

# **FLAME DELUGE**

*A Canticle for Leibowitz*

Andrew Ravensdale

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*Flame Deluge*

*God gave Noah the rainbow sign.  
No more water, the fire next time.*

Traditional

*It was down in Louisiana, just about a mile from Texarkana.*

Leadbelly

*I need a job, so I want to be a paperback writer.*

The Beatles

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## **Catholic**

Walter M Miller's *ACanticle for Leibowitz* is historically and institutionally a thoroughly Catholic novel. Most of the action takes place in the abbey of the imagined Albertian Order of Leibowitz. The abbey is an unmistakably Catholic institution. The consistency of the location of the action creates something close to an Aristotelian unity of place. The name of the order, the 'Albertian Order of Leibowitz', is I think a particularly happy invention of Miller's.

The Order is a celibate community of Catholic monks. Almost all the characters of *ACanticle for Leibowitz* are either members of the Order, or involved with it. Directly or indirectly, all the events of the novel are connected with the Order. The social cohesion of the novel, and the central importance of the Order in the novel, creates a considerable unity of action.

The action of the novel is spread over fourteen hundred years. There are additional flashbacks to the moment of the first Holocaust six hundred years before that.

In addition to the unity of action and place, mentioned above, there is of course a third Aristotelian rule. That is the unity of time. According to Aristotle, all the action should occur in the same twenty-four hour period.

*ACanticle for Leibowitz* fails, rather grandly, to meet this requirement. In the absence of unity of time, it is the Abbey and the Order as institutions – and as part of a Catholic Church seen as eternal – that give the novel cohesion and structure.

*ACanticle for Leibowitz* is thus an institutionally Catholic novel. It is located in a Catholic institution, and the concerns of the novel – the preservation of ancient documents, the claims of science, the fear of a nuclear Holocaust – are very largely the concerns of that institution.

## **History**

*ACanticle for Leibowitz* is historically Catholic as well as being institutionally Catholic. The world-building of *ACanticle for Leibowitz* is based on the history of the Catholic Church. In particular it is based on the intellectual history of the Church.

It is not unusual to draw on history to build a world in science fiction. In fantasy, I have the impression that using history in this way is even more common. What I think is unusual, in both science fiction and fantasy, is to use history quite as precisely and as accurately as Miller does in *ACanticle for Leibowitz*.

The alternative history of *ACanticle for Leibowitz* is based on the intellectual history of medieval Europe. It is a familiar, almost a popular, version of that history. There are well-defined main events: the Fall of Rome, the Dark Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment. This is history as progress. The rise of technological civilisation is inevitable. Modernity is unquestionably superior.

By the time Miller wrote *ACanticle for Leibowitz* he no longer believed in progress. *ACanticle for Leibowitz* is pessimistic, fatalistic, misanthropic and dark. *ACanticle for Leibowitz* is implicitly critical of the conventional view of history.

The three parts of *ACanticle for Leibowitz* are *Fiat Homo*, *Fiat Lux*, and *Fiat Voluntas Tua*. Each of the three parts corresponds to a particular period of European intellectual history. *Fiat Homo* is the sixth-century Dark Ages. *Fiat Lux* is the thirteenth century Renaissance. With a little authorial sleight of hand, *Fiat Lux* is also the sixteenth-century reformation and has elements of the nineteenth-century Westward expansion of the United States. *Fiat Voluntas Tua* is the very near future.

The very near future is a world of technology. It is also a world of bureaucracy, post-Enlightenment humanism and high levels of interstate violence. It is a world with the potential for unleashing a nuclear Holocaust. It is the world that Miller knew.

The chronology of the three stories replicates the dating of the traditional Three Ages of European history. The periods in which the stories are set are separated from each other by several hundred years. There are internal dates for each part of the novel in the text.

Two of the parts, *Fiat Lux* and *Fiat Voluntas Tua*, are dated precisely. We can work out what date the imagined future corresponds to in recorded history. We simply need a baseline.

*Fiat Homo* is based on a magazine story. In the story, Brother Francis finds a blueprint in an ancient box. The box has been concealed in the rubble of ancient ruins.

The blueprint in the box is precisely dated. The date on the blueprint is '*...the Year of Grace 1956....*' 1956 was the year after the first publication of the story.

In the novel, there is also a blueprint. It has no date. The effect is to enhance the air of mystery.

Despite the absence of a precise date, there are two phrases used in *Fiat Homo* which enable us to date the first part of the novel quite accurately. One of those phrases is '*...six centuries of darkness*'. 'Darkness', here, is a reference to the so-called Dark Ages, the period of European history that followed the fall of Rome. Miller is dating from his imaginary Holocaust. [Leibowitz, 6.]

There is also a reference to '*... the ruler who occupied the white palace during the middle and late sixties.*' This dates the Flame Deluge in the novel to the sixth decade of the twentieth century. The phrase 'white palace' is, I think, rather witty. [Leibowitz, 6.]

This enables us to date the new Dark Age to 2560 AD. I arrive at this by taking 1960 as a baseline. This is arbitrary, but not wholly unreasonable. 1960 is the copyright date of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. I then add the 'six hundred years of darkness'.

A date for *Fiat Lux* is given at the end of *Fiat Homo*. '*Eventually it was the year of Our Lord 3174. There were rumours of war.*' [Leibowitz, 11.] This is a date more than a thousand years greater than the present. Miller is making a precise point about the relationship of time in his novel to historical time.

In order to be consistent I take 1960 as the baseline again. The exercise - 3174 less 1960 - gives us a date of 1214. It is the thirteenth century. It is the century of a renaissance of science, based in large part on the recovery of ancient texts.

The lapse of time between the second and the third parts of the novel is as great as that between the first and second parts. '*Then, after the generations of darkness came the generations of the light. And they called it the Year of our Lord 3781 – a year of his peace, they prayed.*' [Leibowitz, 23.] We are entitled to expect that imagined time in the third part of the novel will have the same significant relationship to historical time as it does in the first two parts. If that is so, we should be able to make a similar calculation.

If we use the same base year for our calculation, we arrive at a date of 1821. The calculation is 3781 minus 1960. It is the nineteenth century.

It is perfectly obvious why Miller wants to date the first and second parts of his book in reference to the sixth century and the thirteenth. The sixth century is a Dark Age, the thirteenth is a renaissance.

The choice of 1821 as a date is more puzzling. It would be appropriate for the expansion of Hannegan, the ruler of Texarkana, across the continent. In 1821 in the 'real world' the westward expansion of the United States was well under way. Hannegan's military adventures, however, are in the second part of the novel. This is the third.

The world of *Fiat Voluntas Tua* very obviously belongs to the latter part of the twentieth century. In relation to the date when Miller was writing it is the very near future. There is no evidence that I have found, either internal to the novel or in the sources, to explain why Miller would not have used the date at which he was writing as a baseline. That would have given a date for *Fiat Voluntas Tua* of 3920 AD, rather than 3781. 3920 is of course 1960 plus 1960. There is a difference of a hundred and thirty-nine years.

The nineteenth century is recognisably the modern world. It is associated in most people's minds with the rise of industrial civilisation. Miller might have chosen that date, rather than one closer to the time he was writing, as a reference to industrialisation.

Without more evidence, we need to be cautious. If Miller was thinking specifically of industrialisation, there are many other dates he could have chosen. He could have used 1712, for instance. That was the year the Newcomen engine was

introduced. He could equally have chosen 1844. This was when the railway network in Great Britain was completed. He did not.

He might have rejected those dates because of their specifically British reference. In that case we might like to ask ourselves what were the significant events in 1821 in the United States. As it happens, it was the year in which the United States took possession of Florida, which it had bought from Spain.

Florida was Miller's home state. He spent most of his life there. He was living in Florida when he wrote *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. It is rather curious.

I may very well be wrong in taking 1960 as the baseline. As I said above, it is arbitrary. If I am wrong, then the most likely alternative is 1956. This is the date of the blueprint that Brother Francis finds in the original magazine story. Using 1956 as a baseline would give us 1817 as the date of *Fiat Voluntas Tua*.

The year 1817 turns out to be also significant in the history of Florida. It is the year of the outbreak of the First Seminole War.

It seems possible, though no more than that, that the date that Miller was using may involve a completely private reference. *The Darfsteller* and *The Will*, both of which I deal with below, also include references to private information. In neither case does Miller provide any very obvious clues for the reader.

I have the impression that Miller was a writer who was confident he would not be understood.

## Bible Study

Miller's use of scriptural and liturgical references often reveals a great deal about his intentions. The part titles in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* are informative.

They are given in Latin. Each phrase starts with the same word, *fiat*. This is a form of the Latin verb *facere*, meaning 'make' or 'do'. It is the third person of the present passive subjunctive. It means 'let it/let there be made' or 'let it/let there be done'. The repetition of the verb form in all three part titles creates what is, to my mind, a rather pleasing parallelism.

*Fiat Homo*, the phrase that is the title of the first part of the novel, is a reference to the Book of Genesis. *Fiat Homo* translates as 'Let there be man.' It is a direct reference to the bible. 'And God said, Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness....' [Genesis, 1:26.]

The phrase creates a clear theological context for the action. The pilgrim only occurs in two chapters of *Fiat Homo*. The whole of the first part however turns on the nature of what Brother Francis saw. It is frequently discussed.

The question, finally, is whether the pilgrim is a man or something else: a saint, perhaps, a mutant, or some preternatural creature. He might even be an illusion, generated by the heat-addled brain of a half-starved novice.

*Fiat Homo* is also a reference to Man - that is to say, humanity - being created by God. This is a fundamental tenet of Christian belief, and indeed of the beliefs of all the Abrahamic religions.

Man as creature is a theme which is picked up again in a fierce verbal dispute between Pfardentrott and Dom Paolo in *Fiat Lux*. "'So we are but creatures of creatures, then, Sir Philosopher?'" [Leibowitz, 22.]

*Fiat lux*, the title of the second part, means 'let there be light'. Light, as a metaphor, is about knowledge and by extension power. In the context of science and a renaissance, the subject of *Fiat Lux*, the metaphor of knowledge is appropriate. Like 'Fiat Homo', the title of the first part, the words 'Let there be light' are an allusion to the Book of Genesis.

The phrase 'let there be light' is very well known. It is one of a handful of verses from Genesis which are deeply embedded in Western culture. It is familiar to

the most secular of people. Specifically, 'let there be light' is a reference to the myth of the creation of the world by God. '*And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.*' In the second part of the novel, *Fiat Lux*, the creation of light is made thoroughly ambiguous. It is one of the most powerful metaphors in the novel.

[Genesis 1:3.]

*Fiat Voluntas Tua* means 'Thy will be done.' It is one of the concluding phrases of a very well-known Christian prayer, which is often called in English the 'Lord's Prayer'. It is also known as the 'Our Father', from its opening words: 'Our father, which art in heaven....' In Latin it is the *Paternoster*. It is the prayer that Christ teaches the disciples in the gospel. '*And after this manner therefore pray ye....*' [Matthew, 6:9-15.]

The only other Christian prayer which is equally well-known is probably the 'Hail Mary'. Miller does not quote it or refer to it. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, despite the intellectual and historical Catholicism, Mary is not present. There are no references to her.

Women are not particularly important in Miller's imagined world. The Mother of God is not important either.

The phrase *Fiat Voluntas Tua* expresses the necessity of obedience to the will of God. It is the Christian equivalent of the Muslim notion of submission. The action of *Fiat Voluntas Tua* turns on this concept, and on the reality of human rebellion. The doing of God's will is precisely the issue.

## **Albertian Order**

The Albertian Order of Leibowitz in the novel is modelled on the Benedictine Order in the 'real' world. The close resemblance of the imagined future and the historical past is not accidental. Miller's history is cyclical.

The *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* cites both Spengler and Toynbee as writers whose cyclical accounts of history have interested authors of science fiction. I have not read Spengler for many years. I have never read any of the twelve volumes of Toynbee's *The Study of History*. I am unable to suggest more precisely what the source of Miller's thinking might be. [Clute *et al.*, 2011.]

The Benedictines, established in the sixth century by Saint Benedict, their eponymous founder, were the first regular monastic order in the Latin west. The order was the model for the later development of monastic life. The Benedictine *Rule*, which Saint Benedict wrote to guide the brothers, was the earliest Latin document of its type.

Saint Benedict's *Rule* emphasises the importance of work, which usually meant physical, agricultural work. The houses of the Order were as far as possible self-supporting.

Agricultural work is not a part of the activity of the Albertian Order of Leibowitz in the novel. This is possibly because the Abbey of the Albertian Order is in the desert - to be precise, in the south-west desert of the former United States.

It is also possible that agricultural work is not part of the activity of the order because it would not further the plot. This would be the simpler explanation. The plot turns on intellectual, rather than manual, activities: science, the study of documents and the conservation of those documents.

Where the Albertian Order does follow the Benedictine original is in the importance it gives to reading and writing in the life of the community. St Benedict's *Rule* stresses the role of reading. Writing, in the form of copying, was also significant in the life of the Benedictines. Copying manuscripts was a recognised form of work and the *scriptorium* - where the copying was done - was an important part of the abbey.

The same is true of the abbey of the Albertian Order of Leibowitz. When Brother Francis, the key actor in *Fiat Homo*, the first part of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, is allowed to profess his full vows he starts work in the *scriptorium*. It is in the *scriptorium* that much of the work of preserving the Memorabilia – the fragmentary remains of the ancient ‘European-American’ civilisation - takes place.

Each house of the Benedictine Order was independent, and elected its own Prior. The Order had no mother house. The abbey of the Order of Leibowitz is also independent.

The independence of the abbey is particularly important in *Fiat Lux*, the second part of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Thon Thaddeo Pfardentrott, the secular scientist from the early modern state of Texarkana, wishes to take the Memorabilia away, ostensibly for study. The abbot, Dom Paolo, cannot be coerced, and does not have to take instruction from the officials of New Rome. Pfardentrott, rather to his surprise, cannot achieve his ends by putting pressure on the Papal legate, the urbane Marcus Apollo. [*Leibowitz*, 12.]

In the novel, there is no mention of any other house of the Order of Leibowitz. It would in fact not be dramatically necessary for the Order to have any other house. The one in the desert is enough.

The original house of the Benedictine Order was the Abbey of Monte Cassino. Miller, famously, participated as a member of a United States Army Air Force bomber crew in a raid on the Abbey of Monte Cassino during the Second World War. The raid caused a great deal of damage, and a number of civilian casualties.

The Abbey of Monte Cassino was in the mountains. The Abbey of the Albertian Order of Leibowitz is in the south-western desert of the former United States. Mountains and desert are both forms of wilderness.

The Abbey is an all-male environment. None of the main characters are women. This has been commented on.

There are a few female characters. They are secondary. Some of the female characters speak or act. All the female characters who speak or act occur in the third part of the novel, *Fiat Voluntas Tua*.

