COMPETING FICTIONS: THE USES OF CHRISTIAN APOCALYPTIC IMAGERY
IN CONTEMPORARY POPULAR FICTIONAL WORKS

PART TWO: ANTI-APOCALYPTIC FICTIONS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Two forms of fiction using Christian apocalyptic imagery have recently entered mainstream popular culture. The first form I will refer to as premillennialist apocalyptic fiction. This form is usually in the style of the contemporary political thriller or techno-thriller. Its essence is that follows the outlines of the modern premillennialist "rooster" [1] script. The second form, which I will refer to as anti-apocalyptic fiction, has emerged from various precedents in the science fiction and fantasy genres and uses Christian apocalyptic imagery to question the fundamentals of the premillennialist vision.

The emergence of these forms is indicative of changes within society and publishing affecting the receptiveness to millennial themes in fiction and changes in millennial concerns as we approached the years 2000-2001. The contrasts among these forms and the interpretive works that spawned them illustrate the broader structural distinctions among the varieties of theological and fictional (specifically science fiction/fantasy and political or techno-thriller) modes of discourse. Both forms have the potential either to mitigate millennial tension or, in their more extreme forms and in confrontation with each other, to heighten such tension.

Apocalyptic fiction using Christian imagery almost by definition follows certain Christian assumptions, regardless of whether the target audience is premillennialist or even Christian. The desirability of assisting Good in the ultimate destruction of Evil and the relinquishing of human destiny to the Good are typically not questioned. Questioning these assumptions is in itself regarded as blasphemous (not only

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[1] Term taken from the Center for Millennial Studies lexicon. See www.mille.org/welcome/logo.html.

by premillennialists), and therefore risky for publishers, filmmakers etc. who want to reach a mass audience.

It is therefore surprising that various that in current popular fictional representations of the apocalypse using Christian imagery and scenarios and accepting certain Christian, even premillennialist evangelical Christian, premises there has emerged a different pattern. Instead of depicting the horror of the (temporary) triumph of evil or the ecstasy of the millennial aftermath, these "anti-rooster" representations stress the undesirability and avoidability of the apocalyptic conflict from a human perspective, and oppose (usually with success) human interests against both angelic and demonic plans for such a conflict. Some had cloaked this pattern in allegory, while others have been quite explicit. Examples are found in all the major (and some minor) media: in books (*Good Omens*), on television (*Babylon 5*), in film (*Dogma*, in part) and in comic books (DC's Vertigo line).

I have divided consideration of these new fictional genre forms into two parts, each a self-contained paper. The first part[2] (also published in this issue of the *Journal of Millennial Studies*) outlines a number of examples of premillennialist apocalyptic fiction and describes the usual conventions and recurring themes and patterns of such fiction. This Part Two describes the anti-apocalyptic works that have recently emerged and continued to be planned.

After defining the central common elements of the anti-apocalyptic genre (and excluding conspiracy and apocalyptic avoidance works), this paper will examine the

relevant social, artistic and scholarly sources of anti-apocalyptic thought in contemporary

American culture. This paper then goes on to examine how the science fiction and

fantasy genres have become particularly adaptable to this anti-apocalyptic strain, despite

the usual role of science fiction as our premier secular apocalyptic literature. This paper

will then consider both early approximations and complete examples of anti-apocalyptic

fiction, elaborating on the common themes of anti-apocalyptic fiction and contrasting

their treatment in premillennialist apocalyptic fiction. Finally, we will examine the

implications of this anti-apocalyptic use of apocalyptic images for millennialism in the

coming years and speculate on the future of the anti-apocalyptic genre.

II. FORMATION OF A GENRE

      A. Further Description of the Anti-Apocalyptic Genre

          Because the anti-apocalyptic genre is not defined by an external

nonfictional script in the same way that premillennialist apocalyptic fiction is, the

parameters of the genre require further elaboration. I am limiting my discussion to works

which include the following elements:

          1. The work accepts the reality of a central element of the Christian

apocalyptic account: a immanent conflict between super-human forces for the fate of

humanity, as variously defined (*e.g.*, in *Babylon 5*, all sentient beings in the galaxy).

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[2] Thomas M. Doyle, Competing Fictions: The Uses of Christian Apocalyptic Imagery in
Contemporary Popular Fictional Works. Part One: Premillennialist Apocalyptic
Fictions.

2.   The super-human forces may be described as Good versus Evil, heaven versus hell or angels versus demons, or presented in a fairly obvious allegory to one of the above dualisms (*e.g.*, in *Babylon 5*, aliens who look like angels and demons).

3.   The victor, or at least the protagonist, of the anti-apocalyptic genre is neither of the super-human forces, but humanity as variously defined, thus subverting another central element of the Christian account (the triumph of Good) without resorting to a simple inversion (the triumph of Evil).

One set of works that I have generally excluded from my delineation of the anti-apocalyptic fiction genre are conspiracy works such as the television shows *X-Files* and *Millennium* or even the wild *Illuminatus! Trilogy*.[3] Conspiracy works, like horror works generally, have more in common with the spirit of premillennialist fiction than the usual science fiction work. Conspiracy works typically engage in their own form of apocalyptic othering, and a final conflict between Good and Evil (even if on a smaller than scale) is inevitable.

I have also generally excluded from my definition apocalyptic avoidance works. These works do not deny the validity of the apocalyptic conflict; instead, they only say "not yet." They also typically do not place humanity as a third party in a conflict between super-human forces. Of the numerous examples of this form of conditional apocalypticism,[4] the James Bond films are particularly well known. Horror films which uses some Christian apocalyptic elements such as the 1978 film *The Chosen*[5] (in which

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[3] Robert J. Shea and Robert Anton Wilson, *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*, (New York: Dell, 1975).
[4] See discussion of Wojcik's work below.
[5] Not the film based on the Chaim Potok book.

Kirk Douglas must kill his own Antichrist son to save the world) are also typically

apocalypse avoidance works.

B. Why Anti-Apocalyptic Fiction?

As discussed below, science fiction and fantasy writers have been using

Christian imagery, sometimes for subversive purposes, for decades. Why has anti-

apocalyptic fiction only emerged into popular culture in the last decade? As with

premillennialist apocalyptic fiction, there may have been inhibitions in the publishing of

anti-apocalyptic fiction. For anti-apocalyptic fiction, the primary inhibition may have

been simple: the particularly blasphemous nature of the project. Telling Heaven and Hell

to take a hike, whether literally as in the book *Good Omens* or allegorically as in *Babylon

5*, is more culturally explosive than the usual use of Christian imagery in science fiction

(though, as noted below, blasphemy can sometimes boost sales). Another inhibition may

have been science fiction and its action-oriented audience are often more at home with an

apocalyptic view.

More importantly, a cultural demand for anti-apocalyptic fiction sufficient

to overcome these inhibitions may have arisen only in the last decade. I will now explore

some possible causes of this demand.

1. Social Causes.

The social causes of the emergence of these fictional works (*i.e.*, origin of

changes in the implied audience) may be multivalent. The mainstream cultural

perspective on current millennial activity maybe that anyone taking the millennium too

seriously was the real Y2K problem, not actual intervention by supernatural agency or

even a computer crisis. The end of the cold war and the accompanying mistrust of other

simple dualisms, growing globalism and global unity, good economic times – all these

factors and others may be undermining the millennial impulse and calling for a response

to the omnipresence of premillennial themes (including themes in the recent fiction

analyzed in Part One) and the over-hyped, over-sold and over-apocalypticised millennial

years. The calm response to the New Year's 2000 celebrations globally testifies to the

mitigation of the millennial impulse.[6]

        However, the anti-apocalyptic works may also be seen as a redirection

rather than repression of the millennial impulse. In traditional millennial movements, the

participants frequently directed their hostility against the clerics and the rich.[7] In modern

times, anti-apocalyptic fiction may express a transference of such millenarian hostility

towards authoritarian hierarchy generally through the metaphor of supernatural hierarchy.

Alternatively, traditional millennialism has sometimes manifested itself as being anti-

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[6] At least one author anticipated the paucity of millennial response for the near future:

> Several complex developments, which can be briefly identified, have
> converged to undermine the millennial impulse: the settlement of the cold
> war has removed from active political consciousness all serious concerns
> about the apocalyptic dangers of a war fought with nuclear weapons . . . ;
> the related disappearance of serious ideological and geopolitical conflict
> from the global setting left the way open for the ascendancy of
> consumerist preoccupations with economics growth and the expansion of
> world trade, an essentially materialist calculus; the imposing discipline of
> global capital has induced even stronger states to transfer significant
> amounts of sovereignty over economic policy to international institutions
> and arrangements (NAFTA, Maastricht, World Trade Organization) . . . .

