of the sixties" (Berger xii) next to each other, especially when they are organized around the preposition "or," suggests a lack of interest in historical specificity so extreme that these different catastrophes become first examples, and then totally interchangeable. The result of this is to transform historical trauma into structural trauma, which results in the transformation, in Dominick LaCapra's terms, of loss into absence. LaCapra makes clear the ethical imperative here: "absence is the absence of an absolute that should not itself be absolutized and fetishized such that it becomes an object of fixation and absorbs, mystifies, or downgrades the significance of particular historical losses" (702). The danger of postmodern apocalypse criticism as it currently stands is that it erases both specific historical traumas and the many ways in which people respond to ongoing social traumas (what Lauren Berlant calls the "crisis ordinary" [8]). In so doing, it represents the world at a level of abstraction that makes the development of an apocalyptic ethics impossible to imagine, excluding real life in its reification of real traumas.

The concretization of apocalypse thus becomes the task at hand—a task that ever since the Book of Revelation has been left to writing. In the tension between a pre-apocalyptic modernism in which ethical action is considered possible and a post-apocalyptic postmodernism in which it is not, Walter J. Miller's 1959 novel *A Canticle for Leibowitz* occupies a useful position. Too late to be modern and too early for postmodernism, a high-brow novel in a low-brow genre, both pre- and post-apocalyptic, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* provides a concrete imagining of a world structured at both ends by apocalyptic destruction. It is divided into three sections: 'Fiat Homo', 'Fiat Lux' and 'Fiat Voluntas Tua'. The biblical titles (Let There Be Man, Let There Be Light and Thy Will Be Done) neatly encapsulate Miller's larger concern, which is to demonstrate how religious and secular/Enlightenment principles work dialectically to produce the conditions for both what we call progress and for nuclear catastrophe. The first section is set six hundred years after a nuclear war has destroyed human civilization in the mid-twentieth century and depicts an America populated by warring tribes in which the flame of literacy is kept alive only by the church, and particularly by the Order of Leibowitz, founded in the days of the Simplification immediately after the war, when the survivors, blaming knowledge itself for the disaster, attempted to destroy all remaining traces of learning, whether written or human. Hiding in the desert to avoid the massacre, the Order were both "bookleggers",

hiding books in buried kegs, and memorizers, committing texts to memory to preserve some kind of cultural memory. The second section is set six hundred years after this, at the dawn of a new Renaissance when secular learning seems poised to develop again along with the rise of the city-state. The third section, six hundred years later again, features the church almost completely sidelined by a military-industrial state locked into a binary global conflict with another superpower; the novel ends with a second nuclear apocalypse, escaped by some members of the Order who flee the planet on a spaceship bearing with them the Memorabilia, the precious written archive of the Church.

The novel has frequently been read as an exercise in historical pessimism, the message being, according to most critics, that if you don't learn from history you are condemned to repeat it, but equally, if you do learn from history—and if you have martyrs and countless generations of monks who lived and died working to ensure that you can learn from it—you are condemned to repeat it as well. Joan Baum encapsulates this view neatly when she describes the marketing of the novel as "a prophetic allegory about the ritual rise and fall of man" (52). The third section opens with an address from time itself that sums up this view:

> Generation, regeneration, again, again, as in a ritual, with blood-stained vestments and nail-torn hands, children of Merlin, chasing a gleam. Children too of Eve, forever building Edens—and kicking them apart in beserk fury because somehow it isn't the same. (AGH! AGH! AGH!—an idiot screams his mindless anguish amid the rubble…) (244)

3. In Althusser's reading of Marx, "the different aspects of the social formation are not related as in Hegel's dialectic of consciousness… as phenomena and essence, each has its precise influence on the complete totality… Thus base and superstructure (q.v.) must not be conceived as vulgar Marxism conceives them, as essence and phenomenon, the State and ideology are not mere expressions of the economy, they are autonomous within a structured whole" (251).

4. He makes his earliest appearance in literature in 1228, in Roger of Wendover's *Flores Historiam* (Baron 177).

These readings place *Canticle* firmly on the side of post-apocalypse, where any change is perceived as part of a complex stasis.