There may be a reason why women are present as actors and speakers in the third part of the novel only. The world of *Fiat Voluntas Tua* is quasi-modern. It may be that Miller finds it easier to imagine women playing a part in society in a quasi-modern world than in a quasi-medieval one. The part that women play, admittedly, is less than full and equal.

Mrs Grales, the 'Old Tomato Woman', is a rather important character. Rachel, Mrs Grales' second head, is also important.

Mrs Grales speaks. Mrs Grales wants Abbot Zerchi to baptise Rachel.

Rachel does not speak. She is without language.

Rachel, very significantly, acts. Despite being a layperson, uninstructed, without speech and doubtfully human, Rachel offers the dying Zerchi the Host. This is one of the most powerful images in the novel.

The mother of the child who is dying from radiation sickness and blast also speaks. Abbot Zerchi attempts to persuade her not to opt for euthanasia. Neither the woman nor her daughter is named. There is, I think, a degree of depersonalisation here.

There is a 'Lady Journalist' who appears in the delightful pastiche of the news conference. The Lady Journalist is given no other name and has no other reality. She speaks.

The Lady Journalist is portrayed as being rather assertive. This is perhaps a stereotype.

Sister Helen comes across Brother Joshua when he is naked from his bath. Sister Helen does not speak. She shrieks.

The treatment of women in Miller's commercial stories is very much of its time, the 1950s. I feel the portrayal of Sister Helen, on her brief appearance in the novel, may be an example of the same thing. The depiction of women in *ACanticle for Leibowitz* does not add very much to the novel.

## **Men without Women**

Miller is perfectly capable of writing about relationships between men and women if he wants to. He does not do so well, but he does it. Miller in fact believes that men cannot live well without women.

In his story *The Lineman*, Miller makes the point explicitly. He talks about: ‘... *Man, who had to be a twosome in order to be recognizably human.*’ In the same story Miller clarifies one of the reasons that he feels men need to be with women. ‘*It was gang ethics, but it seemed inevitable somehow. Where there was fear, men huddled in small groups and counted their friends on their fingers, and all else was foe. In the absence of the family, there had to be the gang, and fear made it quarrelsome, jealous and proud.*’ [*The Lineman*, 1957.]

Miller shows repeated signs of being concerned with gangs, though the gangs are never central to his stories. In *Beyond Armageddon*, there is an editorial note on the rather well-known story by Stephen Vincent Benet, *By the Waters of Babylon*. In this note Miller mentions personal experience of a particular sort of gang. ‘...*I was engaged in a serious but sporadic BB-gun war with a bunch of Minorcans across the alley.*’ The reference is jocular. There is I think an underlying seriousness. [Miller and Greenberg, 1985.]

*The Lineman* and *Cruxifixus Etiam* are both terraforming stories, as they are known to the fans. *The Lineman* includes an overt explanation for the absence of women. It is rather crude.

An organisation called ‘the Party’ is opposed to something called the ‘Schneider-Volkov Act’. This act forbids women living or working on Mars. There is an ostensible rationalisation for the prohibition. ‘*You can’t raise kids in low gravity. There are five graves back in Crater City to prove it. Kids’ graves. Six feet long. They grow themselves to death.*’ [*The Lineman*, 1957.]

The all-male environment has a direct effect on the plot of *The Lineman*. ‘“*WOMEN! .... Did he say women? .... “It’s a troop of entertainers, Jo. Clearance out of Algiers.... That’s all I know, except they’re mostly women.*”’ [*The Lineman*, 1957.]

These all-male environments have not been created, however, to afford the opportunity for homilies on low gravity or to create the possibility of more or less

interesting plot developments. They are a reference to Miller's experience of military life.

Service in the United States Army Air Force was Miller's most extensive experience of an all-male environment. It is pretty clear from internal evidence in his fiction that there was something about military service that Miller did not like.

The workers' accommodation in *Crucifixus Etiam* is very reminiscent of a barracks. '*The camp was ugly, lonely, and dominated by the gaunt skeleton of a drill rig set up in its midst.*' The dominant drill rig is like the control tower of an airfield. [*The Lineman*, 1959.]

Novotny, the foreman, is the type of the tough, authoritarian regular NCO. '[Novotny] *expected self-discipline and self-imposed obedience, and when he didn't get it, he took it as a personal insult and a challenge to a duel.*' [*The Lineman*, 1957.]

The questioning of purpose is part of the quasi-military life. '*What am I doing here? What is anybody doing here?*' [*Crucifixus Etiam*, 1953.]

The questioning leads to rebelliousness. In *Crucifixus Etiam* one of the men incites the others to kill the engineer, Kinley. "*We oughta take him apart. We oughta kill every one who knew about it – and Kinley's a good place to start!*" [*Crucifixus Etiam*, 1953.]

The rebelliousness is even clearer in *Way of a Rebel*. Given the title, one might perhaps expect it to be. *Way of a Rebel* has an explicitly military theme. The protagonist, Garson, is the commander and crew of a one-man nuclear armed submarine. The one-man nuclear armed submarine is rather an extravagant idea.

Garson refuses to start a nuclear war. He uses his rather juvenile code name to announce his rebellion to his superiors. '*Sonnyboy just resigned from the Navy. Go to hell, all of you! Over and out!*' [*Way of a Rebel*, 1954.]

Garson's motives for rebellion are interesting. '*Why must I participate in the wrecking of mechanical civilisation? he thought grimly.*' This is an example of the technophilia, required by the commercial magazines, against which Miller was himself eventually to rebel. [*Way of a Rebel*, 1954.]

The concern with 'mutiny' in *The Lineman* is very similar to Garson's rebellion. "*Conspiracy to commit mutiny rates the death penalty.*" The use of the word

'mutiny' supports, I think, my argument that all-male environments in Miller are in some way a description of aspects of military life. [*The Lineman*, 1957.]

Garson is ambivalent about his rebellion. '*Had he gone completely insane?*' Rebellion in Miller's magazine stories tends to be ambiguous. [*Way of a Rebel*, 1954.]

Sometimes the rebellion is resolved by being repressed, as in *Crucifixus Etiam*. '*The Peruvian's fist chopped a short stroke to Handell's jaw, and the dull thuk echoed across the clearing. The man crumpled, and Manue crouched over him like a hissing panther. "Get back!" he snapped at the others. "Or I'll jerk his [air] hoses out."*' [*The Lineman*, 1957.]

Sometimes the rebellion is resolved in favour of conformity. It is through conformity that Manue in *Crucifixus Etiam* achieves a personal resolution. '*He knew now what Mars was.... an eight-century passion of human faith in the destiny of the race of man.*' [*Crucifixus Etiam*, 1953.]

Garson in *Way of a Rebel* tries to convince himself with not dissimilar arguments. '*People never needed much of a philosophical motive to make them do the socially approved things.... How could a man trust himself to judge wisely, when his judgement went completely against that of his society?*' [*Way of a Rebel*, 1954.]

Garson's rebellion is finally self-destructive. '*A close explosion sent him lurching aside. He grabbed at the wall and pushed himself back. The switch--the damn double-toggle red switch! He screamed a curse and struck at it with both fists. There came a beautiful, blinding light.*' [*Way of a Rebel*, 1954.]

*Wolf Pack* is another explicitly military story. It is barely science fiction. It might be considered part of the genre on the grounds that its author is a science fiction writer. It also contains something that may or may not be telepathy.

Parapsychology, for some at least of the magazine editors of the 1950s, counted as a science. Stories which included telepathy therefore qualified as science fiction.

*Wolf Pack* is not a bad story. It is better than many of Miller's other productions for the magazines. It is not particularly good.

*Wolf Pack* describes a bombing raid by American airmen in Italy during the Second World War. Mark, the protagonist, is a pilot. For plot reasons, he has to be in

command of the aircraft. Miller in real life was a radio operator and air gunner. Otherwise the setting is very close to Miller's experience.

The concern is not so much with cultural vandalism, as in the raid on Monte Cassino or the threats to the Abbey of Leibowitz in the novel. It is with attacks on civilian targets and with civilian casualties. In particular, there is a concern with casualties among women.

Most of the casualties of the bombing raid on the Abbey of Monte Cassino were apparently among women and children from the surrounding area. They were refugees, sheltering from the bombardment during the battle. Under the classic, chivalric 'laws of war' they would have been considered 'non-combatants'.

It is not clear from the record – such as it is – that Miller ever learned the details of the effects of the bombing of Monte Cassino. It is perfectly clear from the internal evidence in *Wolf Pack* that he was concerned with the issue of attacks on civilians.

Mark is the protagonist of *Wolf Pack*. He may be in telepathic contact with a young Italian woman, and to some extent in love with her. If not, he has imagined her very vividly.

The process started with his feelings about the girl back home. '*She had grown like a strange moth in the chrysalis of his mind, born of a slow metamorphosis that began with a memory image of Ruth.*' [*Wolf Pack*, 1953.]

The young woman hates Mark. "*Che brutto! ...How hateful you are.... You goddamn murderer, you killed my mother! You wrecked my church, and you shattered my city....*" [*Wolf Pack*, 1953.]

Finally, on a bombing run, Mark responds to her insults. "*Bixby! Close the bomb bays!*" [*Wolf Pack*, 1953.]

Mark's crew won't join his impromptu mutiny. '*Surges [the co-pilot] let the ship go, jammed a foot against Mark's side, pistol-whipped him until the pilot fell bleeding against the side of his seat.*' [*Wolf Pack*, 1953.]

Rather than being court-martialed for mutiny, Mark is hospitalized. He is apparently suffering from combat fatigue. "*Man, you're lucky, Pappy!*" 'Pappy' is the bomber crew's nickname for Mark. '*They'll send you home right away. No need to finish*

*those last four missions.*" "Combat fatigue? Hell, Pappy, it could happen to anybody."

Mark's rebellion fails, and he is spared the consequences. [*Wolf Pack*, 1953.]

These stories about male environments in Miller's writing are highly charged. They involve violence, including violence towards women. There are gangs.

The gangs suggest fascism. 'A block away, the nude figure of a girl was struggling between taut ropes held by green-shirted guards.' The uniform colour of the shirts is the clue. In another context, the shirts would be brown or black. [*Dark Benediction*, 1951.]

Miller is concerned with violence against women in wars. He makes his explicit in an editorial comment in *Beyond Armageddon*. 'When a civilisation collapses, barbarians do fall on women first, as every place becomes a war zone and no rules exists.' The key terms here are not 'civilisation' and 'barbarians'. They are 'war zone' and 'no rules'. Miller was an ex-serviceman. These expressions indicate a serious concern. [*Beyond Armageddon*, 1985.]

The themes of Miller's stories of all-male environments are not limited to violence. There are also themes of rebellion and conformity. There is another instance – and an extremely interesting one – of the theme of rebellion in *The Darfsteller*. [1955.]

Miller's concerns about his experience of the military have not I think been fully recognized. Miller's participation in the raid on Monte Cassino has of course always been seen as important. There are however other things that worried Miller about military life.

The fact that Miller was worried is clear. There is no trace in the record of any particular experiences during his war service that he might have been worried about.

## **Love Interest**

Miller does not of course always describe all-male environments. It is in fact relatively unusual for him to do so. He has written a number of stories with a 'love interest', and occasionally describes domestic relationships.

I am not familiar with all the stories that Miller wrote. Of the stories that I am familiar with, *Dark Benediction*, *Anybody Else Like Me? Big Joe and the Nth Generation*, *Dumb Waiter*, *The Ties that Bind*, and *Wolf Pack* all involve a love interest of some kind.

*Conditionally Human* and *Death of a Spaceman* both deal with domestic relationships. In *Conditionally Human* the domestic relationship is foreground.

These stories were written and published in the fifties. The portrayal of both the love interest and the domestic setting is very much of their time. The style-conscious reader will easily be able to imagine the bouffant hairstyles and the swirly skirts.

Men and women, in the world that Miller describes, have radically different attitudes to relationships. To women they are apparently all-important. *'He swallowed hard. For the girl, "love" automatically settled everything, and consummation must follow.'* [*The Ties that Bind*, 1954.]

Men, however, are conscious of a higher duty. *'Stop it, you fool, he told himself. You can't make love to her. You've got to leave with the rest of them.'* [*The Ties that Bind*, 1954.]

Sometimes the love interest occurs in the setting of an adventure story plot. Women are powerless. *'In the oversized clothing she looked like a child, hurt and helpless.'* [*Dark Benediction*, 1951.]

Women in the adventure stories need to be rescued. *'The sound of [the truck's] engine starting brought a halt to the disposal of the pest-girl.'* The 'pest-girl', Willie, has been affected by the extra-terrestrial plague. Willie is a 'dermie'. She is dangerous. [*Dark Benediction*, 1951.]

When girls are helpless and powerless, and exposed to violence, they can gain the approval of the boys by enduring pain with stoicism. *"You're a plucky kid," he grunted.... But the girl made no complaint except the involuntary hurt sounds. She asked*

*nothing, and accepted his aid with a wide-eyed gratitude that left him weak. He thought that it would be easier to leave her if she would only beg or plead, or demand.'* [Dark Benediction, 1951.]

Eventually Willie gains her reward. *'Paul fought down a crazy urge to pick her up and carry her; plague be damned.... He pulled her close and kissed her.'* [Dark Benediction, 1951.]

*Dumb Waiter* is also an adventure story. The hero, Laskell, is not just physically brave. Like Paul in *Dark Benediction* – and, as the record fairly clearly suggests, like Miller himself – he is also technically competent.

The hero upbraids the girl for her incompetence with gadgets. *“You're worthless! ...You're one of the machine-age's spoiled children.... You're not fit to take care of yourself.”* [Dumb Waiter, 1952.]

Finally in exasperation our hero spans the girl. *'He picked up a ruler from Sarquist's desk, then dived for her. A moment later she was stretched out across his lap, clawing at his legs and shrieking while he applied the ruler resoundingly.'* [Dumb Waiter, 1952.]

This being the fifties, there is no sense that the spanking is consensual. Neither is it erotic. It is seen as perfectly appropriate for an adult male to physically chastise an adult woman who has irritated him. Miller appears to accept this, in fiction at least, as normal.

Mrs Waverly in *Anybody Else Like Me?* is not just telepathic. She is also a respectable housewife. There is a reference to *'Quiet misery in a darkened room.'* The unhappy 1950s housewife was to become a stock theme of the counter culture. The best known version is probably the 1973 pop song, 'The Ballad of Lucy Jordan'. The song is by Dr Hook and the Medicine Show.

Mrs Waverly is shocked by the mere suggestion of illicit sexual activity. This is also typical of the stereotype. *'Arrange for some children indeed!'* [Anybody Else Like Me? 1952.]

The marital relationship in *Conditionally Human* is just as conventional. Norris is practical. *“You knew I was District Inspector for the F.B.A. You knew I had charge of a pound.”* Mrs Norris is emotional, and to some extent her husband's conscience. *“I*

*didn't know you killed them," she snapped, whirling.'* The word 'whirling' evokes a world of stereotypical femininity. [*Conditionally Human*, 1952.]