Richard Falk, The Paucity of the Millennial Moment: The Case of Nuclearism in *The Year 2000: Essays on the End*, Charles B. Strozier and Michael Flynn, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 169-170. Interestingly, some of the few exceptions to his analysis have been the recent and surprisingly aggressive protests against such "international institutions and arrangements."

conflict, as with the Peace of God movement in the generations around the year 1000.[8]

The anti-apocalyptic works may be an extension of similar pacifistic hopes in the period

around 2000-2001. Anti-apocalyptic fiction may be quite millennial.

So, depending on the perspective, we either have creator desired/consumer

demanded visions of a future or present world (a) where we face down the millennial

impulses that will bring about our destruction or (b) where such millennial impulses are

fulfilled in the ultimate anti-authoritarian or pacifist fashion. If there is a specific

"implied audience" for this genre, it is probably the same audience of cynical irreligious

youth that Lindsey was initially addressing in *The Late Great Planet Earth*.[9] But this

newer generation seems to lack the need for absolute certainties, and be more distrustful

of absolutes generally.

2. Post-Modernism, Blasphemy and Evil.

Consumers are increasingly consciousness of what is loosely termed a

post-modern perspective on narrative, both fictional and historical. In fiction, popular

audiences have expressed a preference for stories that portray cultural icons in surprising

ways (for instance, a sympathetic biography of the Wicked Witch of the West).

Furthermore, even the average consumer may have at least some understanding not only

that a narrow view of humankind's story and its end may create a self-fulfilling prophecy,

but also that story of the end may be susceptible to a rewrite. Audiences are ready for an

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[7] See Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 80-81, 98.

[8] See Thomas Head and Richard Landes, Introduction, in *The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around the Year 1000*, Thomas Head and Richard Landes, ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

apocalypse which has been re-rendered in a playful postmodern fashion for shear surprise and delight.

A connected trend to the willingness of audiences and authors to play with traditional narratives is the penchant for blasphemy in today's market. A whole PEN seminar was devoted to the subject of blasphemy in today's America.[10] Though authors may have once shrunk from blasphemous projects, they are now more willing not only to engage in religious blasphemy, but deal with traditionally forbidden topics generally. Entertainment which is controversial in this fashion (for example, the movie version of *The Last Temptation of Christ*), is guaranteed at least some notoriety and sales.

Another set of changes in cultural taste related to the post-Cold War distrust of simple dualisms might be abbreviated as "sympathy for the devil." American culture has increasingly accepted eastern religious and other alternative religious views of Evil: that Evil is simply illusion, that Evil is the necessary complement of Good or that Evil is even the distant lover of Good.[11] These views find support in the emergence of gnostic themes in popular movies such as *The Truman Show* and *The Matrix*. This modern gnosticism views the conventional ideas of both Good and Evil as part of the illusory world to be transcended on our way towards the divine. Our culture of self-love

[9] See Stephen D. O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 143-44.

[10] Margo Jefferson, Critics Notebook: Writing About Race, Walking on Eggshells, *New York Times*, June 10, 1999: B1.

[11] The *Ramayana* is one serious presentation of these ideas (see William Buck, *Ramayana* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), 349-351), but an amusing variation of this theme appeared in one issue of the comic strip "Rhymes with Orange": an angel and devil couple explain that they have moved to Purgatory to balance their commutes. Hilary Price, Rhymes with Orange, *Boston Globe*, June 15, 1999: E10.

may encourage such beliefs.[12] Also, the rebellious or even evil anti-hero of which

Milton's Satan is perhaps the archetype has become almost a signature of American

popular culture. Perhaps American culture may be losing its sense of Evil altogether. As

Bernard McGinn notes, "some cultural critics have wondered how much of a sense of evil

remains in advanced technological societies, especially the United States," which will

therefore "have a hard job making sense of Antichrist, or any representative of pure

evil."[13]

        3. Millennial Nonfiction Writers and Scholars and Anti-Apocalyptic
        Views.

Some of the preparation of the anti-apocalyptic market has come from the

top down, rather than the bottom up. As we approached the years 2000-2001, more and

more millennial scholars authored works intended for popular audiences. Several writers

on millennialism have called for new visions to supplant violent millennialism. Though

their perspectives differ, their visions for a better form of millennial thinking bear certain

similarities.

Raymond Bulman, a professor of theology at St. John's University,

analyses with disapproval both millennial beliefs which provoke either violent reaction or

fatalistic acceptance and the skeptical belief that the year 2000 is just another year. He

also attempts a reconciliation between the literalist and symbolic interpretations of the

millennium by reference to the "Age of the Spirit" envisioned by Joachim of Fiore, an

approach taken up by the TV series *Babylon 5*, as discussed below. Bulman views the

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[12] See Paul Zweig, *The Heresy of Self-Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980).

year 2000 as presenting an opportunity to move towards a new spiritual vision by

improving race relations and dialogue in areas of local and global tension and by

responding to the call to spiritual community.[14]

Moving away from a spiritual view, Jack Blake's *Comes the Millennium*[15]

argues from a rationalist and humanist perspective against apocalyptic thinking. Several

other authors seem to bridge the spiritual and skeptical realms. In *Dreams of Millennium*,

Mark Kingwell hopes for a transcendence within each individual of both apocalyptic fear

and cold skepticism.[16] Similarly, Robert Bosnak poses the following questions:

> How do we move beyond our Judeo-Christian vision of the end that is
> linked to redemption and messianic vengeance? How is this battle
> between good and evil pitted against our hope for a better world? How
> can we, as individuals, deal with the tension between the real destruction
> of the world and our imagination of it?[17]

In discussing the modes of interpreting the apocalypse, Stephen O'Leary

implicitly argues for a comic versus a tragic frame of interpretation. His version of the

comic frame sounds very much like the perspective of anti-apocalyptic fiction.

> The fully comic interpretation of the Apocalypse, however, would
> not merely postpone the End. Rather, it would make the End contingent
> upon human choice, would assign to humanity the task of ushering in the
> millennium. To be consistently comic, this interpretation would address
> the *topos* of evil by defining it in terms of ignorance and foolishness
> (which can be overcome by exposure, education, and progress) rather than

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[13] Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), xiii.

[14] See Raymond E. Bulman, *The Lure of the Millennium: The Year 2000 and Beyond* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

[15] New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

[16] Mark Kingwell, *Dreams of Millennium: Report from a Culture on the Brink* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1997), 351.

[17] Robert Bosnak, Introduction: Re-Imagining the End of the World in *Facing Apocalypse*, Valerie Andrews, Robert Bosnak and Karen Walter Goodwin, ed. (Dallas: Spring Publications, 1987), 1-2.

exclusively in terms of sin and guilt that require blood expiation. [cite omitted] Such an understanding of apocalyptic fulfillment as a product of human action rather than divine predestination would seem to be difficult to sustain in the face of the apparent historical pessimism of the Apocalypse itself; but it nevertheless appears in American history as the doctrine of "postmillennialism."[18]

Indeed, anti-apocalyptic fiction often goes one step further and is also comic in the sense of being humorous.

Lee Quinby is more against millennialism as such than her fellow scholars. She believes that "All three forms of expression, literature, film and television, along with print news media, from tabloid to serious journalism, provide a steady diet of apocalyptic imagery and belief, in catastrophic and utopian forms."[19] She searches for conflicting messages in literature, such as the play *Angels in America*, to encourage a sense of millennial skepticism which "specifically questions truth claims that are authorized through faith alone, whether its source of authority derives from the divine, the natural and social sciences and the humanities, or the legal system."[20] She believes that such a sense of skepticism in everyday life may lead to a "commitment to the practice of freedom."[21]

Daniel Wojcik distinguishes between conditional and unconditional apocalypticism, with a natural bias towards the conditional form.[22] These categories are readily applicable to the fictional forms considered in Parts One and Two. Premillennial

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[18] O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 84. O'Leary provides and examination of apocalypse as rhetoric which has been extremely helpful for the analysis in Parts One and Two of my paper.
[19] Lee Quinby, *Millennial Seduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 9.
[20] Quinby, *Millennial Seduction*, 8.
[21] Quinby, *Millennial Seduction*, 151.

apocalyptic fiction is typically unconditionally apocalyptic: the apocalypse is foreordained and not avoidable or delayable by human action. The apocalypse in anti-apocalyptic fiction is clearly (at most) conditional and permanently avoidable through human action.

Finally, there is evidence of a distaste for focusing on imminent apocalypse even among writers whose beliefs are premillennialist. For instance, pair of articles in the magazine *Charisma* condemned the alarmist responses over the Y2K bug specifically and the years 2000-2001 generally as being in effect unchristian.[23]

Whether or not any of these authors influenced any of the fictional works discussed in this paper, it is still interesting to see that they expressed in a nonfictional context a similar longing to that expressed in the anti-apocalyptic genre.

C. Religious and Apocalyptic Imagery in the Science Fiction and Fantasy Genres

The fictional categories of science fiction and fantasy both have demonstrated great flexibility with alternative visions of the world and have shown an artistic facility with blasphemy. The ability of science fiction to re-envision the world is based on several of its intrinsic qualities. Foremost of these qualities is that science fiction is self-understood as dealing with new things.[24] Science fiction is also ideologically argumentative even when it is conservative nigh fascist, and even old ideas become new in the new contexts postulated by science fiction.