The end of history, in Fukuyama's terms at least, generally means the end of dialectics—which a reading of *Canticle* as a rehearsal of human history as ordained to repeat itself would support. Dialectics do not fit well with historical determinism, however; these days, even Marxists define such a view as 'vulgar'.[3] Miller's insistence on the complex interplay of forces that are generally considered to be diametrically opposed to each other suggests that the inevitable end of history is not his primary focus here. As David J. Tietge writes: "Miller, neither a staunch advocate of blind faith nor a champion of mindless technological development, reminds us that the inflexible, self-satisfied, and unscrupulous defense of any knowledge system will tear down the fabric of civilization and return us to a state of nature—one that is solitary, nasty, brutish, and short" (693). It is not the existence or non-existence of opposing forces that will bring about the end of history or of the world, but an insistence that they are not complex: that we have a mastery over them, that we can see how they operate, that we stand outside and above them and watch history play out like a game of toy soldiers. In *Canticle*, even though human history is represented from the perspective of what Wai Chee Dimock calls "deep time," the aggrandizement of the human perspective that leads to the apocalyptic re-ending of the world is subtly yet continually challenged. It is by this means that Miller complicates the terms by which we understand progress, and gestures towards an apocalyptic ethics.

The first aspect of the text that serves this function is the figure of the Wandering Jew. The Wandering Jew has a long literary history as well as embodying a superhuman time frame; his longevity as a figure is matched only by the length of time in which he has been represented in literature.[4] He is usually presented as a tragic figure of human hubris punished by divine intervention (having mocked Christ on the cross he is doomed to wander the earth until the second coming), but Miller establishes him as part of a subset of literature that resists this reading. In modernity, the Wandering Jew appears as part of Guillaume Apollinaire's cast of figures who complicate the drive of Enlightenment teleology in the short story collection *The Heresiarch and Co.* In Apollinaire's "The Wandering Jew" the synchronic cosmopolitanism of the narrator's world view, summed up neatly in the first two lines ("In March, 1902, I was in Prague./I had arrived there from Dresden" [1]), becomes the apocalyptically structured prophecy of an old Jew by the last lines of the story, in which this Jew,

"with the eyes of a prophet", sees Laquedem fall ill and be carried away and announces "[that] is a Jew. He is going to die" (12). Suddenly, a vastly different time frame breaks into the narrative that has been structured around a single day and night: Laquedem will die, one day, but not until the return of Christ and the end of the world.

Here, as in *Canticle*, the figure of the immortal traveler introduces a new model of temporality and interpretation that challenges the prevailing phenomenology. Miller's Wandering Jew (who here is named Benjamin), like Apollinaire's, is by no means "a pale adventurer, haunted with remorse" (Apollinaire 11). Sprightly despite his age, he alternately spends time as a traveler and as a hermit, keeping his eyes open for new messiahs, dismissing powerful figures scornfully if they don't turn out to be the One and occasionally chasing young priests with pointy sticks. He is the first thing we see in the novel and the motor for its plot; the first section begins with the sentence "Brother Francis Gerard of Utah might never have discovered the blessed documents, had it not been for the pilgrim with girded loins who appeared during that young novice's Lenten fast in the desert" (3). The "blessed documents" are fragments of text written by Saint Leibowitz when he was still only an engineer, which Francis finds in a buried fallout shelter that Benjamin directs him to, and which eventually provide the means by which nuclear technology is redeveloped. While this encounter has been read as kickstarting men's inevitable drive to extinction (Hillier 170–3), such a reading ignores the strangeness of so explicitly opening the novel in the subjunctive mood: if this one thing had not happened, the plot of this novel would not have taken place. While Apollinaire establishes a modern, instrumentalized or timetable-like temporality that he then explodes through the figure of the Wandering Jew at the end of the story, Miller opens with this gambit, drawing our attention to the many other ways that history could have developed and thus bringing into the text at least the ghosts or shadows of unfulfilled histories from the start. While Miller's future history does play out as a repeat of past history, opening the novel in this way suggests that this is not inevitable, that other paths, other developments, are possible.

Benjamin is the only character in the novel to appear in all three sections, meaning that the alternative histories that hover around him continue to haunt the text at every stage in the modernization process. And his longevity is used not only as a challenge to the temporality of the modern, as in Apollinaire, but also to its model of subjectivity and its consequent construction of ethics and responsibility. Throughout the

novel we encounter religious figures, usually the abbots of the Order, who struggle at moments of great social change with the ethics of involvement in the secular or political world, who try to work out what their role should be in promoting or withholding the spread of knowledge and the development of science and technology. In the second section we see Abbot Dom Paulo negotiating with the Galileo-esque figure of Thon Taddeo, who wishes to gain access to the knowledge held by the Order of Leibowitz. Taddeo argues that the growth of knowledge is a good in itself; Dom Paulo suspects that this knowledge will always be used in political power struggles yet cannot in conscience prevent the spread of it, since the promotion of knowledge is the purpose of his order. Many, many pages are spent on the monk's moral dilemma, but in the middle of the section we are offered a different model of responsibility through the figure of Benjamin. Dom Paulo does not really believe that Benjamin is immortal, but in trying to understand his peculiar sense of global responsibility and the way in which he understands his own existence in time, the Abbot offers the following interpretation:

> The Jewish community was thinly scattered in these times. Benjamin had perhaps outlived his children, or become an outcast. Such an old Israelite might wonder for years without encountering others of his people. Perhaps in his loneliness he had acquired the silent conviction that he was *the last*, the one, the only. And, being the last, he ceased to be Benjamin, becoming Israel. And upon his heart had settled the history of five thousand years, no longer remote, but become as the history of his own lifetime.
> His 'I' was the converse of the imperial 'We.' (169)

Being able to step outside of teleological time, to take upon himself in an appropriately Benjaminian touch the history of five thousand years, undoes for Benjamin the model of the individualized subject upon which modernity is also predicated. Michael Alan Bennett reads this scene as redefining responsibility to include others, with Benjamin saying that "each individual man is responsible, not only for his own actions, but for the actions of all men" (487). Yet Benjamin is not describing a responsibility that he as an empowered individualized subject decides to take up. Responsibility here is not a personal dilemma—how can I act so that I feel right about myself—but a burden, something that must be carried because, as Benjamin says, "it was pressed upon me by others… should I refuse to take it?" (169). It does not require a decision but an endurance, an endurance that is required

even though it is also impossible: "I've known all along that I can't carry it," Benjamin says, "ever since He called me forth again" (171). The persistence of this particular archaic figure at the birth of modernity not only renders more complex and intertwined the binaries through which the world is understood, but also offers a different way of being, one in which time can collapse and expand apocalyptically within a single figure, offering an alternative way of being both temporally and socially.

The question of how to endure relates to the other representation of superhuman longevity in the novel: the survival of the archive. The figure of Benjamin is bound up with the longevity of text from the start: the opening description of his approach from afar describes him as "[an] iota of black caught in a shimmering haze of heat" (3), which, as Lewis Fried argues, is strongly reminiscent of Matthew 5:18, where Jesus says as part of the Sermon on the Mount that "until the sky and earth are gone, not one iota or one end of a letter must go from the law, until all is done" (Fried 369). The written law and Benjamin are the two things that will last until the apocalypse—the real, final one, not the not-quite-total models we see here where at least some things survive. This partial survival reflects Derrida's description of the destruction of the literary archive in the event of nuclear war: the "uniqueness of nuclear war," he writes, lies in "the possibility of an irreversible destruction, leaving no traces, of the juridico-literary archive—that is, total destruction of the basis of literature and criticism. Not necessarily the destruction of humanity, of the human habitat, nor even of other discourses (arts or sciences), nor even of poetry or the epic", but of the social structures that make literature readable as literature ("No Apocalypse" 26). This survival without meaning becomes the primary engagement with text in *A Canticle For Leibowitz*, as both monks and secular scientists encounter scraps of text that they have no way of understanding, and preserve only in the hope that one day they will become comprehensible. In one of the few moments of the novel not narrated through a focalizer, the omniscient narrator describes this new epistemology:

> ... the knowledge they saved was useless...[it] was empty of content, its subject matter long since gone. Still, such knowledge had a symbolic structure that was peculiar to itself, and at least the symbol-interplay could be observed. To observe the way a knowledge-system is knit together is to learn at least a minimum of knowledge-of-knowledge, until someday—someday, or some century—an Integrator would come, and things would be fitted together again. (65)

If knowledge is the thing that leads this future world back towards a repeated nuclear catastrophe, it is worth taking a closer look at this passage to see exactly where the problem starts. The first half of the process—the observation of symbol-interplay—seems harmless: the individuality of the structure is recognized and some things are learned from it without trying to force it to be anything else. The trouble comes with the arrival of the Integrator—and it is no coincidence that this word, in a novel that is in many ways about Church history, sounds so much like Inquisitor, or its secular equivalent, Interrogator. To fit things together is also to force them into a structure that they are not currently in, an action that suggests a strongly individualized and instrumentalizing approach that we might take as the epistemological equivalent of Dom Paulo's individualistic view of ethical responsibility.