The role of the wife in *Death of a Spaceman* is quasi-maternal. One of her jobs is to stop her husband drinking. *"Pour me a drink, will you?" "You shouldn't have it, Donny. Please don't."* [*Death of a Spaceman*, 1954.]

Donny's wife also has to persuade him to have the Last Rites. *"Donny," she whispered, leaning closer, "won't you let me call the priest now? Please?" "...If I'm not dying, I don't need a priest," he said sleepily. "That's not right," she scolded softly. "You know that's not right, Donny. You know better."* [*Death of a Spaceman*, 1954.]

Miller's portrayal of relations between men and women is thoroughly conventional. The rendering of the convention is more or less competent.

## Priests

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* is the first time Miller has written about monks. It is a significant departure for him.

Miller has however written about the secular clergy. There are Catholic priests in several of Miller's stories. They occur for example in *Dark Benediction* and *Death of a Spaceman*, as we have seen, and in *Conditionally Human*. They also occur in an early non-science fiction story, *Month of Mary*. The presentation of the clergy is generally positive.

*Month of Mary* [1950], which I have not examined, apparently deals with a leper colony. In *Dark Benediction*, the colony is in Galveston and is for those affected by an extraterrestrial plague. The priests in this case are missionaries, and therefore have medical skills. "Well, most of the priests down at Saint Mary's were missionaries. They're all doctors." [ *Dark Benediction*, 1951.]

The medical qualifications of the former missionaries are convenient for the story. The hero is interested in a young woman called Willie. Willie has been rather badly wounded by a bullet during her adventuresome rescue from a gang of fascists. She can hardly walk.

The priests treat Willie. They also recognise and support the hero's altruistic instincts. "Really, you've done enough. I gather you saved her life." [ *Dark Benediction*, 1951.]

The protagonist in *Death of a Spaceman* does not initially want the priest to come. It is the priest however who arranges for the wealthy revellers next door to play the *Last Post* as the spaceman dies. "I saw Father Paul on the terrace, talking to somebody." ....it puzzled him, hearing the same slow bugle-notes of the call played at the lowering of the colours.... The trumpet stopped suddenly. Then he knew it had been for him.' This is sentimental. It is intended to show the clergy in a good light. [ *Death of a Spaceman*, 1954.]

In *Conditionally Human* the priest is motivated by concern about his brother-in-law. The priest's brother-in-law, a shopkeeper, became fond of a genetically modified chimpanzee. The protagonist, as we have seen, works for the regulatory

authority. He has removed the chimpanzee. The priest's brother-in-law has reacted with violent distress.

The priest is prepared to have a serious conversation about the theology of genetically enhanced animals. He uses an analogy, as Miller often does, to argue that technology itself is morally neutral. The neutrality of technology was one of Miller's favourite positions when he was writing commercial stories for the magazines. "*To make nitro-glycerine for curing heart trouble is good, to make it for blowing open safes is bad.*" [*Conditionally Human*, 1952.]

There is a similar argument in *Dark Benediction*. "*It's been pointed out by our philosophers that things become evil only through human use. Morphine, for instance, is a product of the Creator; it is therefore good when properly used for relief of pain. When mistreated by an addict it becomes a monster.*" [*Dark Benediction*, 1951.]

The priest in *Conditionally Human* takes a humane view of the question of whether the genetically modified chimp is in some way human. The priest's humanity is sympathetic. "*What's intelligence? A function of Man, immortal. What's man? An intelligent immortal creature, capable of choice.*" [*Conditionally Human*, 1952.]

The priest insists that the chimp should have the benefit of the doubt. "*If you had to decide for yourself-*" "*What? Whether to destroy her or not? ... Not if there was the least doubt in my mind about her.*" There is I think an underlying concern with abortion. [*Conditionally Human*, 1952.]

In *A Cantic for Leibowitz* there are mutants. They are the result of atomic radiation. There is some concern in about whether the mutants are fully human. It is interesting to see a similar concern about mutation and the nature of humanity in an earlier story.

The priests in these stories are rational and humane. They are decent men. They have a certain limited authority. Their authority is moral, rather than sacerdotal.

This is religion as a social institution. It is not a belief system, and it is not spiritual.

Miller wrote about all-male environments before he wrote *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. He also wrote about relationships between men and women. What is new in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is the abbey – the community of monks.

In *A Canticle for Leibowitz* the all-male environment is an idealization. There is a discipline and a dedication which of which Miller seems to approve. It is reminiscent of more romantic ideas about the military. The violence of military life, however, has been expelled beyond the abbey walls.

The abbey is somehow redemptive.

## **Memorabilia**

The Albertian Order of Leibowitz in the novel was founded to preserve surviving fragments of the scientific knowledge of the ancient civilisation from the violent rage of the 'Simplification'. *'Twelve years after the proposals were made, Father Isaac Edward Leibowitz had won permission from the Holy See to found a new community of religious.... Its task, unannounced and at first only vaguely defined, was to preserve human history for the great-great-great-grandchildren of the children of the simpletons who wanted it destroyed.'* [Leibowitz, 6.]

After civilisation is destroyed mobs blame the learned, and in the end the merely literate, for the disaster. They destroy books and lynch those who hide them. *'And the hate said: Let us stone and disembowel and burn the ones who did this thing.... Let us make a great simplification, and then the world shall begin again.... So it was that after the Deluge... there began the bloodletting of the Simplification....'* [Leibowitz, 6.]

Leibowitz was the founder of the Order. He was a former electrical engineer whose wife had died in the Holocaust. He took the Cistercian habit and became a priest. He was martyred by the Simplifiers. [Leibowitz, 6.]

It is not completely insignificant that when Miller enrolled at the University of Tennessee, it was ostensibly to study electrical engineering. After living through a period of violence – the Second World War, rather than an imagined Holocaust – Miller turned his attention to books. The parallel is approximate but clear.

The Simplification does not seem to me to have a single, specific historical referent. It brings to mind a number of historical events and processes. It recalls for instance the pogroms and the wars of religion. It perhaps also recalls the book-burning of the Nazis. It is an image of violence, ignorance and anti-intellectualism. Given the importance of Jewishness in the novel, and the fact that it was written so soon after the genocide of the European Jews in the death camps, it is an image perhaps above all of scapegoating.

It also seems quite possible that at the date in question in the southern states of the USA, where Miller resided, the author was also thinking of lynching. *'Hooded*

*in burlap, [Leibowitz] was martyred forthwith, by strangulation with a hangman's noose not tied for neck-breaking, at the same time being roasted alive....'* [Leibowitz, 6.]

A form of hanging causing death by slow strangulation was the most common form of murder in lynching cases. Burning alive was sadly by no means unknown. The case of Henry Smith in Texas in 1893, for example, is well-documented.

The word 'Albertian' in the title of the order is a reference to Albertus Magnus, teacher of St Thomas, and patron of men of science. Magnus was a Dominican friar, a bishop, and a theologian and philosopher.

Magnus taught at the University of Paris. He commented extensively on the works of Aristotle and studied Averroes and Avicenna. In choosing Albertus Magnus as the patron of his imaginary Order, Miller emphasises the responsibility of the Order towards science, and its connection with the intellectual traditions of the church.

The '*...members [of the Order] were either "bookleggers" or "memorisers"....'* [Leibowitz, 6.] These terms are medieval in their concreteness. The bookleggers smuggle the books, at considerable personal risk. The memorisers commit to memory texts that they may scarcely understand, and when it is safe write them down.

'Booklegger' is derived from the criminal 'bootlegger'. The word is used in the novel for a religious activity. This is typical of Miller's wit.

The term 'memorabilia' is normally used to refer to the collectable personal effects of celebrities. Miller borrows the same word in his novel for the fragmentary remains of the ancient scientific culture. The word retains, I think, something of the derogatory connotation that the term has in its original context.

The word memorabilia is usually refers to an arbitrary assemblage of objects, which are cherished solely because of an association. The association is usually with a celebrity. The objects are often over-valued. They may have little or no intrinsic worth. In the novel, the association of the fragments of scientific texts is with the vanished civilisation.

The Memorabilia do not in fact amount to a great deal: '*...a few kegs of original books and a pitiful collection of hand-copied texts rewritten from memory....*' The monks have preserved some documents. They have not preserved the knowledge that would make their contents meaningful. '*... much of it was not really knowledge now... empty of content, its subject matter long since gone.*' [Leibowitz, 6.]

The same point is made, with what I think is wonderful irony, when Brother Francis makes a pilgrimage to New Rome to present the Pope with an illuminated copy of an incomprehensible blueprint. We are allowed to assume that the blueprint is associated with Leibowitz personally. "'Tell us, do you understand the symbols used by Leibowitz? The meaning of the, uh, thing represented?" "No, Holy Father, my ignorance is complete." The Pope leaned forward to whisper: "So is ours."' The Pope is of course infallible, if only on matters of doctrine. To me the idea of the Pope being ignorant of anything at all is quite delightful. [Leibowitz, 11.]

The brothers of the Order of Leibowitz preserve the fragmentary written remains of the ancient civilisation. Historically the monks, in what are still sometimes known as the Dark Ages of medieval Europe, preserved both secular and sacred Latin manuscripts in a very similar way. Monastic scholarship, and monastic copying and re-copying, were the main route by which classical civilisation was transmitted to the modern world.

Latin scholarship, and the preservation of ancient learning, is very much part of the history of the Catholic Church. This is another example of Miller's use of the notion of cyclical history. The firm basis in history makes Miller's imagined future thoroughly concrete. It also makes it real.

## **Renaissance**

In *Fiat Lux*, the second part of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Miller describes a renaissance. 'Now a Dark Age seemed to be passing.' [Leibowitz, 14.]

In the popular version of European cultural history, the word 'renaissance' usually means the fourteenth century Tuscan Renaissance. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz* Miller intends rather the thirteenth century Renaissance.

The Tuscan Renaissance was about literature and philosophy, and the use of Classical models and Classical subjects in the plastic arts. The Renaissance of the thirteenth century was about the recovery of scientific learning. The thirteenth-century Renaissance was based on the recovery of Greek works of philosophy from Arabic versions, and the acquisition of previously unknown works by Arabic philosophers.

In the thirteenth century the scholars involved in the translation and study of the newly-available documents were ecclesiastics. The centre of the movement, the University of Paris, was a Catholic institution. The thirteenth century Renaissance was known for the development of universities. This is paralleled in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* by the activities of Pfardentrott and his colleagues.

Pfardentrott is not an ecclesiastic. He refers however to '*the faculty of the collegium*'. This is clearly a university. The world has come on since the Dark Ages of *Fiat Homo*. [Leibowitz, 12.]

The recovery of learning in the thirteenth century is part of the history of the Church. It is this history that is being repeated in the novel.

In *Fiat Lux*, Miller describes a reformation as well as a renaissance. It is a reformation that Miller carefully links to the European Reformation of the sixteenth century. The sixteenth-century Reformation, although by definition Protestant, is also part of the history of the Catholic Church.

The history of the Reformation is the history of the end of the Catholic Church as the monolithic institution which defined and expressed the idea of Western Europe. Western Europe, at that time, was often referred to as Christendom.

The modern period of *Fiat Voluntas Tua*, the third part of the novel, represents the triumph of secularism. This is the end result of the Reformation. The Church must adapt to secularism, but as an institution it must also resist.

The Order of Leibowitz is a religious order. The documents, however, are secular. They cannot on their own bring about a revival of learning, but they may contribute to it. *'The Memorabilia could not, of itself, generate a revival of ancient science or high civilisation... but the books could help....'* [Leibowitz, 14.]

The revival of learning will bring about the reinvention of nuclear weapons and the repetition of the nuclear Holocaust. This is another example of Miller's use of the idea of the cycle of history. *'Twelve centuries ago, not even the survivors profited. Must we start down that road again?'* [Leibowitz, 21.]

The Order, as a Christian institution, has no reason to get involved with secular learning or with science. Dom Paolo's friend Benjamin makes this explicit. *''The books... were written by the children of the world, and they'll be taken from you by the children of the world, and you had no business with them in the first place.''* [Leibowitz, 16.]

Benjamin is Leibowitz, the eponymous founder of the Albertian Order. He has somehow survived his own death by several hundred years. By an authorial sleight of hand, Benjamin is also the Wandering Jew of medieval Christian legend.

The preservation of scientific documents is different from the preservation of secular literature by the medieval European monks. The classical Latin texts did not contain the secrets of a science that would enable the rediscovery of nuclear weapons. They did however contain some of the seeds of the Renaissance and the Reformation. The Renaissance and the Reformation damaged – if they did not destroy – the Catholic Church.

Learning was always ambiguous.

## States

In the world of *Fiat Lux*, early modern states are emerging from the ruins of the former United States. In the same way, early modern states emerged after the Dark Ages from the ruins of the Roman Empire.

The strongest and most ambitious of the new states in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is Texarkana. The ruler of Texarkana is Hannegan.

Hannegan is a powerful presence in the novel. He is feared, and often discussed. He neither appears nor speaks.

Hannegan is a blood relative of Pfardentrott and in a sense Pfardentrott's patron. Pfardentrott's collegium is based in Hannegan's Texarkana. Hannegan, much like Henry VIII of England, and for reasons which – also like Henry – are dynastic rather than doctrinal, stages a reformation.

In the alternative universe of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Hannegan is historically quite complex. Hannegan has a number of titles: '*Hannegan II, by Grace of God Mayor, Viceroy of Texarkana, Defender of the Faith, and Vaquero Supreme of the Plains....*' [*Leibowitz*, 21.]

The recitation of the titles is not just bombast, though it is also that. The titles refer to specific periods and events in European and American history. The order in which the titles are recited corresponds fairly closely to their sequence in history.

The title of Mayor is a reference to the Merovingian Franks and the Mayor of the Palace. This connects Hannegan with the Dark Ages that are reproduced in *Fiat Homo*.

Hannegan is also quite explicitly compared to Henry VIII. Henry broke with Rome and established a national church. Hannegan, like Henry, bears the title 'Defender of the Faith'. In the light of subsequent events, the title is ironic.

Miller also refers to '*Regnans in Excelsis, a sixteenth century bull ordering a monarch deposed.*' [*Leibowitz*, 21.] *Regnans in Excelsis* was issued in 1570 by Pius V. The pope declared Elizabeth, Henry's daughter, 'pretended Queen of England and servant of crime', to be a heretic. He released Elizabeth's subjects from obedience. Heresy, in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, is an important theme.

The titles of Viceroy and Supreme Vaquero of the Plains are American in reference. Columbus was the first Viceroy of the Indies. After the conquests on the mainland the title became Viceroy of New Spain. Like 'mayor', the term suggests less than fully independent power.

'Vaquero', of course, is Mexican-Spanish for 'cowboy'. The idea of a 'Supreme Vaquero' is both bombastic and amusing.