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[22] Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 209-10.
[23] See Richard Abanes, Why We Must Reject Millennium Madness, *Charisma and Christian Life*, July 1999 Vol. 24, 12 p. 40; Jim Lafoon, Why I'm Not Afraid of Y2K, *Charisma and Christian Life*, July 1999 Vol. 24, 12 p. 48.

Science fiction is also the premier secular apocalyptic literature, its doomsday visions even inspiring religious writers, as discussed in Part One. The build-up of the science fiction apocalyptic scenario is typically the trigger for a new thing, a new evolution in man's role, a new age. What need then did this form have of the literal religious apocalyptic script? (This is something like the old joke of posing to a Freudian the question: what does it mean when I explicitly dream about sex?) What is really added by making the Christian imagery explicit?

In response, one should first note that science fiction and fantasy apocalyptic allegories that do not use explicitly Christian imagery usually still conform to the Christian apocalyptic assumptions (*e.g.*, the final episodes of *Star Trek Deep Space Nine*[25] and the film *The Matrix*). Good versus Evil makes a pleasing story, and Good winning is the Hollywood ending.

However, the science fiction and fantasy genres (despite C.S. Lewis[26] *et al*.) are typically anti-established religion, and more often than not such works use any adopted Christian materials for their skeptical or subversive purpose. Indeed, the science fiction and fantasy genres are perhaps the popular culture heirs to the Enlightenment attack on religion. It is therefore not surprising that anti-religious establishment, anti-apocalyptic works using Christian imagery would emerge from within the categories of

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[24] See Frederick A. Kreuziger, *Apocalypse and Science Fiction: A Dialectic of Religious and Secular Soteriologies* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).

[25] *E.g.*, the last episode, "What You Leave Behind."

[26] Examples of such pro-Christian science fiction and fantasy works are Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* and "space trilogy" of *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra* and *That Hideous Strength*.

science fiction and fantasy. For instance, books within the anti-apocalyptic genre come from self-understood sci-fi or fantasy writers.

The evolution towards the anti-apocalyptic script that uses Christian imagery for its subversive purpose happened gradually along several different paths within science fiction and fantasy. One transformation was to take the apocalyptic conflict between Good and Evil and change it into a conflict between more ideological principals such as order versus chaos. These principals are familiar to readers of Zelazny's *Amber* books,[27] players of Dungeons and Dragons and its off-shoot role playing games and consumers of numerous other sci-fi and fantasy works. Evil and demonic forces roughly correspond with chaos and good and divine forces with order, but neither principal is viewed as completely healthy or even moral on its own.[28] This move is the inversion of the fundamentalist tendency to characterize ideological conflict as one of good versus evil.

Another transformation is the progressive willingness of science fiction and fantasy authors to potentially offend by treating Christianity as another myth to be retold as they saw fit. [29] Science fiction and fantasy works frequently recast the beliefs of other cultures for their plots. For example, Roger Zelazny used Hindu mythology as the basis for *Lord of Light*[30] and Egyptian mythology for *Creatures of Light and Darkness*.[31]

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[27] A complete list of this lengthy series is included in the bibliography.

[28] In Dungeons and Dragons, though, there can be combinations like "chaotic good" and "lawful evil."

[29] In some ways, this retelling also resembles the way that psychics would adopt the broad outlines of Christian eschatology in telling their particular stories. See Richard G. Kyle, *The Last Days Are Here Again: A History of the End Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 197.

[30] New York: Avon, 1967.

In a note to one of his *Incarnations of Immortality* series, Piers Anthony explains his attitude towards religion, Christian and otherwise:

> As I have mention in prior Notes, I have no belief in the supernatural. These novels are unabashed fantasy. Some of you have written to object to my atheism. I do not treat such letters kindly, because I am not an atheist. I am an agnostic: one who not come to a conclusion about the validity of the existing theories of Deity and Afterlife. I regard them as unproven, and I feel free to represent them in my fiction whatever manner is condusive to the narration of an entertaining and sometimes thought provoking story. In short, I am having fun, and I hope that my readers are too.[32]

The boldest authors indulged in quasi-Satanic inversions of Christian myth. For example, in Harlan Ellison's "The Deathbird,"[33] Satan is a good alien guardian of our race against an insane alien God. In Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End*,[34] the demonic looking aliens are harbingers of our ascension to quasi-divine consciousness. Both of these works place humankind in a relatively high position. But they are apocalyptic, not anti-apocalyptic.

Despite these bold inversions, it still remained for science fiction and fantasy authors to not simply reverse the Christian apocalyptic story, but question the apocalyptic rationale altogether – in some respects, transcending not only the Christian apocalyptic conflict of Good versus Evil but the usual nature of science fiction.

Another reason why these new works are capable of using religious imagery and constructs for an anti-apocalyptic purpose instead of the almost expected apocalyptic purpose may be structural. As discussed in Part One, the transfer of religious

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[31] New York: Avon, 1969.

[32] Piers Anthony, *For Love of Evil* (New York: Avon Books, 1988), 313.

[33] Harlan Ellison, The Deathbird in *The Hugo Winners Volume 3*. Isaac Asimov, ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1977).

imagery from its theological context to fictional works (orthodox or not), with their emphasis on individual character, choice and conflict, in itself alters the usual priorities of the tragic apocalyptic rhetoric.[35] The transfer of such imagery to specifically science fiction or fantasy genres may necessarily alter the fundamental purposes to which that imagery is put, for example, due to the relative importance of the ideas of "emancipation" versus "redemption" in the fictional genres versus apocalyptic theology.[36] Redemption in this context is achieved through choosing "good'' versus "evil," emancipation by transcending both to some higher notion of good and liberation. Furthermore, though science fiction and fantasy are very apocalyptic genres and may use a fairly religious plot scheme, the combination of religious fatalism and orthodoxy would largely negate the first genre and regularly alters the second to mere religious allegory (the works of C.S. Lewis again being a prime example).

As with the political or techno-thriller, science fiction was traditionally a male-centered genre, but as with premillennialist apocalyptic fiction the works of anti-apocalyptic fiction have a strong tendency to cross-over to female audiences. This is particularly true to the extent that the plots of such works are not simply adolescent male fantasies but instead are more sophisticated, literary and humorous.

III. EXAMPLES OF THE GENRE

A. Earlier Approximations

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[34] New York, Ballantine Books, 1953.

[35] The transfer of imagery has not been in one direction. As discussed in Part One premillennialist apocalyptic fiction has borrowed the devices of science fiction.

[36] See Kreuziger, *Apocalypse and Science Fiction*.

As works of anti-apocalyptic fiction, the following do not quite meet the pattern I have set out, but they are worth noting because they preceded the full examples in time and because of their relative popularity and support of some of the anti-apocalyptic ideas.

1. *Job: A Comedy of Justice*.

In Robert Heinlein's *Job: A Comedy of Justice*,[37] the Apocalypse happens, but one human appeals the outcome *vis-à-vis* himself to a power higher than Jehovah and Satan. Good versus Evil is not so much the issue as order versus chaos and the transcendence of aesthetic principals (foreshadowed in Heinlein's "The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag" short story). The millennium is a 1000 years in a hell on earth redesigned for human enjoyment.

2. *The Seventh Sign.*[38]

In this 1988 film, the subversion of the apocalyptic conflict is through completely removing demons and angels, heaven and hell from the scene. Jesus has returned, but he can't do anything to stop the progressively worse natural disasters. He instead guides the protagonist to the knowledge that human beings now have to make the sacrifices to avert apocalypse – and it is averted. The only manifestation of Evil is a quasi-immortal Roman centurion modeled on the Wandering Jew, who looks forward to the apocalypse as a release from his life.

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[37] New York: Ballantine Books, 1984.
[38] For a more detailed discussion and synopsis of *The Seventh Sign* and *The Rapture*, see Amanda Loos, *"But That's Crazy!": The Apocalyptic Imagination in Recent Western Cinema* (Thesis: University of South Florida, 1999).

3. *The Rapture*.[39]

In this 1991 Michael Tolkin film, one woman starts from a life of pure carnal enjoyment and becomes converted to evangelical Christianity. After the death of her husband, she believes that she is to be tried in the wilderness like Abraham, but God does not intervene when she kills her daughter. Though she is offered salvation, she denies the justice of the apocalyptic outcome, asking "Who forgives God?" She accepts damnation rather than conceding the need for forgiveness and a love of God.

4. *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode, "Devil's Due."

In this television episode (for which the original script was written during the 1970s), an alien world claims that they made a contract with their version of the devil, Ardra, giving up their freedom after 1000 years of prosperity. As the 1000 years runs out, the citizens experience millennial panic. Sure enough, a being claiming to be Ardra shows up. But the being is simply an alien con-artist. The former leaders of the alien world apparently created the story of the contract in order to provide hope to their people, who were in desperate straits 1000 years ago.