Like the Wandering Jew, however, the texts within this text won't stay put. They travel and proliferate and resist interpretation, working as what Bruno Latour would call "nonhuman actors." As Brian Massumi puts it in his description of a football game, "the catalytic object-sign may be called a part-subject... The ball moves the players. *The player is the object of the ball*" (75–6 emphasis in original). They have easily the same amount of agency as human subjects do: the right text in the right place at the right time can change the course of history, as the circuit diagram discovered by Brother Francis does. The blueprint travels to New Rome, gets copied, lost and found, and eventually becomes the basis for the renascence of scientific learning and the redevelopment of nuclear weapons. In the encounter between Brother Francis and the circuit diagram, the level of reverence displayed by the monk and his order, the years spent in the study and recopying of it, blur the boundaries between subject and object as described by Massumi. If the rebirth of technological civilization is predicated on the existence of the blueprint, is humanity the driving force behind progress, or is it the blueprint? It is, at the very least, a significant nonhuman actor in the novel, fulfilling Rita Felski's definition of objects that "modify states of affairs... are participants in chains of events... shape outcomes and influence actions" (583).

The blueprint does not, however (and *contra* Hillier's reading), bring with it an inevitable path to destruction. The circuit diagram is found with a shopping list, indicating the potential for everyday life to counter the time of militarized historical determinism; it also, in Brother Francis's illuminated copy of it, kickstarts the rediscovery of art. As with the figure of Benjamin, the blueprint brings with it alternative histories that might

have played out if humanity had taken a different approach. The level of power that is given to texts contrasts strongly with that given to humans: much of both the comedy and the drama of the book comes from human attempts to interpret texts that remain inscrutable. As much as the characters might try—and sometimes succeed—to position themselves as impermeable subjects who use texts only as objects, these attempts fail repeatedly in the face of the opacity of the texts themselves. When Brother Francis finds the blueprint along with the shopping list, both are carefully preserved as the monks have no way of determining which is important and which quotidian. One of the more marvelous qualities of the text is the way in which, despite creating a realistic post-apocalyptic world, Miller creates within this world a system in which, as Derrida prophesied, language is divorced from its referent. This does not only work explicitly, as in the passage quoted above, but structurally in the way that memory works in the individual consciousnesses that we see. As David Seed points out, symbols and motifs proliferate throughout the novel, appearing in all three sections, with the result that when "[characters]... ask themselves 'where have I seen that before?' 'Before' does not refer to any individual memory but rather signals a condition of the text itself, which is packed with the traces of earlier cultural periods or of earlier phases in its own unfolding" (260). The possibility of a knowledge that is not forced into an instrumentalized shape is suggested in the inherent resistance of texts as nonhuman actors, and of language itself, to conform to the wishes of human epistemologies. Language that echoes across millennia is not a collective memory, per se, but a textual one; again, a transfer of responsibility away from the individual consciousness to something that is not related to an instrumentalized subjectivity. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* thus moves away from an understanding of ethics as something that can be performed towards an apocalyptic ethics that decenters the human decision as the locus of ethical responsibility. The Wandering Jew, non-interpretative ways of encountering knowledge systems, and texts as non-human actors are all used as challenges to the model of individualized subjectivity that, in its insistence on its own importance, inevitably seems to lead to its own destruction.

In closing, I would like to look at the moments that represent a move away from this anthropocentric view, where literature does what other discourses cannot: where it objectively describes things that no human has seen. These non-focalized moments occur at the end of each section. At the end of the first section, Brother Francis is killed by bandits and

the focalization shifts to the buzzards who eat him; the passing of time is measured not in human terms but in those of the carnivorous birds who "laid their eggs in season and lovingly fed their young. Earth had nourished them for centuries. She would nourish them for centuries more" (116). As human civilization develops, so does that of the species who live off of its death. At the end of the second section, the focalization moves back to the buzzards, who "laid their eggs in season and lovingly fed their young… searching for the fulfillment of that destiny which was theirs according to the plan of Nature. Their philosophers demonstrated by unaided reason alone that the Supreme Cathartes aura regnans had created the world especially for buzzards" (238–9). Seed argues that "[to] conclude with other natural creatures draws attention to mankind as a species uniquely cursed with a death wish" (267), but his interpretation of this death wish as Enlightenment rationalism does not do justice to the potential power of these strange ending moments, where suddenly we see no human consciousness within the text, only buzzards eating the bodies of the people we have just been focalizing through. The novel ends with a particularly striking passage:

> A wind came across the ocean, sweeping with it a pall of fine white ash. The ash fell into the sea and into the breakers. The breakers washed dead shrimp ashore with the driftwood. Then they washed up the whiting. The shark swam out to his deepest waters and brooded in the old clean currents. He was very hungry that season. (334)

Narration without focalization, the omniscient third person narrator, does not have a very good reputation, being generally considered as a refusal of the merry dialogism that turns a good book into a good party—or a good political gesture that allows multiple voices to speak.[5] In this context, however, when it has been set up by so many things that refuse the very notion of having a single voice to speak with, third person narration seems more inclusive than exclusive. Here we have the shark's hunger, if not his thoughts; the presence of global ecologies in the tides of the ocean; and some kind of judgment, if not a human one, in describing the shark's currents as "old" and "clean." What we do not have is a human voice that claims to make sense of these things, in terms of history, progress or of anything else. It also, perhaps, points out the deficiencies of the modern individual subject that lays such claims to being the only option.

But what could possibly be ethical, we might ask, about zooming out dispassionately at the moment of death, either of the individual or of the species? Perhaps we can find an answer in the consummate theorist of mass death, Theodor Adorno, who wrote in the chapter from *Negative Dialectics* "After Auschwitz" that "[people], of course, are spellbound without exception, and none of them are capable of love, which is why everyone feels loved too little. But the spectator's posture simultaneously expresses doubt that this could be all—when the individual, so relevant to himself in his delusion, still has nothing but that poor and emotionally animal-like ephemerality" (363). Detachment from the world, a refusal to commit to it emotionally and even to be the kind of subject who could be said to have emotions can serve as a rejection of enchantment, a refusal to take part in the kind of history and the kind of subjectivity that, seemingly inevitably, leads to genocide or to nuclear war. Modeling a different kind of subjectivity, just as modeling a different kind of thought, is so difficult as to be next to impossible, and as Adorno points out in *Minima Moralia* is an apocalyptic gesture, since "[the] only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption" (247). Even Adorno will admit that such a standpoint is impossible to achieve in this life, and perhaps literature is the only place where such an attempt might take place: not because through art we can picture ourselves succeeding but because art can take us right to the point where imagination fails and an apocalyptic ethics might begin. As Massumi writes: "a political knowledge-practice that takes an inclusive, nonjudgmental approach to tending

5. This concept comes, of course, from Bakhtin; even theorists such as Stallybrass and White who critique Bakhtin's arguments about the political efficacy of the carnivalesque do not question the assumption that more voices are always better than fewer.

belonging-together in an intense, affectively engaged way is an ethics—as opposed to a morality. Political ecology is an amoral collective ethics. Ethics is a tending of coming-together, a *caring for* belonging as such" (255 emphasis in original). Apocalyptic literature takes us past the end of morality, which is bound up in the habits of being of a world that has ended. If morality is based on the concept of the individual decision, apocalyptic literature can take us beyond the individual to a space where caring for being and being-together, rather than individual responsibility, is the focus of ethics, because the alternative lies in not being-together, which in ecological terms means not being at all.

A Canticle for Leibowitz suggests that leaving behind a rigid subject formation in favor of a non-reified distinction between subject and object—an activity that lies at the heart of postmodernism in its commitment to the repeal of the Grand Narrative model of history, the decentering of the subject, and the reimagining of the world as non-anthropocentric—may be the only way to find a future that is not foreclosed. Perhaps what Miller's apocalyptic text is telling us, after all, is that the end of everything might just mean the end of everything we can imagine—and only then, finally, will we be in a position to start again.

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ABSTRACT

This article challenges the conflation in late twentieth-century culture of postmodernism with post-apocalypticism, arguing that the central features of postmodernism—the repeal of the Grand Narrative model of history, the decentering of the subject, and the reimagining of the world as non-anthropocentric—are also central to an ethics of apocalypse that seeks to avoid actual extinction even as it imaginatively engages with it. Through a reading of Walter J. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, it argues that through literature we can encounter the apocalypse not as the promised end to the project of modernity but as a way of countering modernity's more destructive tendencies.

BIOGRAPHY

Jessica Hurley (1983) holds a BA (Hons) from the University of Oxford and a MA from the University of Sussex. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania, where her research focuses on the affective life of apocalypse in the nuclear age.