Eventually Hannegan's ambitions lead to something very like the Henrican reformation. *'The Mayoral TAKE HEED ordered the licensing of the Texarkanan clergy, made the administration of the Sacraments by unauthorised persons a crime under the law, and made an oath of supreme allegiance to the Mayoralty a condition for licensing and recognition.'* This closely parallels Henry's rejection of the authority of Rome and his creation of a national church.

There is no equivalent in Hannegan's decree to Henry's notorious dissolution of the monasteries. The Abbey of the Albertian Order of Leibowitz is the only monastic institution which is described in detail in the novel, although at least one other is referred to indirectly. This is the monastery that brought up the scientist Pfardentrott. The Abbey of the Albertian Order of Leibowitz does not come under the jurisdiction of Texarkana. There is no need for a dissolution.

Miller takes what he needs from history. He discards the rest.

## Documents

Documents are crucial in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. They are important also in some of Miller's other writings. The Memorabilia of the *Canticle* do not come from nowhere.

Documents play a key role in at least two of Miller's magazine stories. There are documents in *Big Joe and the Nth Generation* (1952) and in *Dark Benediction* (1951).

In *Big Joe and the Nth Generation* the documents are ancient. Their meaning has been lost and has to be reconstructed. The knowledge they contain is essential to the survival of the Martian colony. Most of the colonists do not know this. Mars, in this imagined reality, has an atmosphere that has been artificially created. It needs to be maintained. *Big Joe and the Nth Generation* is amongst other things a terraforming story.

In *Dark Benediction* the documents are extra-terrestrial. They are associated with a virus that was carried to Earth in the same bombardment as the documents. The virus is dangerous. It has destroyed what the protagonist thinks of as 'industrial civilisation'. *Dark Benediction* is a holocaust story.

There is technophilia in both stories, more strongly in *Big Joe and the Nth Generation*. Technophilia was very much what some of the magazine editors required. John W. Campbell of *Astounding Science Fiction*, for example, was well known for insisting on a positive attitude to technology.

In *Dark Benediction* there is also a certain pessimism. It is similar to the pessimism that pervades *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. It is not so intense.

In *Big Joe and the Nth Generation* there has been a collapse in the level of civilisation. 'But if the third, fourth and Nth generations fail to further the retooling process....' As well as being a terraforming story, *Big Joe and the Nth Generation* is a Ruined Mars story. It is a variation on the more familiar Ruined Earth scenario. [*Big Joe and the Nth Generation*, 1952.]

The texts in *Big Joe and the Nth Generation*, just as in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, are scientific. The scientific authors of the twentieth century have acquired divine status. Individual sentences are memorised, handed down, traded, and stolen. 'Quotations from the ancient gods - Fermi, Einstein, Elgermann, Hanser and the rest - most men owned

*scattered phrases, and scattered phrases remained meaningless.*' [*Big Joe and the Nth Generation*, 1952.]

This fragmentary quality, the loss of meaning and the purely oral transmission, occur in a more extreme form in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. In the novel, the fragments are of course written.

Asir, the protagonist of *Big Joe and the Nth Generation*, is an outcast and a thief. Asir '*...came back to the village of his ancestors to... steal the rituals of his masters.*' The word 'ritual' has associations of repetition and obscurity. They are appropriate here. [*Big Joe and the Nth Generation*, 1952.]

The council punish Asir for his crimes. Asir knows more than they do. '*A thief, if successful, frequently became endowed with wisdom, for he memorised more wealth than a score of honest men ...a thief memorised all the transactions that he overheard, and the countless phrases could be fitted together into meaningful ideas.*' Asir knows that the ancient machinery has to be restarted. If this is not done the artificial Martian atmosphere will seep away. [*Big Joe and the Nth Generation*, 1952.]

Asir beats the robot guardian of the neglected machinery in a combined display of physical courage and intelligent problem-solving. Asir becomes a hero. He gets the girl. "*Kiss me, Technologist,*" she told him in a small voice.' [*Big Joe and the Nth Generation*, 1952.]

In *Dark Benediction* the documents arrive in objects that are originally thought to be meteorites. '*Rumor connected the onslaught of the plague with an unpredicted swarm of meteorites....*' On examination what had been thought to be meteorites prove to be manufactured objects. '*...the meteorite... was a near-perfect sphere.... The globe was made up of several concentric shells.... Paul found the iron filings and dusted the mirror-shells with the powder. Delicate patterns appeared.*' The patterns are a form of writing which scientists have partially deciphered. In *Dark Benediction*, Miller is still positive about science and scientists. [*Dark Benediction*, 1951.]

The writing includes a warning. "*If you are self-destroyers, then the contents will only help to destroy you.*" The first people to find the globes don't heed the warnings. "*They meant for us to read the warning on the shells before we went further.... The senders just didn't foresee our monkey-minded species....*" Their carelessness causes a plague,

which leads to the collapse of civilisation. '*The dark pall of neuroderm was unlike any illness the Earth had ever seen.*' [Dark Benediction, 1951.]

There is a hint that the mutation caused by the plague could have evolutionary value. '*The fully-developed hyper... has more sensory tools with which to grasp ideas.*' This is offset by a pessimism about humanity. '*If Man intends to keep fighting with his fellows, the parasite will help him make a better job of that, too.*' [Dark Benediction, 1951.]

The holocaust in *Dark Benediction* is caused by a plague, rather than by a natural disaster or nuclear weapons. According to *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, the plague scenario is common. [Clute *et al.*, 2011.] Among the examples cited are Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* [1826], Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* [1912] and Stephen King's *The Stand* [1978].

Miller was clearly interested in the holocaust scenario in general before he decided to write about the nuclear Holocaust. Humanity in *Dark Benediction* is described as self-destructive. That self-destructiveness is said to be innate. These ideas recur in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. In the novel they are fundamental.

In *Dark Benediction* mankind is also described as a parasite. '*Man is a parasite, as far as vegetables are concerned.*' This remark, odd as the reference to 'vegetables' may sound to a modern ear, is a hint of the ecological ideas which were entering science fiction at about that time. [Dark Benediction, 1951.]

*Big Joe and the Nth Generation* is technophile. In the story, the restoration of the knowledge that the fragmented 'rituals' contain is a laudable objective. 'Given the knowledge, the colonists may be able to restore a machine culture if the knowledge continues to be bolstered by desire.... *The quotation was from the god Roggins, Progress of the Mars-Culture.*' The restoration of knowledge will save society. '*The Blaze of the Great Wind needed to be rekindled under the earth....*' [Big Joe and the Nth Generation, 1952.]

In *Dark Benediction*, the scientists are implicitly praised for their caution, and lauded for their rationality. '*I know nothing. Absolutely nothing. I have some observed data. I have noticed some correlations.... I have traced the patterns of the happenings and found some probable common denominators. And that is all!*' [Dark Benediction, 1951.]

Despite the scientific caution, the documents are associated with a powerful danger. *'The normal functioning of civilization had been dropped like a hot potato within six months after the first alarms.'* [*Dark Benediction*, 1951.]

In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the documents that the Albertian Order preserves are thoroughly ambiguous. The monks show a reverence for learning and respect for the scientific past. The medieval European monks showed a similar for the manuscript remains of the classical past. Yet the documents that the Albertian Order preserves contribute to a revival of science. Science reinvents the nuclear weapons that are used by the power hungry to repeat the Holocaust.

At the heart of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* there is a powerful irony. I think it has sometimes been missed.

## Beginning

Miller establishes the Catholic parameters of the novel very firmly in the first sentence of the first chapter. '*Brother Francis Gerard of Utah might never have discovered the blessed documents, had it not been for the pilgrim with the girded loins who appeared during that young novice's Lenten fast in the desert.*' [Leibowitz, 1.]

'Brother' is the usual term for a male member of a Catholic religious order who has not taken holy orders. 'Francis' and 'Gerard' are names of saints. Names of saints are traditionally adopted by Catholic religious on professing vows. We very soon learn that the question of whether or not Brother Francis will be allowed to proceed to his final vows is fundamental to the action of *Fiat Homo*, the first part of *ACanticle for Leibowitz*.

The term 'blessed' in Catholicism indicates a status short of sainthood. We also learn that the progress of the case for the canonisation of the Order's founder, the Blessed Leibowitz, is intimately related to the matter of Brother Francis' vows.

The phrase 'girded loins' is one of a small number of allusions to the Authorised Version which all culturally Christian and most secular people know. It is a broadly Christian, rather than a specifically Catholic reference. Pilgrimage, however, is a Catholic institution. Pilgrimage is not favoured by Protestants.

In the strict sense of the word, the status of 'novice' is specific to the celibate orders of the Catholic Church. A 'Lenten fast' – though not of course Lent itself – is a specifically Catholic institution. A thoroughly Catholic cultural context is thus established right at the beginning of the novel.

Miller mentions that Brother Francis hails from Utah. He is establishing that *ACanticle for Leibowitz* is set in the territory of the former United States. The documents that are glancingly mentioned here, the randomly-preserved fragments of the science of the ancient European-American civilisation, are fundamental to the novel. Their preservation is the *raison d'être* of the Order.

The discovery by Brother Francis of new, authentic documents in the Fallout Survival Shelter is the main event of *Fiat Homo*. The role of the documents in recreating the ancient science and leading to a second Holocaust is the fundamental irony of the novel.

Miller makes it very clear that the story he is telling is a Catholic story. A generically Christian tone, rather than as specifically Catholic one, is established by constant pastiche of scripture. '*Now Prince Name was not as Holy Job, for when his land was afflicted with trouble and his people less rich than before, when he saw his enemy become mightier, he grew fearful and ceased to trust in God, thinking unto himself: I must strike before the enemy overwhelmeth me without taking his sword in hand.*' This is affectionate. It is not parody. [Leibowitz, 18.]

The pastiche of scriptural language serves to place Miller's alternative history in a context of Christian eschatology. The frequent use of Latin restores an emphasis on the Catholic nature of the novel. At the date Miller wrote, Latin was still the liturgical language of the Catholic Church. '*Omnes sancti Martyres, orate pro nobis.*' [Leibowitz, 11.]

*A Canticle for Leibowitz*, as we have seen, is in a number of ways a thoroughly Catholic novel. Rather surprisingly, perhaps, it is not Christian.

## **Divorce**

It is not a knowledge of scripture which defines a person as Christian. It is not, for that matter, a knowledge of Latin either. It is Christian practice and Christian belief.

By the time he wrote *ACanticle for Leibowitz* Miller, as I shall show in a moment, was not a practicing Catholic. It is also clear from the internal evidence of the novel, and from editorial comments in *Beyond Armageddon*, that Miller was a self-aware and self-confessed heretic. He was not a Christian. [Miller and Greenwood, 1985.]

Miller converted to Catholicism in 1947. The exact timing and the precise circumstances, as with so much else about Miller, are not completely clear. Miller was a very private man.

There is in general a lack of reliable information about Miller. I rely heavily on William Roberson's *Walter M. Miller, Jr.: A Reference Guide to his Fiction and his Life*. [Roberson, 2011.]

At about the same time as he became a Catholic, Miller enrolled at the University of Texas to study engineering. Miller had taken two years of college at the University of Tennessee before he enlisted in the Army Air Force.

Miller married Anna Louise Becker in 1945, before his discharge from the Air Force. After her marriage, Mrs Miller was always known as Anne. In 1947, when Miller converted, he and Anne already had two children. The available sources do not indicate whether Anne Miller was a Catholic or not when she married Miller. It is quite an important detail.

In 1949, Anne Miller nearly died during the birth of the Millers' third child. She was advised by her doctors not to have any more children. In 1951, following the birth of the Millers' fourth and last child, Anne Miller had a tubal ligation.

Tubal ligation is a major surgical intervention leading to permanent sterilisation. The Millers delayed the procedure until another child had been born. There is no explanation in the record of why they did this.

The Millers' use of a form of what was then known as birth control led to difficulties with the Church. The Catholic Church forbade, and still forbids, birth control.

The difficulty created with the Church by Anne Miller's tubal ligation is confirmed by Judith Merrill. The details of Merrill's account are unfortunately somewhat confused. [Merrill and Pohl-Weary, 2002.]

In 1953, Miller and Judith Merrill had a six-month relationship. They were clearly very fond of each other and intended at one stage to get married. After the end of the relationship, Miller and Merrill only saw each other twice. One occasion was at the 1956 World Science Fiction Convention in New York.

This is incidentally one of the few occasions where we have direct evidence that Miller attended a science fiction convention. It is often assumed that he attended conventions. There is rarely any evidence that he did so.

While attending the 1956 Convention Miller went to church in Merrill's company. In Merrill's words, *'Walt... wanted me to come to mass with him.... it turns out that Walt had not quite been excommunicated – there's a stage before that – for allowing his wife's tubes to be tied after the fourth child was born on the advice of a doctor.... So I think that time in New York was the first chance he had to attend mass in a long, long time.'*

[Merrill and Pohl-Weary, 2002.]

Merrill was not a Catholic. She did not understand the details of Catholic doctrine. We would not expect her to.

Merrill does not say whether Miller took communion on this occasion. She does not mention whether Miller attended mass or took communion in 1953 when she and Miller were together.

In September 1953 Miller and Anne were divorced. This was during the course of Miller's relationship with Merrill. Later in the same year the Millers remarried.

Divorce was even more problematic for the Catholic Church than birth control. Remarriage would not have helped. Divorced people are not allowed to marry in the Catholic Church.

After his divorce Miller was apparently asked to refrain from taking communion. [Roberson, 2011.] Technically this may only have applied to Miller's own parish. In principle, however, a divorced person could not be a member of the Catholic Church and could not take communion.

Divorce would have been far more important for Miller's relationship with the Church than Anne Miller's tubal ligation. Merrill's account, in the light of this, does not make complete sense. There was nothing to prevent Miller attending mass. The difficulty would have arisen over the sacrament.

Miller, in 1953, was divorced. He was not able to take the sacrament. He was no longer able to practice the Catholic faith.

Cynthia Smith states categorically that Miller was a practicing Catholic when he wrote *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. I am able to state - equally categorically, or perhaps even more so - that Ms Smith is quite simply wrong. The fact of Miller's divorce is fatal to Ms Smith's assertion. [Smith, 2009.]

## **Heresy**

Miller was no more a Christian than he was a Catholic. He is heretical on the doctrine of Original Sin, and he is heretical on Salvation.

The importance of Original Sin is not necessarily obvious to people who are neither practicing Christians nor culturally Christian. The notion of innate and hereditary human sinfulness is, I accept, rather austere. It is however innate sinfulness – being ‘born in sin’, as the jargon has it – that creates the need for salvation.

There are different understandings of Original Sin in the Christian tradition. Christianity is a large and diverse community. Its members are much given to disputation. The notion of Original Sin is one of the beliefs that are vital to the Christian belief system. It is hard to imagine there would not be controversy on the point.

Protestant theologians interpret the Temptation of Eve as a story of sexual shame, and understand Original Sin as concupiscence. Since the Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth century the modern Catholic Church has been interested perhaps above all in sexual discipline. It has taken a view that is similar to that of the Protestants. '*And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.*' [Genesis 3:7.]