This story is anti-apocalyptic from almost a millennial scholar's perspective. It shows the potential of millennial belief both to motivate a society and cause panic or conflict. It is not one of the more popular episodes.[40]

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[39] For the script, see Michael Tolkin, *The Player; The Rapture; The New Age: Three Screenplays* (New York: Grove Press, 1995).
[40] See Timothy Lynch, Devil's Due: Synopsis and Review, www.ugcs.caltech.edu/ ~werdna/sttng/tlynch/devil.rev.html.

B. Complete Examples

1. *Good Omens*.

The work which best sets forth the principles of the anti-apocalyptic genre

is *Good Omens*.[41] *Good Omens* takes the premillennialist script mostly at its word. The

Antichrist is born, and both Good and Evil maneuver for the final showdown as the

various signs (for example, the four horsemen) manifest themselves. The tone of the

work is evident from warning on the publication information page:

> CAVEAT "*Kids!* Bringing about Armageddon can be dangerous. Do not
> attempt it in your own home.

A normal family raises the Antichrist (named, amusingly, Adam Young)

instead of politically powerful and Satanically influenced one. The Antichrist becomes

the incarnation of humanity instead of Good or Evil,[42] much to the chagrin of both heaven

and hell. When at last Armageddon is at hand, he refuses to participate, defying both the

heavenly hosts and his infernal father, but supported by the angel Aziraphale and the

demon Crowley, who've both been on earth long enough to develop a sympathy for the

natives.

One brief selection from his final monologue sums up the position of this

11-year-old humanized Antichrist.

> "I just don't see why everyone and everything has to be burned up
> and everything," Adam said. "Millions of fish an' whales an', an' sheep
> and stuff. An' not even for anything important. Jus' to see who's got the
> best gang. . . . But even if you win, you can't really beat the other side,
> because you don't really want to. I mean, not for good. You'll just start
> all over again. You'll just keep on sending people . . . to mess people

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[41] Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch* (New York: Workman Publishing, 1990).
[42] Gaiman, *Good Omens*, 325.

around. It's hard enough bein' people as it is, without other people coming and messin' you around."[43]

At the end of the novel, God gives an implicit approval of the results of Adam's defiance and thereby to humankind's coming of age.[44] Also implied is that any future conflict will be heaven and hell against humanity.[45] This is not, as one scholar put it, a simple comic inversion of the apocalyptic story[46] (the Antichrist does not become the Messiah), but a much more radical retelling.

Good Omens is so particularly clear in its expression of the anti-apocalyptic view, yet also perhaps unfamiliar to the general reader of this paper, that I have included an appendix of quotations from the book's climax not otherwise used in this paper.

2. *Babylon 5*.

In the science fiction TV series *Babylon 5*, members of one alien race, the Vorlons, are explicitly "angels," while another race, the Shadows, are clearly "devils."[47] The Vorlons keep their appearance hidden because they would be recognized by everyone. When Ambassador Kosh finally reveals his appearance, he is seen as an angel by humans, and as the equivalent to an angel by the other aliens. Alternatively, the Shadows avoid detection by invisibility to human eyes, and when seen they resemble spiders. At first, the plot seems biblical by way of Tolkien: the older Vorlon angels mentor the younger alien races in the fight against the Shadow demons. However, it soon

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[43] Gaiman, *Good Omens*, 322.
[44] Gaiman, *Good Omens*, 346.
[45] Gaiman, *Good Omens*, 345.
[46] McGinn, *Antichrist*, 271.
[47] Harlan Ellison, author of "The Deathbird," was also a consultant for *Babylon 5*.

becomes clear to the younger races that the older aliens are fighting for ideological

control of the galaxy as representatives of the principals of order versus chaos, and have

very little concern for the younger races except as tools in that fight. Humankind's

responses to the appearances of the respective older alien races were condition in the

infancy of our species, and do not necessarily reflect the "good" or "evil" of the Vorlons

or the Shadows. In the final showdown (all the nations of the galaxy gathered together),

the younger races assert their independence of the conflict. Humanity in the guise of the

younger races informs that older races that we have outgrown their simplistic dualism and

can make our own mistakes and progress.[48]

If there is a character representing a transcendent God in this picture, it is

the "First One," the first sentient being of our galaxy, who brings about the situation in

which the conflict can come to a head. The First One mediates the exit of the older alien

races, particularly the Vorlons and the Shadows, from the galaxy, leaving it for the

younger species.

There is also a Christ figure: Captain Sheridan must "die" in order to

contact the First One, who brings him back to life. He is not divine, however, only a

"good man."[49]

Babylon 5 contains sufficient apocalyptic lore that it's subversion of the

Christian apocalyptic story is not likely to be accidental. For example, the series uses a

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[48] This episode of *Babylon 5*, "Into the Fire," is described in Jane Killick's *Babylon 5
Season by Season: No Surrender, No Retreat* (New York: Del Rey, 1998), 66-72.
[49] See Killick, *Babylon 5 Season by Season: No Surrender, No Retreat*, 176 (from the
episode "The Deconstruction of Falling Stars").

"three ages" scheme, which seems to correspond with the three ages of Joachim of Fiore

(1145-1202). Joachim developed an interpretation of

> history as an ascent through three successive ages, each of them presided
> over by one of the Persons of the Trinity. The first age was the Age of the
> Father or of the Law; the second age was the Age of the Son or of the
> Gospel; the third age would be the Age of the Spirit and that would be to
> its predecessors as broad daylight compared with starlight and the dawn,
> as high summer compared with winter and spring. If the first age had been
> one of fear and servitude and the second age one of faith and filial
> submission, the third age would be one of love, joy and freedom, when the
> knowledge of God would be revealed directly in the hearts of all men.[50]

Later interpreters of Joachim of Fiore set the outset of the third age and corresponding

apocalyptic conflict at 1260.

In *Babylon 5*, the apocalyptic conflict comes at the onset of the "third age

of man," and the series is set in the period leading up to the Shadow War in the year 2260

(one thousand years after the prophetic year of 1260). The Shadows were locked in the

pit of their home planet for a thousand years – meaning the previous war against them

ended around 1260. Captain Sheridan describes the three ages in terms echoing Joachim

of Fiore. "It's a new age. We began in chaos, too primitive to make our own decisions.

Then we were manipulated from outside by forces that thought they knew what was best

for us . . . Now we're finally standing on our own."[51]

Other apocalyptic references abound. The very name "Babylon" is a

gauntlet thrown down to premillennialists, for besides the overt Genesis reference

implicit in the name, there is the apocalyptic reference to Babylon the harlot from

Revelation. The catch phrases for *Babylon 5*, the "last best hope for peace" and then later

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[50] Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 108.

the "last best hope for victory" echoed both Reagan's "the last best hope of man on earth"[52] and Lincoln's "last best hope of earth,"[53] both of which are imbued with the apocalyptic feeling of their speakers.

Joe Straczynski, the creator of *Babylon 5*, put the climatic episode in a psychological context. "The episode is really about metaphorically killing your parents. . . . The infant has to become the adult and say, 'I have to go on without you from now on.' Very often the parent can forget that the job is to create a person, not just turn out someone who will obey you."[54]

3. The *Incarnations of Immortality* series.[55]

The last two volumes of Piers Anthony's *Incarnations of Immortality* series, *For Love of Evil* and *And Eternity*,[56] particularly concern Satan and God. Both Satan and God are themselves human in origin. As with the other Incarnations of timeless principles (Death, Time, War, etc.) their offices are eternal, but the particular occupants are not. Therefore, on the cusp of World War III, the current Christian God is booted out for incompetent narcissism and replaced with a woman. The tension in the series always the humanity of the characters versus the principle of the office, with the humanity usually triumphing. The Incarnations generally oppose Evil, but they all cooperate against Chaos, and Christianity is just one of several frameworks. The person

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[51] *Babylon 5*, "Into the Fire," as quoted by Killick, *Babylon 5 Season by Season: No Surrender, No Retreat*, 68.
[52] See O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 180.
[53] Abraham Lincoln, Annual Message to Congress – Concluding Remarks, 1862 at www.netins.net/showcase/creative/lincoln/speeches/congress.htm.
[54] Killick, *Babylon 5 Season by Season: No Surrender, No Retreat*, 72.
[55] The complete list of books in the series is contained in the bibliography.
[56] New York: Avon Books, 1990.

chosen for the job of God has herself experienced evil and can empathize with the problems facing humanity. In the same way, Satan is conscious of serving the greater good. The Incarnations must mature in the understanding of their offices even as humanity matures in its moral understanding.

4. *His Dark Materials*

Philip Pullman's children's fantasy trilogy, *His Dark Materials*,[57] fits within the anti-apocalyptic genre, though at times it appears to merely invert the usual apocalyptic scenario. The books, *The Golden Compass*, *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*, follow the adventures of Lyra and Will, two children who become caught up in a second rebellion against God (or at least, the supreme angel who's been claiming to be God) and his oppressive church on earth. This time, the rebellion is led by humans, with angels following our lead. Though there is an apocalyptic battle, the result of the battle is that both the leaders of the rebellion and God and his lieutenant are destroyed. This leaves the universe in a *status quo ante* in which humans will have the freedom to choose their own destiny. Instead of an apocalyptic resurrection of the dead, Lyra and Will help the dead escape to oblivion. Instead of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, Lyra and Will begin the establishment of a Republic of Heaven with a reenactment of the Fall of Man. Pullman views his trilogy as an alternative to the Christian allegory of C.S. Lewis.[58]

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[57] Philip Pullman, *The Golden Compass* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997); Philip Pullman, *The Subtle Knife* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998); Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000).
[58] Sarah Lyall, The Man Who Dared Make Religion the Villain, *N.Y. Times*, Nov. 7, 2000: B1, B7.

5. The Vertigo line of comics.[59]

This line of comics is written for an adult audience (but is not pornographic in content). It emerged as a separate line within DC from several titles popular with adults in the late 1980s. The breadth of it's cultural influence is rather surprising, even as it's sales have declined with those of other comics since the mid-1990s.[60]

Although a standard plot feature of many traditional comic books is apocalyptic avoidance (by superheroes engaged against a supervillain), the Vertigo line of books differ in their explicit use of the myths of Christianity and other religions for their source material. Therefore, the apocalypse in the Vertigo line often more resembles the Christian one than in traditional comic books. Furthermore, the validity of the apocalyptic conflict is consistently questioned in these books. Indeed, Vertigo comics are at times downright militant in their anti-apocalyptic view and opposition to the hierarchies of Heaven and Hell.

a. *Preacher*.[61]

This comic series by Garth Ennis sold about 100,000 copies of each issue,[62] a respectable figure for comic books generally and an exceptional figure for adult comic books. It was one of the most loved of current comics. The main character, Jesse, the "preacher" of the title, finds that his body is co-host to the child of a liaison between

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[59] The comic books cited are all published by DC Comics under their Vertigo label. A list of the comic books cited is included as a separate section in the bibliography.

[60] One of the star Vertigo authors, Neil Gaiman, also contributed an episode of *Babylon 5*.

[61] A list of *Preacher* trade paperbacks is included in the bibliography.

[62] Inara Verzemnieks, Forget Mom and Apple Pie: Two Brits Dissect America in a Decidedly Serious Comic Book, *Washington Post*, Sept. 4, 1996: B01.

an angel and a demon named Genesis. Early on, he explains his understanding of the

cosmic situation to his girlfriend, Tulip:

> Jesse: Heaven an' hell're at war with each other. These two broke the
> rules when they fell in love. They got killed for it. But the kid the girl
> had, that was *Genesis*. An' it's something never happened before – a mix
> of demon and angel, a *new idea . . .*
> Tulip: Good and evil together?
> Jesse: Heaven an' Hell. Got a feelin' they ain't necessarily the same
> things. But because Genesis was a new idea, it was as powerful as
> either've the old ones.[63]

Upon the birth of Genesis, God leaves his post and hides on earth. Jesse and Genesis

decide to hunt down God and make him answer for the evils of Creation (the devil having

been destroyed earlier by the Saint of Killers, a gunslinger who has become the Angel of

Death). Along the way, they beat up angels and human apocalyptic conspirators. Jesse

himself is no saint, but he embodies the cowboy virtues. The storyline ended in the fall of

2000 with Jesse and the Saint of Killers successfully conspiring to gun down God.[64]

Ennis clearly feels that humans at their best are morally superior to God and the devil as

usually conceived.

> b. Other Vertigo Comics

> Summaries of *The Invisibles*, *The Books of Magic*, and *Hellblazer* are

included in Appendix Two to this paper.

> 5. Movies.

> Perhaps because of limited time and the nature of the market, full explicit

exposition of the anti-apocalyptic themes has not usually been given on film, but the anti-

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[63] Garth Ennis, *Preacher: Gone to Texas* (New York: DC Comics, 1995); also*, Preacher*
Issue #3, June 1995, 22.
[64] *Preacher*, Issue #66, October 2000.

apocalyptic view is fairly well implied even when not specifically stated in the following

works.

a. *Dogma*.[65]

In this comedy, which some Catholics and other Christians protested

against as blasphemous,[66] rogue angels from both heaven and hell try to usher in a super-

apocalypse. This apocalypse would be the destruction of all reality, not the victory of

Good over Evil. Human beings take the lead in saving reality, including saving a

comatose God. Kevin Smith has written an introduction to a *Preacher* compilation,[67] and

is clearly influenced by the Vertigo view of theology.

b. The *Prophecy* films.[68]

In *The Prophecy*, the audience discovers that the Book of Revelation is not

the last word. Instead there are further chapters detailing an ongoing second war in

Heaven. The angel Gabriel leads a new force of rebel angels against his fellows, with

God remaining mysteriously silent. Gabriel is fighting against human superiority in

heaven, and the fight against him becomes largely a human one on earth.

In *The Prophecy II*, human superiority to both sides of the new apocalyptic

conflict is made explicit. Valerie, played by Jennifer Beals, is to be the mother of a new

Nephilim, a human/angel hybrid of the kind referred to in the book of Genesis (and, as

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[65] For an on-line draft of the script, see Kevin Smith, *Dogma*, third draft of script, www.newsaskew.com/dogmarc/dogma.text.

[66] See Miramax Takes First Shot in Holy War, *Falwell Confidential*, June 18, 1999.

[67] Kevin Smith, Introduction, in Garth Ennis, *Preacher: Until the End of the World* (New York: DC Comics, 1997).

[68] Although these films did not perform spectacularly at the box office (see Dave McNary, 'Mortal Combat' Tops Box Office, *UPI*, Sept. 4, 1995), at least the first film reached a wider audience on video and cable.

discussed in Part One, condemned by premillennialists as satanic in origin). After

surviving a conflict among the angels themselves (which Lucifer has bowed out from),

she refuses to surrender her child to the Archangel Michael (Eric Roberts), saying in

effect that humans are superior to angels, at least in the respect that we really care about

our fellow humans.[69]

c. *South Park* (TV and film)

Collectively an episode of the edgy comedy series *South Park* and the

movie based on the series contain the central anti-apocalyptic elements. In one TV

episode,[70] the Antichrist (of course named Damien) attends school with the South Park

boys, where he adjusts well and uses his powers to the group's amusement. Meanwhile,

the final confrontation between his father Satan and Jesus becomes a WWF event, with a

resolution as contrived as any pro-wrestling bout. The entire town bets on Satan to win,

only to have Satan take a dive. Jesus forgives them all of course, and life goes on.

The *South Park* movie has a similar humorous anti-apocalyptic plot.[71] In

anticipation of the martyrdom of Terrance and Phillip (a flatulent team of Canadian

comedians), Satan and the late Saddam Hussein rise up from Hell to rule the world. They

are stopped only by humans reconciling their differences and saving Terrance and Phillip.

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[69] A third film, *The Prophecy 3: The Ascent*, is available on video. It concerns the
Nephilim and his role in protecting humankind.
[70] The "Damien" episode is available on video in Volume 4 of the *South Park* video
series. The Trey Parker and Matt Stone script for the episode is at www.beef-cake.com/
blackbart/Files1/Episode108.txt.
[71] To peruse the script without sitting through the entire over-the-top film, see Trey
Parker, Matt Stone and Pam Brady, *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut,* eight draft of
script, January 21, 1999 at www.lontano.org/FMA/arkiv/south-park.html.

d. *The Book of Life*

Hal Hartley's *The Book of Life* may be the best example in film of the anti-apocalyptic genre, though it is not well known.[72] On the New Year's Eve before 2000, Jesus arrives in New York to usher in the apocalypse, but he hesitates to bring an end to humankind. The Devil and agents of God pursue him to obtain the Book of Life and open its remaining seals. Jesus is clearly more human than God in his role here, and both perceives and represents our potential at the end of the millennium. [73]

IV. THEMES OF THE GENRE

The mere existence of the anti-apocalyptic genre and the reason it has come into existence at this time may be more interesting than its particular themes. Still, it is worth noting such themes and the contrasts between the anti-apocalyptic works and the premillennialist works described in Part One. The anti-apocalyptic themes are not point by point comparable with those in Part One, but where they are, I will discuss their different treatments of the same subjects.