I do not cite the Authorised Version because of any mistaken belief in the authoritative nature of the text on which the translation was based. I like the grandiloquent English.

In the first two parts of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* Miller interprets Original Sin as the desire for scientific knowledge, rather than as concupiscence. Miller further defines the desire for scientific knowledge as intellectual pride.

In *Fiat Lux*, the second part of the novel, Miller puts this view of original sin into the mouth of Abbot Paulo. This is in the course of an acrimonious dispute with the scientist Pfardentrott: '*... to abuse the intellect for reasons of pride, vanity or escape from responsibility, is the fruit of that same tree.*' [Leibowitz, 22.] The ‘tree’, here, is of course the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, in the Garden of Eden.

Scientific knowledge, in the hands of rulers who wish to dominate, is dangerous. . '... you promise to begin restoring Man's control over Nature. But who will govern the use of the power to control natural forces? Who will use it? To what end? How will you hold him in check?' [Leibowitz, 21.]

There is a hint here, I think, of Plato's Guardians. Miller seems to be thinking of the well-known line of Juvenal's, *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* The tag is usually translated as 'Who will guard the Guardians?'

Miller's interpretation of Original Sin as the search for secular knowledge is not without scriptural warrant. The temptation of forbidden knowledge is a crucial part of the biblical story. 'Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field.... And the serpent said to the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' The desire for knowledge is equated with the desire to be like a god. This is the sin of pride. [Genesis, 3:1, 4-5.]

Ketterer, in *New Worlds for Old*, completely misses the point. Discussing the end of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, he comments: 'Men, having previously devolved into automatons, may, on another world, evolve into gods.' Ketterer is apparently unaware that the desire to be like a god is a mortal sin. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, mortal sin – albeit in a deviant form – matters very much. [Ketterer, 1974.]

Miller chooses to equate secular science with the knowledge of Good and Evil that was forbidden by God. This is sleight of hand on Miller's part. He is writing fiction. He is not arguing theology. The existential loss of innocence would not normally be considered by theologians to be the same thing as the pursuit of science. It is a different kind of knowledge.

In *Fiat Voluntas Tua* the risk of nuclear war is imminent. In Miller's alternative version of history, this is the second holocaust - the 'fire next time'. The consequences of the use of atomic weapons are obvious. By the time in which *Fiat Voluntas Tua* is set, the ruins have been rebuilt. Yet harm persists. One of the clearest signs is the persistence of genetic mutation. *Mrs Grales... the bicephalous old tomato woman...* is '...one of [the] more conspicuous heirs... of the Diluvium Ignis.' [Leibowitz, 24.] As Abbot

Zerchi observes with passion, '*... governments were fully aware of the consequences of another war....*' They are therefore morally responsible. [Leibowitz, 27.]

Miller puts into the Abbot's mouth the suggestion that beings who are prepared to take this kind of risk must be mad. He presents this as a fundamental human flaw. '*Is the species congenitally insane, Brother? If we're born mad, where's the hope of heaven?*' The notion of a fundamental flaw is of course a defining element of Original Sin. [Leibowitz, 25.]

Miller believes that the pursuit of scientific knowledge is Original Sin. This is not what Christians believe. Miller is a heretic.

Miller is not a Christian.

## **Technology**

Technology itself – technology as machines, rather than as scientific theory – is not seen as a problem in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. It is the intentions of human beings that are problematic.

Technology, in the science fiction magazines of the ‘Golden Age’, was very much seen as the solution. When he writes *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Miller no longer believes this.

Miller’s magazine fiction is usually technophile. The magazine stories *Dumb Waiter*, *Dark Benediction*, and *Big Joe and the Nth Generation* all clearly endorse the cult of technology. *The Darfsteller* is more ambiguous.

In *Dumb Waiter* the belief of Laskell, the protagonist in technology is explicit. ‘*Humanity had waited a hundred thousand years before deciding to build a technological civilisation. If he wrecked this one completely, he might never decide to build another.*’ Laskell goes on to fix the computer. He makes the city work again. [*Dumb Waiter*, 1952].

In *Big Joe and the Nth Generation* the restoration of the machines is presented as the only rational solution. ‘*It is realised that the colonists will be unable to maintain a technology without basic tools, and that a rebuilding will require several generations of intelligently directed effort.*’ [*Big Joe and the Nth Generation*, 1952.]

In *The Darfsteller* the protagonist, Thornier, is very angry about ‘auto-theatre’, and contemptuous. At the end of the story Thornier is treated to a lecture on Luddism. ‘*“Last century, it was between a Chinese abacus operator and an IBM machine... and the century before that, it was between a long-hand secretary and a typewriting machine.... And before that, the handweavers against the automatic looms.”*’ [*The Darfsteller*, 1955.]

Much of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* takes place in a familiar science fiction scenario, a ‘Medieval Future’. Machines are implied by the memory of the nuclear Holocaust, the Flame Deluge. No machines actually exist. There is not even a water-wheel or a bellows. Not much knowledge has been preserved.

The first machine to be created is in *Fiat Lux*. It is Brother Kornhoer’s ‘lamp of electricity’. The lamp of electricity is not without its absurdities. ‘*It reminded the abbot*

*of nothing useful, unless one considers engines for torturing prisoners useful.'* [Leibowitz, 14.]

The effort involved in keeping the lamp of electricity running is quite disproportionate to its meagre utility. *'...it was necessary to keep at least four novices or postulants at cranking the dynamo and adjusting the arc-gap.'* [Leibowitz, 19.]

The lamp of electricity also does harm. *'...the novice who sat atop the ladder to keep the arc-gap adjusted ... had replaced the previous skilled operator who was at present confined to the infirmary with wet dressings over his eyes.'* Even the harm, however, has an element of black humour. [Leibowitz, 22.]

In *Fiat Voluntas Tua* one of the machines is the Abominable Autoscribe. It is a word-processor that is supposed amongst other electronic tasks to translate simultaneously among the multiplicity of successor-languages to 'Ancient English'.

These languages, such as 'Southwest' and 'Alleghanian', have grown up in the post-Holocaust former United States. In the same way, successors to Latin grew up in medieval Europe after the *Völkerwanderungen*. It is another example of Miller's use of a cyclical notion of history. It is both accurate and witty.

The Abominable Autoscribe is completely absurd. *'...its malignant enormity, electronic by disposition, filled several cubical units of hollow wall space and a third of the volume of the abbot's desk.'* It does not even work very well. *'tEsting tesTing testNg?'* [Leibowitz, 24.]

Abbot Zerchi's inability to deal with the Autoscribe is also absurd. *'Zerchi... tried to massage the involuntary tremor out of his forearm, which had been recently electrified while exploring the Autoscribe's intestinal regions.'* [Leibowitz, 24.]

The Autoscribe is not threatening. What are more threatening are the driverless trucks on the highway between the original buildings of the abbey and the newer additions. The trucks are an example of the cyclical nature of history, and the return of the old civilisation. *'Once before, long ago, there had been six lanes and robot traffic. Then the traffic had stopped, the paving had cracked, and the sparse grass grew in the cracks after an occasional rain.... But now there were six lanes and robot traffic, as before....'* [Leibowitz, 25.]

The monks are quite good at dodging the trucks. *“Let’s hike across. That tunnel can be suffocating after a dust storm. Or don’t you feel like dodging buses?”* The trucks are however genuinely dangerous. *‘To be felled by one of them was to be run over by truck after truck until a safety cruiser found the flattened imprint of a man on the pavement and stopped to clean it up.’* [Leibowitz, 25.]

Starships are icons of science fiction. The starship in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is unattractive. It is neither threatening nor amusing. *‘There came a blur, a glare of light, a high thin whining sound, and the starship thrust itself heavenward.’* ‘Blur,’ ‘glare,’ ‘whine’ and ‘thrust’ are all adjectives with more or less unpleasant connotations. [Leibowitz, 30.]

None of this – the lamp of electricity, the Autoscribe, the robot traffic or the starship – suggests Miller has a positive attitude to technology. Technology, in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, is repulsive, dangerous and absurd.

## **Sin**

In Brother Kornhoer's experiment in *Fiat Lux* Miller is not merely suggesting that technology can be dislikeable. He is dramatising a serious argument.

Miller is arguing that the desire to create technology constitutes Original Sin. The creators of technology are claiming a power that is reserved to the divine. The phrase *Fiat Lux* is the verse in Genesis which perhaps expresses the divine nature of creativity most clearly.

Brother Kornhoer has managed to build a generator which will power an electric lamp. He is a talented engineer. The science comes from hints in the abbey's ancient documents. The building of the generator is a symbol of the revival of ancient knowledge.

Dom Paulo, the abbot, is uneasy. '*That is not without a certain vanity, Brother.*' 'Vanity,' in Catholic theology, can mean pride. It can also indicate a self-defeating preoccupation with material things. In either case it is a sin. [Leibowitz, 14.]

The abbot does not want the experiment to succeed. Nevertheless he allows Kornhoer to go ahead. '*...I'm hoping he will reduce himself to absurdity, without any help from me.*' [Leibowitz, 13.]

The brothers stage a demonstration of the dynamo and the lamp. The demonstration is timed to impress Pfordentrott. During the demonstration the blasphemy is made inescapably clear. The brothers generate light with a dynamo and an arc light. They equate this with God's creation of light at the beginning of the world.

Brother Kornhoer has posted sentries to alert him to the approach of Pfordentrott and his party. He has drilled his team. The code words are quotations from Genesis. Miller gives them in Latin.

'*In principio Deus,*' says one of the brothers. 'In the beginning, God....' His comrade picks up the theme and takes it one step further. '*Caelum et terram creavit.*' '...created heaven and earth.' [Genesis, 1:3; Leibowitz, 18.]

Brother Kornhoer times the start of the demonstration to coincide with Pfordentrott's arrival. '*Dixitque Deus: 'FIAT LUX,' said the inventor in a tone of command.... "Et lux ergo facta est."*' 'And God said, Let there be light.... And there was

light.' [Genesis, 1:3; *Leibowitz*, 18.] The monks turn on the generator. The arc light flares.

What the monks are doing is blasphemous. It is also the sin of pride. It is the desire to obtain powers that are like God's. The words that Kornhoer uses, '*fiat lux*', are the words of the divine command.

This is Faustian. It is Original Sin.

The desire to obtain Godlike powers is quite clearly referred to in Genesis. It is part of the motivation to 'eat of the fruit of the tree'. '*For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*' [Genesis, 3:5.]

The effect on Pfordentrott is not at all what Kornhoer wanted or intended. At first Pfordentrott completely misses the point. He does not realise that the dynamo is something the monks have built. In his paranoia, Pfordentrott thinks it is an ancient relic that the monks have concealed from the outside world. '"*A lamp of electricity,*" [Pfordentrott] *said. "How have you managed to keep it hidden for all those centuries!"*' [*Leibowitz*, 18.]

This is consistent. Pfordentrott also thinks that the monks have in effect concealed the documents of the Memorabilia. '"*You haven't withheld it; but you sat on it so quietly, nobody knew it was here, and you did nothing with it.*"' [*Leibowitz*, 21.]

Pfordentrott is put out for other reasons. He came to the abbey to make discoveries. He finds he has been anticipated. '*But there was no balm to soothe an affront to professional pride – then or in any other age.*' [*Leibowitz*, 18.]

Miller is equating originality with creativity. '[Pfordentrott] *...is finding out that some of his discoveries are only rediscoveries, and it leaves a bitter taste. But surely he must know that never during his lifetime can he be more than a recoverer of lost works; however brilliant, he can only do what others before him have done.*' Miller is denying that science is creative. It is an austere view. [*Leibowitz*, 20.]

The distinction between rediscovery and creation is in contention between Abbot Zerchi and Pfordentrott in their confrontation at the end of *Fiat Lux*. '"*Why do you wish to discredit the past, even to dehumanise the last civilisation? So that you need not*

*learn from their mistakes? Or can it be that you can't bear being only a 'rediscoverer', and must feel you are a 'creator' as well?'" [Leibowitz, 22.]*

The quotations from Genesis do not occur in the original magazine version of this episode, *And the Light is Risen*. Miller chose to make the point about Original Sin explicit when he wrote the novel.

In using a phrase from Genesis, *Fiat Lux*, as the title of the final version, Miller made it clear that the concept of Original Sin defines the second part of the novel. Original Sin, in the heretical form in which Miller uses it, is in fact the fundamental concept of the novel as a whole.

## Rebellion

The original Catholic view of Original Sin is that it represents rebellion against God. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden disregard God's explicit command. *'But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.'* [Genesis, 2:17.] Miller reverts to this interpretation in the last part of the novel, *Fiat Voluntas Tua*. It is perhaps the default value.

In *Fiat Voluntas Tua* the second nuclear Holocaust occurs. After the initial nuclear strikes there are many refugees. Many of the refugees are injured. Many are ill with radiation sickness.

The abbey provides shelter. This is a simple matter of Christian duty and Christian charity.

There is conflict between Abbot Zerchi and Dr Cors. Dr Cors is the medical worker in charge of a unit which tests the refugees for radiation sickness. The issue between Abbot Zerchi and Dr Cors is not testing as such. It is euthanasia.

Euthanasia is equated by the church with suicide. Suicide is prohibited. The prohibition is absolute. By extension, euthanasia is absolutely prohibited as well.

Dr Cors is a humanist. He believes that for the most severe cases euthanasia is a better option. *'What I meant by better was "more merciful".'* [Leibowitz, 27.]

For the abbot the issue turns on whether Dr Cors simply informs the worst affected of his patients of the availability of euthanasia, or actively recommends it. *'"Do you, as a physician, advise hopeless cases to go to a mercy camp?" ...The medic stopped and closed his eyes.... He shuddered slightly. "Of course I do," he said finally. "If you had seen what I've seen, you would too."'* [Leibowitz, 27.]

It is important, I think, that Miller does not belittle the doctor's humanity, or suggest that he does what he does for any other reason than compassion. There is a real conflict between the teaching of the church and the principles of humanism.

Dr Cors holds the classic humanist view of suffering. *'...pain is the only evil I know about. It's the only one I can fight.'* He also takes the classic humanist view of morality. *'... the laws of society are what makes something a crime or not a crime.'* The abbot objects strongly. *'Dearest God, how did those two heresies get back into the world after all this time?'* [Leibowitz, 27.]

The abbot insists on a written promise from Dr Cors not to advise patients to seek euthanasia while he is working in the abbey grounds. *'Can you not, then, understand that I am subject to another law, and that it forbids me to allow you or anyone else on this property, under my rule, to counsel anyone to do what the Church calls evil?'* [Leibowitz, 27.]

Dr Cors breaks his promise, and leaves. The doctor's decision is prompted by a particularly severe case. *'She's sick enough now, and so's the child.... Radiation sickness. Flash burns. The woman has a broken hip. The father's dead. The fillings in the woman's teeth are radioactive. The child almost glows in the dark. Vomiting shortly after the blast. Nausea, anaemia, rotten follicles. Blind in one eye. The child cries constantly because of the burns. How they survived the shock wave is hard to understand.'* It is difficult to imagine anything more horrible. [Leibowitz, 28.]

To make matters worse, the mother of the child is a Catholic. She understands church teaching. *'The woman handled the beads [of the rosary] with fingers that knew them. There was nothing [Abbot Zerchi] could say to her that she didn't already know.'* Abbot Zerchi attempts to persuade the mother of the sick child not to accept euthanasia. *'Don't do it, daughter. Just don't do it.'* [Leibowitz, 28.]

Zerchi fails. His authority as a 'priest of Christ' is not enough.

Original Sin as rebellion against the will of God is orthodox Catholic doctrine. Miller however in *Fiat Voluntas Tua* presents that rebellion as prompted not by the whispering of the serpent but by the temptations of humanism. The Church often describes what it calls secular humanism as the enemy of religion. It does not however equate humanism with Original Sin. Miller, on this point also, is in error. It is, I think, another heresy.

In *Fiat Voluntas Tua* rebellion against the Will of God is symbolised by the acceptance of euthanasia as preferable to suffering. That symbol occurs in the context of the destruction of the world and its population in a nuclear Holocaust.

Rebellion and the holocaust are intimately connected. The destruction of the world, and of humanity with it, is a direct consequence of human action.

## **Mad Science**

Many years after the publication of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* Miller was invited to co-edit the anthology *Beyond Armageddon* with Martin Greenberg. The anthology was the first published creative work that Miller had done for twenty-five years. It is a sign of the prestige of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* in the science fiction community that Miller, despite his subsequent inactivity, was still seen as the right person for the job.

In the intervening period Miller's fundamental views had not changed. They had however developed. Now Original Sin is not simply the search for secular knowledge. It is reason itself. *'Logos-Reason was the Snake, not the Savior. It was the ability to think in categories, the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, product of the Fall.'* Miller explicitly acknowledges that this is heresy. *'This of course is heresy, but not an original one.'* [Miller and Greenberg, 1985.]

Reason, in Miller's view, is antithetical to humane values. *'If Megawar comes, it will be because human reason has finally and permanently prevailed over human compassion on a global scale, putting itself and the reasoned forever out of business.'* [Miller and Greenberg, 1985.]

'Megawar' is a term Miller uses in *Beyond Armageddon*. He wishes to reserve the term 'Holocaust' for the genocide under Hitler of the Jews. I respect Miller's reasoning. I do not follow his practice.

Miller's portrayal of the search for secular knowledge, and of the scientists who search, is beyond satirical. It is savage.

Pfardentrott is an example of the mad scientist. This is of course a familiar icon of science fiction. If one sees Mary Shelley as the first writer of science fiction, as some do, then the mad scientist is the primary icon.

Pfardentrott, as Marcus Apollo has pointed out, is unbalanced and dangerous. *'He has a mind like a loaded musket, and it can go off in any direction.'* It is a disturbing metaphor. [Leibowitz, 13.]

Pfardentrott's celebration of the revival of science verges on the messianic. In the context of Pfardentrott's professed contempt for religion, this is ironic. Yet there is a fervour in the language which Miller gives him which is unmistakably religious. *'The mastery of man over the earth shall be renewed.'* [Leibowitz, 20.]

Pfardentrott is not merely unstable. It is worse than that.

Pfardentrott's vision of the future is of an authoritarian, science-based state.

*'Ignorance has been our king. Since the death of empire, he sits unchallenged on the throne of Man.... Tomorrow, a new prince shall rule. Men of understanding, men of science shall stand behind his throne, and the universe will come to know his might.'* This seems like another hint at Plato's Guardians. [Leibowitz, 20.]

There is also a clear hint that what Miller has in mind is not merely authoritarianism. He is talking about fascism.

Miller was a World War Two veteran. Miller's story is written at the height of the Cold War. Miller took fascism seriously.

Pfardentrott's prophecies of the future have a gloating tone. *'Ignorance is king. Many would not profit by his abdication. They are his Court.... They will press the battle upon the world... and the violence which follows will last until the structure of society...is levelled to rubble, and a new society emerges.'* Miller here is describing a *Gleichschaltung*. The allusion is quite subtle. It could I think be easily missed on a first reading. [Leibowitz, 20.]

In *Fiat Lux*, the third part of the novel, the association with fascism, in its Nazi variant, is made quite clear. The authorities set up a 'Green Star Relief Station' a little distance down the road from the abbey. The abbot realises that this in fact a euthanasia facility: *'MERCY CAMP NUMBER 18'*. [Leibowitz, 27.]

The methods of the camp administration are bureaucratic. *'Victims who have been exposed... must report to the nearest Green Star Relief Station where a magistrate is empowered to issue a writ of Mori Vult....'* ('He/she wishes to die.') [Leibowitz, 28.]

The abbot realises that the Green Star organisation have brought the materials for a crematorium. *'There was a big red engine of some sort. It seemed to have a firebox, and something like a boiler.... Some [of the trucks] were loaded with lumber, others with tents and collapsible cots. One seemed to be hauling firebricks, and another was burdened with pottery and straw. ...the last truck's cargo... was a load of urns or vases... packed together with cushioning wads of straw.... What had at first glance appeared to be a boiler, now suggested an oven or a furnace. "Evenit diabolus!" the abbot growled.'* The word 'oven' creates an explicit association with the concentration camps. [Leibowitz, 27.]

The methods of the camp are bureaucratic. Its organisation is quasi-industrial. This is strongly reminiscent of the concentration camps. There is a statue outside the camp in reinforced plastic, which '*...bore a marked similarity to some of the most effeminate images by which mediocre, or worse than mediocre, artists had traditionally misrepresented the personality of Christ.*' [Leibowitz, 28.] The statue represents the same sort of outrageous lie as the slogan *Arbeit Macht Frei* over the gate at Auschwitz.

A reading of Miller's commercial magazine stories confirms that he is concerned with Nazism and fascism, and with the camps. In *Conditionally Human*, a crematorium not unlike the one in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is coupled with a gas chamber. '*The third room contained a small gas chamber, with a conveyer belt leading from it to the crematorium.*' It is the clearest possible allusion to the camps. [*Conditionally Human*, 1952.]

The reference in *Dark Benediction* is even more explicit. '*Paul felt suddenly ill.... Here was Dachau and Buchenwald and the nameless camps of Siberia.*' [*Dark Benediction*, 1951.]

To associate the quest for scientific knowledge with fascism and the death camps is of course completely unfair. It is nevertheless what Miller wants to do.

It is a very angry image.

## **Misuse of Reason**

Miller was not just a heretic in relation to the Catholic Church. He was also a heretic in relation to the belief system of science fiction.

Gary Wolfe claims that science fiction has a '*dogma of reason for reason's sake*'. He speaks about science fiction's '*faith in the scientific method*'. [Wolfe, 1979.] The claims seem broadly right. Wolfe's use of religious language to describe the belief in science and technology within science fiction seems appropriate.

In the 'Golden Age' of science fiction there was a belief in the progress of humanity through science and technology. This was the future. The belief is still held by writers of 'hard' science fiction, such as Kim Stanley Robinson. There are of course exceptions. I do not think that Wolfe's theory accounts adequately, for example, for the agrarian nostalgia of Clifford Simak.

The New Wave in science fiction, which for some marks the end of the Golden Age, had an interest in the 'soft' sciences and a concept of 'inner space'. New Wave writers were deliberately distinguishing themselves from the older writers of the Golden Age.

Miller held at one time a belief in reason, progress and science. By the time that he wrote *A Canticle for Leibowitz* he had given it up. He is not so much distinguishing himself from the beliefs of the Golden Age as rejecting them.

Miller describes technology as powerful and occasionally frightening, as well as sometimes absurd. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz* Miller portrays science and technology as not only evil and destructive but fascistic to boot. He is firmly of the opinion that reason can be misused.

Twenty-five years later, when he edited *Beyond Armageddon*, Miller held the same view. '*I point to the West's idolization of Logos, not to disparage science... but to preface the assertion that sometimes the use of reason is so inappropriate as to be either laughable or minimally insane....*' [Miller and Greenberg, 1985.]

Miller moved away from the core beliefs of science fiction. He did so just as steadily as he moved away from the Church.

There is a furious dialogue between Dom Paolo, the abbot, and Thon Taddeo, the secular scientist, towards the end of *Fiat Lux*. It dramatises an open clash

between the Thon's conviction of material progress and the abbot's belief in Original Sin.

The writing, to my mind, is very effective. It is of a quality which I think is rarely reached in science fiction. This dialogue is, I think, the intellectual heart of the novel. It is worth giving an account of it in some detail.

The Thon is excited about a document he has found in the memorabilia. *"We located one pre-Diluvian fragment that suggests a very revolutionary concept, as I see it. If I interpret the fragment correctly, Man was not created until shortly before the fall of the last civilisation." ... [civilisation] was developed by a preceding race which became extinct during the Diluvium Ignis.* [Leibowitz, 22.]

Thon Thaddeo has completely misunderstood. *"If Thon Thaddeo had read the Venerable Boedullus' De Inanibus he would have found that one classified as 'probable fable or allegory.'"* *De Inanibus* means 'Concerning the Inane'. One imagines there is an ironic intention. [Leibowitz, 22.]

The document, as has often been noticed, is a fragment of a play by the Czech writer Karel Capek. The play is called *R U R – Rossum's Universal Robots*. The title is apparently in English in the original. That makes it the first use of the word 'robot' in the English language. The word 'robot' is derived from a Slavonic root meaning 'work'. The creatures in the play are not in fact very like robots, in the sense that word has acquired. They are more like cyborgs or clones.

When the priests understand what Thon Thaddeo is saying, they are deeply shocked. *"You are proposing," said Gault [the prior], suddenly dismayed, "that we are not the descendants of Adam? not related to historical humanity?"* Thon Thaddeo displays a complete lack of diplomacy or tact. He carries on. *"... if one looks at the Simplification as a rebellion by a created servant species against the original creator species.... It would explain why present-day humanity seems so inferior to the ancients, why our ancestors lapsed into barbarism when their masters were extinct...."* [Leibowitz, 22.]

It has already been established that Thon Thaddeo is completely contemptuous of ordinary humanity. In an earlier conversation at the palace in Texarkana with Marcus Apollo, the Papal Legate, Thon Thaddeo displayed a paranoid disgust and loathing. It is proto-fascist and sub-Nietzschean in its intensity.

*“You can’t see the syphilis outbreak on his neck, the way the bridge of his nose is being eaten away. Paresis. But he was undoubtedly a moron to begin with. Illiterate, superstitious, murderous. He diseases his children. For a few coins he would kill them. He will sell them anyway, when they are old enough to be useful.... tell me if you see the progeny of a once-mighty civilisation?” [Leibowitz, 12.]*

The Thon is obsessed with the ancient, pre-Diluvian civilisation. Its attraction for him is the lost science, and a sense of power. *“How can a great and wise civilisation have destroyed itself so completely?” “Perhaps,” said Apollo, “by being materially great and materially wise, and nothing else.” [Leibowitz, 12.]*

The abbot intervenes in the dispute between Pfardentrott and Gault. It is here we come to the key point of the dialogue. When Thon Thaddeo rejects the descent from Adam, he implicitly rejects the idea that humanity is fundamentally flawed.

The abbot is openly contemptuous. *“So we are but creatures of creatures, then, Sir Philosopher? Made by lesser gods than God, and therefore understandably less than perfect-through no fault of ours, of course.” “... it would account for much....” “And absolve of much, would it not? Man’s rebellion against his makers was, no doubt, merely a justifiable tyrannicide against the infinitely wicked sons of Adam, then.” [Leibowitz, 22.]*

Thon Thaddeo does not concede. He formulates a classic post-Enlightenment opposition between what he calls ‘superstition’ and material progress. *“... you would prefer .... to leave the world in the same black ignorance and superstition that you say your Order has struggled ....against. Nor could we ever overcome famine, disease or misbirth, or make the world one bit better than it has been for twelve centuries....” [Leibowitz, 22.]*

I would assume that the term ‘mishbirth’, here, refers to genetic mutants. It is an indication of Miller’s persistent concern with the side effects of the use of nuclear weapons.

The abbot strikes back. He rejects the notion of progress. He does so absolutely. *“It never was any better, it never will be any better. It will only be richer or poorer, sadder but not wiser, until the very last day.” [Leibowitz, 22.]*

This is very dark. A twenty-first century churchman might privately hold similar views. He would I think probably hesitate to declare them publicly.

Lest there should be any doubt in the mind of the reader about what is at issue here, Miller has Dom Paolo insist on it to Pfordentrott. *"The account that I was quoting, Sir Philosopher, was not an account of the manner of creation, but an account of the manner of the temptation that led to the Fall."* This is Original Sin. [Leibowitz, 22.]

Miller also has Dom Paolo clarify, presumably again for the benefit of the reader rather than the fictional Thon, Miller's personal heretical interpretation of the doctrine. *"... to abuse the intellect for reasons of pride, vanity or escape from responsibility, is the fruit of that same tree."* [Leibowitz, 22.]

The abbot, in the limited and local context in which the dialogue takes place, wins. The monks finally understand what they have been doing with their 'lamp of electricity'. They stop the work of generation and dismantle the machine. *'The light spluttered and went out.... The novices at the drive-mill had stopped work. "Bring candles," called the abbot. Brother Kornhoer slipped into the room again. He was carrying the heavy crucifix which had been displaced from head of the archway to make way for the novel lamp.'* The monks reject technology. It is a symbol, also, of Miller's personal rejection of the technophilia he had once espoused. [Leibowitz, 22.]

Wolfe insists that technophilia is fundamental to science fiction. He says that in the eyes of its creators technophilia defines the genre. *'More than any other modern genre, science fiction provides a narrative realization of this new dogma of reason for reason's sake.... the heart of what Heinlein, Azimov and others seem to regard as the redeeming strength of the genre: its faith in the scientific method and its assumption that technology must somehow be the basis for fiction.'* [Wolfe, 1979.]

Miller rejects this. Miller is a heretic in more ways than one.

The abbot's victory is Pyrrhic. At the end of the novel the abbey, and the rest of humanity, are overwhelmed by the science that Pfordentrott espouses and the technology it creates. Science destroys the world.

## **Unbeliever**

*A Canticle for Leibowitz*, as we have seen, is in several distinct ways a Catholic novel. It has been read by some as Christian apologetics. [Smith, 2009.]

Miller was a heretic. He believed things that Christians are not supposed to believe. He believed in particular that the search for scientific knowledge was Original Sin.

In addition, Miller did not believe things that Christians are supposed to believe. Most importantly, Miller did not believe in Jesus.

To most people – I think to most reasonable people – someone who does not believe in Jesus is not a Christian. A person who did not believe in Jesus would also be seen as *ipso facto* unlikely to write what could properly be called a Christian novel.