A. Ideology

The politics of the anti-apocalyptic genre are generally not as clear as those of the premillennialist apocalyptic works. Like science fiction, anti-apocalyptic fiction is usually ideologically innovative in the sense of being about new ideas, but it is not unambiguously leftist. Both the premillennialist and anti-apocalyptic genres typically

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[72] In fact, due to difficulty in obtaining this work, I am relying on various on-line plot summaries such as on Amazon.com for this description.

assume that "political correctness" is something different, bad or humorous, and the anti-apocalyptic genre often seems more concerned with being subversive than being progressive. Therefore, these works do not necessarily track the anti-apocalyptic program of millennial scholar Lee Quinby.[74]

1. Sexuality.

Freedom of sexuality is typical in the anti-apocalyptic genre, though this may have more to do with the adolescent base of the science fiction and fantasy categories than any particular ideological agenda. In *Babylon 5*, there is a recognition of homosexuality in future being normal (yet still getting comedy out of male homosexuality in one episode). *Job* is offered the full panoply of sexual experience in Heinlein's optimistic view of Hell, and Mary Magdelene's sexuality has freed her to travel between Heaven and Hell.[75] *Good Omens* is largely free of sexual content, as befits a book where the central character is an 11-year-old boy. *The Invisibles* clearly supports complete sexual liberation: it features a gay transvestite shaman, and de Sade himself makes several cameo appearances.[76]

Some works seem more adolescent than others. *Dogma* is, like much of Kevin Smith's work, prurient and oddly homophobic. *Preacher* is also prurient and homophobic, with its heroes engaging in tremendous amounts of straight sex and its evil doers engaging in all forms of sexual deviation. Piers Anthony's *Incarnations* is also

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[73] A further work with some anti-apocalyptic implications was the television series *GvsE* a.k.a. *Good vs. Evil*, but it has not survived long enough on any particular network to fully develop it's views on the relation of humans to the supernatural hierarchies.
[74] See Quinby, *Millennial Seduction* and the discussion in Part One.
[75] Heinlein, *Job*, 329

relatively prurient, reading at times more like trashy romance novels than science fiction or fantasy.

  2. Feminism.

   The authorship of these works is generally male, and the position of women in them, while agreeing with contemporary standards, does not push back the envelope of feminist thought. In *Good Omens*, Famine plagues humans in the modern world through women's body image,[77] and a young girl character, Pepper, voices opposition to nuclear war as "a mother of unborn generations."[78] In *Dogma*, God is a woman (at least sometimes), but the team of Jay and Silent Bob continue a degrading rant about sex with every female character they encounter (including God![79]) which, though probably meant satirically from Mr. Smith's point of view, in the end is simply distasteful. *Job*, as usual for Heinlein, is a fantasy view of completely goddess like and competent yet completely submissive women.

   It is consistently difficult to pin down the feminist politics of these works. There are several prominent female characters in *Babylon 5*, but some of them appeared to be oddly masculinized (particularly in the testosterone driven early episodes). The most prominent women character, the half-human half-alien Delenn, had a diminishing and increasingly passive role as her relationship with the male lead, Captain Sheridan, became closer. In the comic book *Preacher*, Jesse quotes feminist theory while espousing traditional values, and his girlfriend Tulip uses all forms of firearms with

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[76] For example, Grant Morrison, *The Invisibles: Say You Want a Revolution* (New York: DC Comics, 1996), 160.
[77] Gaiman, *Good Omens*, 46-48.
[78] Gaiman, *Good Omens*, 196.

uncommon skill while standing by her man.[80] If, as according to Lee Quinby, part of the apocalyptic ideology is an assertion of male power, perhaps works of anti-apocalyptic fiction created by women would be more effectively anti-apocalyptic in that sense.

       3. Race Relations/Cultural Diversity.

It is not surprising that contemporary science fiction and fantasy usually reflect the contemporary social consensus that racism is bad and cultural diversity is good, whether directly or, in the case of *South Park*, through satire. More central to the anti-apocalyptic scheme is the implicit idea (or in *Babylon 5*, explicit idea) that humanity's ability to come together in our diversity is related to our ability to morally transcend the ideological dispute between the supernatural hierarchies. Humankind means <u>all</u> of humankind.

Babylon 5 is multiracial and multi-aliened, with the major religions all surviving into the future. The show approves a coming together of all human and alien religions. For example, the project of the Franciscan order of the future is to find all the names of God (à la Arthur C. Clarke's *The Nine Billion Names of God*[81]). The series also approves of love and mating between different alien races, as with the relationship between Delenn and Sheridan, and this is meant to be a metaphor for human race

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[79] Smith, Dogma, third draft of script, 86.
[80] For example, Ennis, *Preacher: Until the End of the World*, 207-10.
[81] In *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame*, Robert Silverberg, ed. (New York: Avon Books, 1970).

relations.[82] It is only by bringing all the younger alien races together that the Vorlons and the Shadows are convinced to leave.

The *His Dark Materials* trilogy has races and cultures from all the variations of earth coming together to fight God. In *Good Omens*, the focus is so much on a small town in rural England so that there is very little discussion of other cultures or ethnicities, except for a general deprecation of things American. One exception is a demonstration of the ignorance and single close-mindedness of a modern day witchfinder through his confusion of India and the West Indies.[83] *Dogma* asserts Jesus was black, and had a black apostle.[84] Kevin Smith reserves many of his religious zingers for the Catholic Church, though he seems to have offended ecumenically.

South Park is also ecumenical in offending most groups, though only the most unsophisticated viewer would ascribe the literal statements of its characters to the opinions of its creators. Despite the ironic tone, the message of the movie is clear and surprisingly positive: apocalypse can only be avoided by human unity.

4. Hybridization.

Apocalyptic fiction's insistence on purity and rejection of the other is manifested through a rejection of any direct merger between the angelic, demonic and human participants in the conflict; in contrast, the anti-apocalyptic works embrace the

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[82] *Babylon 5* creator Straczynski notes that regarding racial purity, "I'm not saying it's good or bad. I'm saying it's ridiculous; you can't do it." Killick, *Babylon 5 Season by Season: No Surrender, No Retreat*, 91.
[83] Gaiman, *Good Omens*, 154-55.
[84] Smith, *Dogma*, third draft of script, 29.

other through approval of hybridization across the various divides.[85] In *Preacher*, the

main character's consciousness cohabits his body with the child of a liaison between an

angel and a demon. In the *Incarnations of Immortality* series, the plot tension

consistently centers around the conflicts within persons who have become hybrids of

human, natural and supernatural principle.

In contrast to other anti-apocalyptic plots, the role of cultural and

biological hybridization is ambiguous in *Babylon 5*. As discusses above, the show

generally approves of religious and racial merging, but the hybrids between the younger

alien races and the Vorlons or the Shadows are more problematic. For example, telepaths

among the younger worlds were created by the angelic Vorlons almost like Nephilim to

help oppose the Shadows, but they have generated tremendous problems within their own

societies. Viewed as an absolute abomination in the series is the parasitic control

exercised over Shadow minions, and Shadow use of the humans as the central brain of

their quasi-living space ships. On the other hand, the younger alien races turn decisively

against the Vorlons when the Vorlons start eliminating all races "contaminated" by the

Shadows. The Vorlon obsession with purity thereby alienates the rest of the galaxy.

Examples of hybrids in other works include the hybrids between angels

and demons and humans and faeries in the *Books of Magic*, the human-elemental hybrid

in *Hellblazer*, and the Nephilim in Prophecy *II*. By way of contrast, the *X-Files* (which I

have distinguished from anti-apocalyptic works) in general disapproves of hybrids, as

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[85] Some of what I refer to in Part One as "second coming" books rely on hybridization;
for example, in Glenn Kleier's *The Last Day* (New York: Warner Books, 1997), cloning
leads to the second coming in female form.

seen both in a specific Nephilim episode and in the conspiracy arc of stories regarding

alien genetic manipulation of humans.

5. Environmentalism.

Unlike premillennialist apocalyptic fiction, which views environmentalism

as one of the ideologies which advance the new world order of the Antichrist, anti-

apocalyptic fiction is at least neutral towards and sometimes actively supports

environmentalism. Yet, such environmentalism sometimes runs contrary to the usual

obsession of science fiction with human technological progress.

In *Good Omens*, the reluctant Antichrist gone native is a sometimes

environmentalist.

> If *I* was in charge, I'd try making people live a lot longer, like ole
> Methuselah. It'd be a lot more interestin' and they might start thinkin'
> about the sorts of things they're doing to all the environment and ecology,
> because they'll still be around in a hundred years' time.[86]

Of course, this stance by the Antichrist, reluctant or otherwise, would be no surprise to a

premillennialist apocalyptic fiction fan. Although he experiments with regenerating the

Amazon rain forest, this child Antichrist seems to settle with simply keeping his

hometown in a blissful state of changelessness in the face of commercial development all

around it.