There are three references to Christ in the novel. One reference is part of Dom Paolo's musings when he visits Benjamin on the mesa. '*His own Faith told him, too, that the burden had been lifted from him by the One whose image hung from a cross above the altars....*' [Leibowitz, 16.]

It is I think interesting that what Dom Paolo thinks of is the image, and its place in Church worship. He does not think of the physical, human reality of the Crucifixion, and the extraordinary miracle – as the Christians perceive it – of the Resurrection.

The phrase 'his own faith told him' indicates a knowledge of correct doctrine. It does not suggest passionate, personal conviction.

I have looked hard for other references to redemption in the novel. I have not found any.

The other two references to Christ occur in the final part of the novel, *Fiat Voluntas Tua*. One of them occurs in the discussion of the statue that has been erected outside the Green Star euthanasia camp two miles from the abbey. The statue is loaded with symbolism. '*It was only anonymously a christus..... But surely the Green Star must have seen the resemblance to the traditional christus of poor artists.*' It is a dreadful caricature. '*The sweet-sick face, blank eyes, simpering lips, and arms spread wide in a gesture of embrace. The hips were as broad as a woman's, and the chest hinted at*

*breasts....'* The statue is cheesily sentimental. It is also androgynous. That, in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, is the image of Christ. [Leibowitz, 28.]

The other reference occurs when Abbot Zerchi is trying to persuade the anonymous mother of the suffering child not to take her to the euthanasia camp. It comes in the same chapter as the discussion of the image of Christ. It is only a couple of pages further on. *"No! I'm not asking you. As a priest of Christ I am commanding you by the authority of Almighty God not to lay hands on your child, not to offer her life in sacrifice to a false god of expedient mercy."* [Leibowitz, 28.]

This is about the authority of the priesthood and by extension of the Church. It does not seem to represent a belief, as such, in anything in particular.

Christ in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, therefore, is either a degenerate humanistic caricature, the basis of a claim to sacerdotal authority or an image above an altar. Christ has no other presence in the novel. In particular, Christ is not present as the Redeemer. In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the burden of Original Sin weighs heavily.

The church that Miller creates is without pastoral care, except in the exceptional cases such as the refugees from the nuclear Holocaust. The Abbot does not have a parish, and the church of the Abbey - as Abbot Zerchi tells Mrs Grales - does not even have a font.

The Order is concerned with its documents, and New Rome is concerned with its own survival. *Quo peregrinatur grex*, which plays a very large part in *Fiat Voluntas Tua*, makes provision to *'ensure the apostolic succession on colony planets without recourse to Earth.'* This assumes that Earth - and humanity with it - has been destroyed. [Leibowitz, 25.]

The Church in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* has no mission to the sick and the poor. It does not visit prisoners. There would not appear to be any prisons to visit after the Flame Deluge.

The Church welcomes the travellers that pass the Abbey, and feeds them. It teaches the luckier children in the neighbouring village of Sanly Bowitts their letters. That is the limit of its compassion.

This is not a Christian world, in any recognisable sense. It is too fatalistic, and places more reliance on the Old Testament rather than the New. The world that Miller has created is at best Judaeo-pagan in its beliefs and in its ethical tone.

The single, rather qualified reference to redemption is not evidence that Miller was a believer. It is outweighed, I think, by the use Miller makes of the medieval legend of the Wandering Jew. The function of the Wandering Jew in the novel is to dramatise the impossibility of salvation.

The Wandering Jew is an aspect of the pilgrim of *Fiat Homo*. The pilgrim is also the hermit of *Fiat Lux* and the 'old beggar' of *Fiat Voluntas Tua*. He is the only character who occurs in all three parts of the novel.

The pilgrim has multiple identities. Apart from being the hermit and the old beggar, he is variously known as old Eleazer, Benjamin and the Old Jew. [*Leibowitz*, 13.]

The pilgrim calls himself Lazarus - '*raised up by Christ but still not a Christian.*' [*John*, 11:1-44.] He is, as we shall see in a few pages, Leibowitz. In addition, and very importantly, the pilgrim is the Wandering Jew. With the creation of these multiple identities Miller has entered a non-rational, non-material and non-linear world.

It is the world of the imagination.

## Trickster

The pilgrim is also the Trickster of legend. The word 'Trickster' is not used in the book. The pilgrim however has most of the characteristic traits of the Trickster. He has the Trickster's personality.

The pilgrim is constantly joking. He makes a joke, for instance, of Brother Francis writing in the Roman alphabet. *'The pilgrim smiled wryly at the inscription. His laugh seemed less like a laugh than a fatalistic bleat. "HMMMM-hnnn! Still writing things backward," he said....'* [Leibowitz, 1.]

The pilgrim makes another joke of Brother Francis thinking he is being tempted by the devil, as Jesus was tempted in the wilderness. *'The novice began writing with a dry twig in the sand. Et ne nos inducas in.... ['And do not lead us into....'] The next word, in the Lord's Prayer, is 'temptation'.* *'I've not offered to turn these stones into bread for you yet, have I?" the old traveller said crossly.'* [Leibowitz, 1.]

The pilgrim is always hinting at the truth at the same time as he conceals it. He teases Dom Paolo, the abbot in *Fiat Lux*, about being Leibowitz. *'One of them mistook me for a distant relative of mine—name of Leibowitz.'* Later he hints more broadly. *"I have been called a 'secular scholar' at various times by certain people, and sometimes I've been staked, stoned and burned for it."* [Leibowitz, 16.]

Benjamin baffles Dom Paolo by relating quite simply and straightforwardly the facts about his encounter with Brother Francis. *"I think Francis was that one's name. Poor fellow. I buried him later." ...The abbot gaped at the old man.... Francis? he wondered. That could be the Venerable Francis Gerard of Utah, perhaps? And about six centuries ago, yes, and now this old gaffer was claiming to have been the pilgrim?' [Leibowitz, 16.]*

The pilgrim's hinting and teasing subverts the conventional assumptions of rationality. The abbot even has a sense of what the pilgrim is up to. *'Playing games with us all? wondered the priest.'* [Leibowitz, 16.]

The pilgrim has access to secret knowledge. He knows things one would not expect him to know. The pilgrim finds a rock to fit the apex of the wall that Brother Francis is building to protect his sleeping place. It is not clear that the pilgrim knows that the rock will reveal the Fallout Shelter when it is moved. *"For that, [offering the*

charity of the abbey to a traveller] *I'll find you a rock to fit that gap before I go.*"

[Leibowitz, 1.]

If he does not know, it is an extraordinary coincidence. The discovery of the shelter is the key event of the first part of the novel, and is full of meaning.

Quite inexplicably, when Brother Francis is murdered by mutants at the end of *Fiat Homo*, the pilgrim turns up at the right time and the right place to bury him. *'... the old wanderer... fanned himself with a tattered basket hat.... the wanderer... watched the curious buzzards.... The buzzards were busy at the remains of a man.... The old wanderer found a place where the earth was soft enough for digging with hands and a stick.... One bird finally landed. It strutted indignantly about a mound of fresh earth with a rock marker at one end.'* [Leibowitz, 11.]

Novelists can of course have things happen whenever and wherever they want. I think, however, that Miller intends this to be significant. It is beyond coincidence.

Dom Paulo is puzzled about the pilgrim's knowledge of the affairs of the order. *'He sometimes wondered where Benjamin had picked up enough knowledge of the abbey to invent such tales.'* The pilgrim even knows about Thon Thaddeo, the scientist from Texarkana. *"You've heard of Thon Thaddeo? Tell me, how is it you've always managed to know everything and everybody without stirring from this hill?"* [Leibowitz, 16.]

The pilgrim behaves unconventionally. The pilgrim reacts in a most unsaintly and indeed unpilgrim-like manner when he realises Brother Francis is there in the desert. *'The old man grabbed his staff and bounded to his feet. 'Creep up on me, will you!' He brandished the staff menacingly... Brother Francis noticed that the thick end of the staff was armed with a spike.'* Later the pilgrim hurls rocks. *'... the pilgrim... satisfied his wrath by flinging an occasional rock at the youth.'* [Leibowitz, 1.]

Abbot Arkos, himself quite a tempestuous character, finds the pilgrim's behaviour amusing. *"The Blessed Martyr wouldn't... chase after somebody and try to hit him with a stick that had a nail in one end."* The abbot wiped his mouth to hide an involuntary smile. *"... It was you he was chasing, wasn't it?"* [Leibowitz, 4.]

All these traits – joking, revealing and concealing the truth, subversion, intelligence, secret knowledge, unconventional behaviour - are characteristics of the Trickster in legend. The Trickster is a figure from an archaic, pre-Christian level of belief. The Church feared such figures as pagan, and condemned their practices as sorcery. [*Trickster*, Wikipedia.]

It is not quite clear that the pilgrim is fully or only human. Brother Francis is understandably shaken by the first appearance of the pilgrim in the solitude of the desert. ‘... a wiggling iota of black caught in a shimmering haze of heat. Legless, but wearing a tiny head, the iota materialized out of the mirror glaze on the broken roadway and seemed more to writhe than to walk....’ [Leibowitz, 1.]

The most significant category of the perhaps not fully human in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is of course the mutants, and this is initially what Brother Francis fears the pilgrim might be. ‘Brother Francis added [to ‘an Ave or two’ that he had already muttered] a hasty prayer to Saint Raul the Cyclopean, patron of the Misborn, for protection against the Saint’s unhappy protégés.’ [Leibowitz, 1.]

The pilgrim’s disappearance is if anything even more mysterious than his unexplained appearance. The novice sees him go. ‘Brother Francis caught a glimpse of the pilgrim trudging away on the trail that led toward the abbey.’ [Leibowitz, 1.] After that no-one sees him. ‘“... he didn’t pass our gates, unless the watch was asleep. And the novice on watch denies being asleep....”’ [Leibowitz, 4.]

The Trickster, particularly in the form of Coyote, is prominent in Native American mythology. Coyote is associated with the American West, where *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is located. Miller was interested in anthropology, and in *Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman* he shows himself knowledgeable about Native American beliefs. [Miller, 1997.]

Similarly in *Beyond Armageddon*, Miller reveals a clear interest in deeper and more primitive levels of belief. He writes, in a discussion of post-Holocaust stories, that: ‘There is a nostalgia for things lost that reminds me of ancient underworld myth....’ [Walter M Miller, Jr and Martin H Greenberg, 1985.]

A Trickster figure would have no difficulty in having several identities at the same time. A Trickster figure would have no difficulty in surviving, as Benjamin

does, his own death. The presence of such a clearly mythological figure as the Trickster in the novel strongly suggests that Miller is very serious in the use he makes of another mythological figure: the Wandering Jew.

## Wandering Jew

In the medieval legend, the Wandering Jew is doomed to roam the earth until Christ comes again. The pilgrim himself provides us with a partial, Tricksterish acknowledgement that he is in fact the Wandering Jew. '*Earlier career?*' '*Wanderer.*' [Leibowitz, 16.]

The old pilgrim does all the things we would expect the Wandering Jew to do. In *Fiat Homo* he is searching for something. '*...the search seemed endless, but there was always the promise of finding what he sought across the next rise or beyond the bend in the trail.*' [Leibowitz, 11.]

In *Fiat Lux*, we discover the object of the search. We also discover that the search is indefinitely prolonged. '*... the last old Hebrew sat alone on a mountain and did penance for Israel and waited for a Messiah, and waited, and waited, and....*' [Leibowitz, 16.]

The pilgrim has become fatalistic. '*"To tell you the truth, I don't much expect Him to come, but I was told to wait, and-" he shrugged "-I wait."*' [Leibowitz, 16.]

The pilgrim still has moments of excitement. Benjamin has a habit of approaching strangers and quoting the scriptural passages that have been taken to foretell the coming of Christ. '*"For a Child is born to us, and a Son is given us..." But then the anxious frown melted away into sadness. "It's not him!" he grumbled irritably at the sky.*' [Isaiah, 9:6; Leibowitz, 16.]

Benjamin knows what he is talking about. He has a sophisticated knowledge of Christian scripture. He is familiar with the passages of the Old Testament which were later interpreted as prophecies of the coming of Christ.

Benjamin is also familiar with the association of the Second Coming of Christ with the End Time. Miller dramatises this in the incident in which Dom Paulo tries to return a mutant, blue-headed goat. The Abbot thinks the poet has stolen the goat from the pilgrim. '*"It's not a goat," the hermit said crossly. "It's the beast which your prophet saw, and it was made for a woman to ride."*' The End Time is of course a major theme of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. The woman who rides the goat, incidentally, is the Whore of Babylon. [Revelation, 17:18; Leibowitz, 16.]

On the last but one occasion on which we meet the pilgrim nuclear war is about to break out. '*On the side road which at one point flanked the highway and led from*

*the monastery... into the city, an old beggar clad in burlap paused to listen to the wind. The wind brought the throb of practice rocketry from the south.... The old man gazed at the faint red disk of the sun while he leaned on his staff and muttered to himself or to the sun, "Omens, omens...." [Leibowitz, 24.]*

Whatever the omens mean, it is not salvation. And whatever they herald, it is not the coming of Christ.

The original legend of the Wandering Jew concerns a Jew who mocked Jesus at the Crucifixion. He was then cursed to walk the earth until the Second Coming. [Wandering Jew, Wikipedia.] '*And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, Save thyself, and come down from the cross.*' [Matthew, 15:29-30.]

On some level the myth of the Wandering Jew appears to be an attempt to reconcile the belief of the first generation of Christians that the Second Coming was imminent with the experience of their successors. Christ did not come.

In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Christ also does not come. The theological universe which Miller has created is in many ways a Catholic universe. Despite that, the hope of salvation is slim.

Miller, in his use of the medieval myth, is making another point. If Leibowitz is in fact in this novel the Wandering Jew, how is it that Leibowitz mocked Jesus?

The Wandering Jew in medieval legend is doomed because he mocked Christ. The pilgrim in Miller's myth cannot be the Wandering Jew unless he too mocks Christ.

Leibowitz founded a Christian order dedicated to a non-Christian purpose, the preservation of secular documents. The documents which the order preserves are not merely secular. They are lethally dangerous. That, in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, is how Christ is mocked.

## **Salvation**

There is some ambiguity about the possibility of salvation in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Doubt, in Catholicism, is acceptable. It is a recognised part of the spiritual life. What is not acceptable is despair. That is a mortal sin.

A group of monks escapes the apocalypse in the Order's starship in last pages of the novel. They take a few sisters with them and some children from the Abbey school. The role of the sisters is to look after the children. It is another instance of Miller's fifties values.

There is a chance that the group will reach the stars and survive. There is no certainty. Miller however does not believe that the nature of humanity can change. '*... it was inevitable that the race succumb again to the old maladies on new worlds....*' This may be survival. It is not salvation. [Leibowitz, 24.]