In the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episode "Devil's Due," it was a

planetary environmental collapse that led to the fiction of the contract with the devil. In

Dogma, one of the reasons that the rogue angel Bartleby decides that humans aren't worth

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[86] Gaiman, *Good Omens*, 322.

caring about is their treatment of the environment: "They were given this planet; they destroyed it."[87]

      6. Jews.

      In contrast to premillennialist apocalyptic fiction, there is no particular focus for good or ill on the Jews in most of the anti-apocalyptic works. Some of the works occur within a framework in which different deities have jurisdiction over the different religions, so the Jews are not even subject to the same apocalypse. Where Jews are included, it is more often due to considerations of representing human cultural diversity than for any reason particular to Judaism or biblical prophecy.

      An earlier work, *The Seventh Sign*, differs from the rest of the genre regarding Judaism. In that movie, the central Jewish character is a young scholar who, it is implied at the end, becomes a Christian evangelist for the new good news. Such an outcome agrees with the premillennialist hope regarding the destiny of the Jews, an expectation which may be understandably resented by many.[88]

      Jews are largely absent from the *Incarnations of Immortality* series because the Incarnations are those of the Christian mythos, though they are aware that other Incarnations handle other religions. There is one interesting interaction between the Jewish Yahweh and the Christian Satan, however: as a favor to Yahweh, Satan undoes the Holocaust, and we have a modern world where the Holy Roman Empire still exists.[89] This might be seen as trivializing the tragedy of the Holocaust, though it's not the worst thing to fantasize.

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[87] Smith, *Dogma*, third draft of script, 60.
[88] See Loos, *"But That's Crazy!"*.

England has a tradition of appropriating biblical events to its soil; thus, it is perhaps not surprising that Israel is not important as apocalyptic locus in *Good Omens*. A Russian Jewish character on *Babylon 5*, Ivanova, was central to the story for four seasons. In an early episode, her Jewish identity was made prominent when she had to decide whether to say kaddish for her deceased father. Her religious identity seems to have been more part of an effort at representing human cultural diversity in the future, and seldom was noted in later episodes.

In *South Park*, one of the creators is Jewish, and he is somewhat represented in the character of Kyle, child of the only Jewish family in South Park. In the "Damien" episode, his Jewishness is used to explain why he implies doubt regarding Jesus' victory in the ring against Satan, yet he and Stan both help Jesus train for the big bout. An odder bit of iconography is what appears to be a Hassidic Jew cheering Satan along with the rest of the town (including the minister), perhaps meaning that the town has gone ecumenically to the Devil. But if Kyle's family is the only Jewish family in town, where did the Hassid come from? Kyle's mother leads the crusade against Canada that nearly brings on the apocalypse in the movie, but this role is not overtly tied to her Jewishness; it is instead related to what may be euphemistically referred to as her strong idiosyncratic personality.

B. Relation of Humankind to Heaven and Hell

The change of priorities between the supernatural hierarchies and humanity is a fundamental departure of the anti-apocalyptic genre. As noted in Part One, the design of the premillennialist apocalyptic myth is about the conflict between the

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[89] Anthony, *For Love of Evil*, 258-264.

supernatural principals: Jesus vs. Antichrist, God vs. Satan. Humanity is the object of

the conflict, not a subject with its own values and destiny, and is divvied up between the

sides.

In anti-apocalyptic fiction, humanity is placed above both angels and

demons. However, though the anti-apocalyptic resolution rejects servitude to both

angelic and demonic forces, it typically accepts God as the master arbiter, either because

the anti-apocalyptic resolution in some sense moves humankind closer to God or because

the intermediation of God mitigates the blasphemous implications of the work. Even the

His Dark Materials trilogy accepts a spiritual force (a cosmic Dust) that transcends God

and the rebels. The aggressively blasphemous *Preacher* is so far the one noteworthy

exception to this.

As noted above, the protagonists of *Good Omens* predict that any future

conflict will be both Heaven and Hell against humanity. In *Dogma*, one of the rogue

angels comes to believe that the fundamental conflict is between angels and humans.

> In the beginning, it was just us and Him. Angels and God. And then He
> created the humans. And He gave them more than He ever gave us. Our's
> was designed to be a life of servitude and worship - adoration. But He
> gave the humans more - He gave them a choice. They can choose to
> ignore God, choose to acknowledge Him.[90]

C. Humor

Another distinction is humor. Premillennialist apocalyptic fiction, though

sometimes unintentionally humorous, is generally deadly serious due to its topic and

purpose, while anti-apocalyptic fiction is often funny due to its subversive purpose. The

distinctions between apocalyptic and anti-apocalyptic works find correlation in the

psychology of apocalyptic groups. The ability to view with humor often divides violent

millennial groups from non-violent ones, and groups that one might view as authoritarian

"cults" versus simply non-mainstream religious groups.[91] Their use of humor may help

make these anti-apocalyptic works effective in subverting the millennial rhetoric which

they adopt; they are a humorous version of the comic frame that has always been

available for apocalyptic argument.

Humor can have a significant impact on apocalyptic rhetoric. According

to Richard Landes, it allows us to "address issues that are too delicate and problematic to

be raised seriously" and may also be a "cure for paranoia."[92] This view of humor finds

support in the science fiction and fantasy genre generally.[93]

Various works in recent years have poked fun at apocalyptic thinking

generally, though not within the parameters of the anti-apocalyptic works examined in

this paper. For example James Finn Garner's *Apocalypse Wow!: A Memoir for the End

of Time*,[94] is an ecumenical humorous assault on apocalyptic thinking. The tone of the

work is indicated by this note on its dust jacket: "Garner finds his vague sense of dread

more often a help than a hindrance in his line of work. He is not currently stockpiling

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[90] Smith, *Dogma*, third draft of script, 60.
[91] See P.E. Isaac Bonewits' web site (neopagan.net/ABCDEF.HTML) for his multi-point cult test, which includes "GRIMNESS: Amount of disapproval concerning jokes about the group, its doctrine or its leader(s)."
[92] Richard Landes, *Millennial Humor and Y2K: A Workshop in Shamanistic Humor* (unpublished proposal), 1999.
[93] For example, in both the classic *Star Trek* episode "Day of the Dove" and in Stephen Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever*, evil is literally laughed away. See Stephen Donaldson, *The Power That Preserves* (New York: Hold, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), 373.
[94] New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

provisions." In Gore Vidal's *Live from Golgotha*,[95] St. Timothy and others must ensure

that a time transported Jesus fails in his effort to initiate a nuclear apocalypse. The back

cover quotes a critical description of the work as "a romp of cheerful blasphemy" – an

appropriate description for many of the anti-apocalyptic works.

Within the anti-apocalyptic fictional genre proper, *Good Omens*, *Job*,

South Park and *Dogma* are expressly comedies (though *Job* is given the slightly ironic

subtitle of a "comedy of justice"). But even the most serious representatives of the genre

have a significant component of humor. The horrific *Prophecy* movies are peppered with

the observations of Christopher Walken's Gabriel regarding us "monkeys" and few

characters of Babylon 5 are so seriously good or evil that they have not at one time played

clown.

D. The Problem of Blasphemy

Despite the relative cultural freedom in the United States, the crossing of

the religious and secular rhetorical divides is still a dangerous course in this country. The

treatment of religiously sensitive topics in a popular secular format almost always draws

criticism from established religious groups, which may help the sales of the particular

work but may also lead to economic retaliation against the work's distributor. As noted

above, the anti-apocalyptic works often go further into the realm of outright blasphemy,

which understandably draws an even sharper religious response. Yet, the anti-apocalyptic

work also typically asserts that humanity has reached a certain level of moral maturity

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[95] New York: Penguin Books, 1992. Despite the character of the fanatical Zionist Jesus in this work, I did not mention it in the above discussion of Jews in anti-apocalyptic fiction, again because *Live at Golgotha* did not fully meet the parameters I have set out.

regarding our internecine conflicts. Is the anti-apocalyptic argument undermined by the

casual offense that it often offers to traditional Christian belief? In short, does blasphemy

help or hinder the rhetorical effect?

In response, one should note that in general these works are not merely

casually blasphemous; that is, blasphemous merely for getting attention or other

artistically trivial reason. Rather, a deep sense of humanism often animates these works –

a quasi-religious fervor about the unaided potential of humanity. In making their anti-

apocalyptic argument to its full extent, it would be hard for these works not to appear

blasphemous to a great many Christians.

Still, some works such as *Preacher* and *Dogma* go out of their way to

offend. Although such works are at the forefront of the cultural wars in American

society, they are perhaps not the most effective representatives of the anti-apocalyptic

position. Penn Jillette of Penn and Teller has this defense of *Preacher*'s blasphemies,

which simply offends more than the comic itself, if that's possible:

> Now some would say that putting some of the backbones of
> Western religion into a comic book blasphemes. It actually has the
> opposite effect on me. See those religious symbols used in this context
> without the constant obsessive, anti-science, anti-freedom, anti-sex,
> woman-bashing, gay-bashing, racist, delusional, politically manipulative
> babbling of a bunch of ancient, psycho McVeigh-types was wonderfully
> refreshing. It seems some of the images of religion could be pretty
> entertaining.[96]

This is not likely to conciliate a Christian believer.

Obviously, it would be an exception to the lack of focus on Judaism in the works I have
reviewed for this paper.

[96] Penn Jillette, Introduction in Garth Ennis, *Preacher: Proud Americans* (New York:
DC Comics, 1997), 6.

E. Is the Anti-Apocalyptic Resolution Hegelian?

In resolving their plots, the anti-apocalyptic work has a more complex task than the simple linear denouement of apocalyptic fiction. On their face, the anti-apocalyptic works might appear to be Hegelian (as that term is popularly understood) in structure, in their movement from thesis (Good) and antithesis (Evil) to a new synthesis (transcendent humanity). However, a better characterization would be to say that the anti-apocalyptic resolution reflects a maturation of understanding, and the continued free interplay, of the contraries in human nature as described in Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (a work which also emerged in the '90s of its century and, like the Vertigo comics, a "graphic" work). For example, *Babylon 5*'s creator Straczynski views the Shadows' philosophy of conflict as the source of progress as Hegelian, but goes on to say that "Neither side, the Vorlons or the Shadows, is actually correct" and that we "have to make our own rules"[97] which sounds more like Blake's view.

Another similar perspective is Carl Jung's, who views the Antichrist as the essential psychological counterpart of Christ in an integrated personality. This perspective has been influential on contemporary culture's view of the Antichrist.[98]

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[97] Jane Killick, *Babylon 5: Point of No Return* (New York: Del Rey, 1998),173-74.
[98] McGinn, *Antichrist*, 274-75. McGinn argues that Jung is important as representing a modern view of the Antichrist rather than as an actual view of the historical role of the concept of Antichrist. I disagree with McGinn that one has to apply a particularly Jungian analysis to Blake's work to find the "coincidence of opposites" theme therein. See McGinn, *Antichrist*, 275.

VI. END OF THE END?

In the context of concerns about millennial and apocalyptic groups and themes, these fictional works may be seen as a healthy release from or anti-dote to millennial tension or, in their more extreme forms, as a contributor to such tension. In particular, the direct confrontation, within the realm of the Christian mythos, of premillennialists and Christian belief generally by more secular and humanist perspectives is apt to create controversy. As noted above, some Catholics and other Christians protested against *Dogma*. An issue of the Vertigo comic book Swamp Thing was self-censored by DC comics because it included a segment regarding Christ. Premillennialists are likely to view the anti-apocalyptic genre as fulfillment of the end times prophecy of "mocking, sneering" men who ask "Where is the promise of his coming?"[99] The very desire for peace that the anti-apocalyptic genre expresses would be viewed in such interpretations as leading to the world domination of the Antichrist.

In a sense, anti-apocalyptic fiction mirrors the problems of apocalyptic fiction. While the move to fiction can soften the fatalistic force of premillennialist apocalyptic fiction, the move to fiction, and particularly humorous fiction, of the anti-apocalyptic argument makes it even more difficult to take that argument seriously. One can argue that pop culture both undermines and reinforces both millennialism and anti-apocalypticism.[100]

However, if fiction may be the only place where the general public can tolerate apocalyptic *prophetae*, perhaps it is also the only venue where the general

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[99] II Peter 3:3-4.

consumer can tolerate the inherently blasphemous nature of the anti-apocalyptic works. It is worth considering again here as a post-script whether these anti-apocalyptic fictions, like premillennialist apocalyptic fictions, are acting as partial surrogates for the personal interaction and commitment in millennial mass movements, which other than perhaps the unfocused miscellany of million people marches are noteworthy for their absence thus far in the 2000-2001 time period.[101] We will have to wait to see whether the only millennial mass movements in American culture today are mass movements of consumption of fictional materials instead of action on millennial programs.

　　　　　To conclude regarding anti-apocalyptic fiction, the question arises of whether comic frame of apocalypse which it represents is sustainable for the near future. The popularity of its optimistic view may collapse with the next economic downturn. Or, if interest dwindles in millennialism after the 2000-2001 time period, interest will likely also dwindle in anti-apocalyptic works. The particular patterns of such works are almost certain to change over time from those described here. So long as American apocalypticism remains prevalent and aggressive however, some form of anti-apocalyptic writing is likely to continue as well. The two forms of fiction, apocalyptic and anti-apocalyptic, may continue to contend for audiences and through their antagonism actually support each other's dissemination.

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[100] Regarding pop culture and millennialism, see Philip Lamy, *Millennium Rage* (New York: Plenum Press, 1996), 152.

[101] See again O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, 142-43.

APPENDIX ONE

Additional Quotes from the Climax of *Good Omens*

p. 322

    "I don't see what's so triffic about creating people as people and then gettin' upset 'cos they act like people," said Adam severely. "Anyway, if you stopped tellin' people it's all sorted out after they're dead, they might try sorting it all out while they're alive."

    * * *

    "Ah," see Beelzebub, and he actually began to smile. "You wizzsh to rule the world. That'z more like thy Fath –"

    "I thought about all that an' I don't want to," said Adam, half turning and nodding encouragingly at the Them. "I mean, there's some stuff could do with alt'rin, but then I expect people'd keep comin' up to me and gettin' me to sort out everythin' the whole time and get rid of all the rubbish and make more trees for 'em, and where's the good in all that? It's like havin' to tide up people's bedrooms for them."

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p. 323

    "I'm not rebelling against anything," said Adam in a reasonable tone of voice. "I'm pointin' out things. Seems to me you can't blame people for pointin' out things. Seems to me it'd be a lot better not to start fightin' and jus' see what people do. If you stop messin' them about they might start thinkin' properly an' they might stop messin' the world around. I'm not sayin' they *would*," he added conscientiously, "but they might."

    [On page 324, the angel Aziraphale and demon Crowley point out that the

Great Plan is "ineffable", so Adam's reluctance to bring about the apocalypse might well

be part of it. Then:]

p. 324-325

    "Everyone found their eyes turning toward Adam. He seemed to be thinking very carefully.

    Then he said: "I don't see why it matters what is written. Not when it's about people. It can always be crossed out."

    ***

p. 325

Adam stood smiling at the two of them, a small figure perfectly poised exactly between Heaven and Hell.

Crowley grabbed Aziraphale's arm. "You know what happened?" he hissed excitedly. "He was left alone! He grew up human. He's not Evil Incarnate or Good Incarnate, he's just . . . a *human* incarnate –"

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p. 354

"If you want to imagine the future, imagine a boy and his dog and his friends. And a summer that never ends.

And if you want to imagine the future, imagine a boot . . . no, imagine a sneaker, laces trailing, kicking a pebble; imagine a stick, to poke at interesting things, and throw for a dog that may or may not decide to retrieve it; imagine a tuneless whistle, pounding some luckless popular song into insensibility; imagine a figure, half angel, half devil, all human . . .

Slouching hopefully towards Tadfield . . . .

... forever."

APPENDIX TWO: VERTIGO COMICS

a. *The Invisibles*

Grant Morrison's comic book series, which came to an end this year in a "countdown to the millennium,"[102] appears at first to be about the forces of anarchic good in a struggle against evil fascists minions of Lovecraftian beings from another dimension as the world approaches it's end in 2012. But the underlying philosophy is clearly more Eastern: Good and Evil are just constructs from which the human race has to awaken to achieve freedom, and amazingly, humankind does just that.

b. *The Books of Magic*

This comic book series anticipated the Harry Potter stories as being concerned with a 12-year-old magician named Tim learning his craft.[103] In one story line, angels fight devils in an apocalyptic conflict over the fate of the earth. Because they threaten his home and his family, Tim manages to trap both sides, and the conflict turns out to have been due to the manipulations of the leader of Chaos.[104] The superiority of humans in directing their own destiny is repeatedly emphasized during the course of this storyline.

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[102] See Grant Morrison, *The Invisibles*, Issue Nos. 12 to 1 (New York: DC Comics, July 1999 - June 2000). Two trade paperback compilations of earlier issues are listed in the bibliography.

[103] The character of Tim was created by Neil Gaiman. Neil Gaiman, *The Books of Magic* (New York: DC Comics 1998) (compilation of original issues) in a limited run series. The original author of the continuing series was John Ney Rieber. See John Ney Rieber, *The Books of Magic: Bindings* (New York: DC Comics, 1998) (compilation of first four issues of continuing series).

[104] See John Ney Rieber, *Books of Magic*, "Slaves of Heaven," Issue Nos. 45-49, February to June 1998.

c. *Hellblazer*.

The main character of this long running comic is John Constantine, a British rogue whose occult dealings have placed him on the outs with both Heaven and Hell. He typically holds his own against both sides. In one of the early storylines of the series, the main character has to forestall the apocalyptic schemes of both demons and extreme Christians.[105] His solution is to create a human/elemental hybrid; that is, fusing humans back with nature instead of with demons or angels.

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[105] See Jamie Delano, *John Constantine Hellblazer: Original Sins* (New York: DC Comics, 1992).

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