The monks doubt that humanity can be saved. Admittedly this is in their more depressive moments. They even suggest that God himself has succumbed to despair: '*... a God who must be very weary of the race of Man....*' Miller's suggestion of a despairing God is surely another heresy. [Leibowitz, 26.]

Rachel, Mrs Grales' second head, may be preternaturally innocent. She appears not to need baptism. '*He [Abbot Zerchi] began tracing a cross on her forehead with the moist fingertip.... No! her whole countenance seemed to shout. She turned away from him.*' [Leibowitz, 29.]

Rachel seems to have an intuitive grasp if not of Catholic doctrine, of the reality of the divine. '*She used no conventional gestures, but the reverence with which she handled [the ciborium] convinced him of one thing: she sensed the presence under the veils.*' [Leibowitz, 29.]

In his dying moments, Abbot Zerchi thinks this gives him grounds for a belief in salvation. '*He had seen primal innocence in those eyes, and a promise of resurrection.*' Abbot Zerchi may be wrong. '*Nothing else ever came - nothing that he saw, or felt, or heard.*' [Leibowitz, 29.]

Rachel seems to understand the nature of the Sacraments. Yet Rachel is a mutant. It is not clear to what extent she can be considered human. This may represent hope for something. It is not clearly hope for humanity.

There is a hint, perhaps, that humanity to be saved has to evolve into something else. It is no more than a hint. Miller likes to leave these things ambiguous. There is a similar hint of the possible benefits of mutation in the 1951 magazine story *Dark Benediction*.

The world is destroyed. '*The visage of Lucifer mushroomed into hideousness above the cloudbank, rising slowly like some titan climbing to its feet after ages of imprisonment in the earth.*' The small party of monks leaves just in time for the stars. '*The horizon came alive with flashes as the monks mounted the ladder. The horizon became a red glow.... The last monk, upon entering, paused in the lock.... "Sic transit mundus," he murmured....*' [Leibowitz, 30.]

Miller here has deliberately modified an aspect of Catholic liturgy for his own purposes. Similarly he on occasion modifies Catholic belief.

The original phrase here is '*Sic transit gloria mundi*,' 'Thus passes the glory of the world'. While the phrase is quite well known nowadays outside its original context, it is not simply a free-standing aphorism. It comes from the coronation ritual of the early modern popes. It was intended to remind the newly elevated pope of the transitory nature of earthly things. [*Sic transit gloria mundi*, Wikipedia.]

Miller has changed the phrase to '*Sic transit mundus*,' 'Thus passes the world.' What the monk at the door of the spaceship is witnessing is not a reminder of the ephemeral nature of vain, material things. He is witnessing the end of the world.

It appears that the population of the world is also destroyed. Miller is not absolutely clear on the point. I think we can assume that the lack of clarity is deliberate. It creates ambiguity.

The last sentences of the novel create an extraordinarily powerful image of the Dying Earth. '*The shark swam out to his deepest waters and brooded in the cold clean currents. He was very hungry that season.*' This, it seems to me, contradicts any possibility of salvation. [Leibowitz, 30.]

It is clear that humanity will not be able to return. '*If you ever come back, you might meet the Archangel at the east end of Earth, guarding her passes with a sword of flame.*' [Leibowitz, 30.]

God set Cherubim as sentries at the east end of the Garden of Eden. This was after the expulsion of Adam and Eve. Man in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* has fallen again. This also is not an image of salvation.

Miller has confused the Cherubim at the East End of Eden with the sword of the Archangel in the account of the fall of Lucifer. It is a minor mistake.

The old beggar, we may assume, is probably dead. If not, he is still waiting.

Salvation through Christ is the fundamental tenet of Christianity as a religion. Miller's opinions are not a minor deviation. The beliefs he rejects are principles that define the Christian faith.

## **Leibowitz**

The most important of the multiple identities of the pilgrim is that he is Leibowitz. Leibowitz, the founder of a Catholic religious order, a Beatus and eventually canonised, is a Jew. One suspects, not by any means for the only time in this novel, an ironic intention on Miller's part.

The figure of Leibowitz is ambiguous. The Albertian order was dedicated to preserving the written fragments of a destroyed civilisation. Leibowitz, later a monk and a priest, was originally a weapons technician. *'Leibowitz... was caught by a simpleton mob; a turncoat technician... identified him not only as a man of learning, but also a specialist in the weapons field.'* As such Leibowitz was directly involved in the destruction of the Euro-American civilisation. Paradoxically it is the written fragments of this civilisation that the Order attempts to preserve. [Leibowitz, 6.]

Miller never explicitly states that the pilgrim is Leibowitz, any more than he says directly that the pilgrim is also the Wandering Jew. The information is at least partially concealed from the characters of the novel. This creates irony, in the exact sense of that term. Knowledge is withheld from one party and revealed to another, the reader. It also creates ambiguity.

The martyred Leibowitz lives on, six hundred, fourteen hundred and two thousand years, respectively, after having been very publicly hanged and burned. The children have taken to calling him Lazarus. *'Lookit, lookit! It's old Lazar! ...same one 'ut the Lor' Hesus raise up!'* [Leibowitz, 24.]

Brother Francis denies that the pilgrim he saw was Leibowitz. It is the other novices who make the identification. *'... the whole novitiate is buzzing with the sweet little story that Francis met the Beatus himself out there, and the Beatus escorted our boy over to where that stuff was and told him he'd find his vocation.'* [Leibowitz, 4.]

Arkos recognises, though he cannot accept, how the novices have come to believe the Pilgrim was the Blessed Leibowitz. *''The worst part is the old man he babbles about.... I don't know anything that could damage the case worse than a whole flood of improbable 'miracles' ....And now this Francis, he meets a pilgrim - wearing what? - wearing for a kilt the very burlap cloth they hooded Blessed Leibowitz with before they*

hanged him. And with what for a belt? A rope. What rope? Ahh, the very same-“ [Leibowitz, 4.]

Abbot Arkos' disbelief serves to communicate to the reader that the pilgrim is in fact Leibowitz. It does so without Miller having to make an explicit statement. It avoids that endemic vice of science fiction, excessive exposition.

Dom Paulo in *Fiat Lux* is fond of the man he calls 'Benjamin'. Dom Paulo has a similar difficulty in accepting that Benjamin may be the Wandering Jew. '*Three thousand two hundred and nine, so he says. Sometimes even older.*' [Leibowitz, 13.]

Dom Paulo understands the implications of the statements that Benjamin makes. He just cannot accept them. '*The priest [Dom Paolo] looked puzzled. "Mistook you for whom? Saint Leibowitz? Now, Benjamin! You're going too far."*' [Leibowitz, 17.]

The identity between the pilgrim and Leibowitz is mainly suggested indirectly. The device that Miller uses is a wooden carving which is supposed to represent the saint. Both Dom Paulo and Abbot Zerchi are fond of the carving and have it in their studies.

Craftsmen in the abbey are allowed a private project, which they pursue in free moments. In *Fiat Homo* Brother Francis' project, as a copyist, is to illuminate a copy of the blueprint that the Blessed Leibowitz stamped and signed. There is an irony in the visual elaboration of an abstract design that the monks do not even understand.

Brother Fingo, also in *Fiat Homo*, is a carpenter and a wood carver. His project is a carving in wood of the Beatus. '*... its face wore a curious smile of a sort that made it rather unusual as a sacramental image.*' Brother Francis recognises the expression. '*...Francis could not escape the feeling that the face of the carving was smiling a vaguely familiar smile.*' [Leibowitz, 8.]

We are never told who it is that Brother Francis thinks he recognises. It is typical of Miller's love of ambiguity. But we know.

Like Brother Francis Dom Paulo sees, but does not quite accept, the resemblance of Brother Fingo's carving of the Beatus to the pilgrim - whom Brother Fingo, of course, never saw. '*The abbot had grown rather fond of the twenty-sixth century*

wood carving; its face wore a curious sort of a smile that made it rather unusual as a sacramental image.... Who do I know that grins that way?' [Leibowitz, 14.]

Abbot Zerchi in *Fiat Lux* is also dimly aware of the resemblance between the pilgrim and the carving, by now quite ancient. By now the pilgrim is 'the old beggar'. On his last appearance in the novel, the pilgrim is at the 'beggars' table'. 'Someone was smiling.... [Zerchi] quickly dismissed the feeling he had seen the old man before, somewhere.... "Who are you, if I may ask. Have I seen you somewhere before?"... "Call me Lazarus, then," said the old one, and chuckled.' [Leibowitz, 25.]

The resemblance is in the Tricksterish smile. 'The saint wore a slightly satiric smile. Zerchi had rescued it from oblivion because of that smile. "Did you see that old beggar in the refectory last night?" he asked, irrelevantly....' [Leibowitz, 26.]

The pilgrim's first appearance is to Brother Francis on his Lenten fast in the desert. Miller establishes on that occasion that the pilgrim is probably Jewish. The pilgrim's grace before bread includes the words *Adonoi Elohim*. These are the Hebrew words for 'Lord God'. It is not until the second part of the novel, *Fiat Lux* that it is explicitly confirmed that the pilgrim is in fact Jewish. ... 'But I thought you were wondering about the Old Jew.' [Leibowitz, 9.]

The pilgrim scrawls some signs which Francis does understand on a rock. Abbot Arkos recognises them. 'That is a lamedh, and that is a sadhe. Hebrew letters.' [Leibowitz, 4.]

The knowledge of a couple of Hebrew characters is not of course in itself proof that the pilgrim is Jewish. What Miller is doing here is creating an association.

Miller also creates an association between the pilgrim and Christ. The pilgrim says: 'I've not offered to change these stones into bread for you yet, have I?' [Leibowitz, 1.] This is a reference to the Temptation of Christ in the wilderness. 'And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.' [Matthew, 4:3.]

There are several levels of irony here. Most obviously, the real relationship of the pilgrim to the figure of Christ remains concealed at this point. Later it becomes obvious that the pilgrim is the Wandering Jew. More subtly, Francis is in the wilderness to resist temptation - and suspects that the pilgrim may be the devil.

'Noticing his discomfort, the pilgrim broke his bread and cheese; he offered a portion to Brother Francis.... The novice shuddered again. "Apage Satanas!" ['Begone, Satan!'] he hissed as he danced back and dropped the food. Without warning, he spattered the old man with holy water from a tiny phial sneaked from his sleeve. The pilgrim had become indistinguishable from the Archenemy, for a moment, in the somewhat sun-dazed mind of the novice.' [Matthew, 4:10; Leibowitz, 1.]

Brother Francis discovers relics of the Saint in the fallout shelter. One of these is a blueprint of a circuit design with the signature 'I.E. Leibowitz'. The name Leibowitz is not proof that the Blessed Leibowitz was Jewish, any more than his knowledge of a couple of Hebrew characters is proof that he was Jewish.

Leibowitz is however fairly obviously a Polish name, and many Jews in the United States are of Polish origin. Their forebears were driven out of the *shtetl* in the Pale of Settlement in the pogroms. The initials stand for 'Isaac Edward'. Edward, of course, is not a Jewish forename. The forename Isaac, on the other hand, could hardly be any more Jewish.

A further association is perhaps surprising. It is with the Apostle Paul. "'What does it say, Benjamin? Does it attract much trade up here?" "Hah - what should it say? It says: Tents Mended Here" .' [Leibowitz, 17.]

Paul in the bible is said to be a tentmaker. 'And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.' [Acts, 18:3.]

The pilgrim, like Paul, has a mission, and his mission, like Paul's, takes him among the Gentiles. The pilgrim, again like Paul, pursues his mission without the support of formal institutions.

Leibowitz – the pilgrim, the hermit, the beggar – is not the central figure of the novel. The novel has no central figure.

Each separate part of the novel has its own central figure. They are all different. In *Fiat Homo* it is the simple Brother Francis. In *Fiat Lux* and *Fiat Voluntas Tua* it is the abbots, Dom Paulo and Abbot Zerchi respectively.

Leibowitz however is the only figure who occurs in all three parts. He is also the quasi-legendary founder of the Order that gives the novel its coherence.

*Flame Deluge*

The figure of Leibowitz ties the novel together. He lives for two thousand years. With Leibowitz we are dealing with legend and myth. It is much deeper and much older than the Catholic veneer.

## **Holocaust**

Apart from the nuclear devices themselves, there is little enough technology in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. In *Fiat Lux* there is the monks' crude and clumsy 'lamp of electricity'. In *Fiat Voluntas Tua* there is the 'Abominable Autoscribe'. There are robot trucks on the six-lane highway. There is radiation monitoring equipment. There is one flight of one starship in one final chapter.

There is less science than theology. The science mainly occurs in discussions of the documents of the Memorabilia. There is even a reference to relativity.

Pfardentrott has found a tantalising fragment of a document which '*...treats some of our fundamental concepts as if they weren't basic at all, but evanescent appearances that change according to one's point of view.*' [Leibowitz, 20.]

The theology is more important than the technology. The heretical view of Original Sin is fundamental to the book. The technology is incidental.

Yet despite the relative unimportance of technology, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is science fiction. It is not merely science fiction in a loose, general sense. It is genre science fiction.

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* is based firmly on the scenarios, as they are sometimes known, which are at the core of science fiction. Wolfe believes that it is the scenarios which distinguish genre science fiction from the incursions into science fiction of so-called 'mainstream' writers, such as Kingsley Amis or Doris Lessing. [Wolfe, 1979.]

The most obvious and the most important of the scenarios on which *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is based is the Holocaust or post-Holocaust novel. The Holocaust, in science fiction, is not invariably or indeed usually nuclear. It can equally be caused by natural disaster, plague or aliens.

Novels and stories dealing with the nuclear Holocaust became common at a particular historical moment. That moment, unsurprisingly, is after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and during the Cold War. This is the historical moment at which Miller writes.

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* was published in 1960. The copyright page shows 1959. This was at the height of the Cold War. Memories of the atom bombs dropped on

Hiroshima and Nagasaki were still vivid, and newsreel footage of tests of the more powerful hydrogen bombs made a dramatic impression.

The Cuban Missile Crisis occurred in 1962. This was only a couple of years after the publication of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. The Cuban crisis was almost certainly the closest the world has ever come to nuclear Armageddon. During the crisis Khrushchev famously remarked that he could 'smell burning'. The fears of nuclear Holocaust were at that time very real.

The *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* describes the effect of the historical moment on the genre with great confidence. I think it is worth quoting at some length.

*'After the Hiroshima bombing a new period began in which, unsurprisingly, World War Three and the post-holocaust story came to seem less fantastic; it also became more popular, and developed a distinctively apocalyptic atmosphere, a heavy emphasis on a supposed antitechnological bias among the survivors, and a concentration on the results of Nuclear Energy in general and radiation in particular. The mood was darker in that imagined catastrophes were now primarily manmade. Man became pictured as a kind of lemming bent on racial suicide – through nuclear, biological and chemical warfare in stories of the 1940s and 1950s, and through Pollution, Overpopulation and destruction of Earth's ecosystem through Climate Change in many stories since the 1960s.'* [Clute, et al., 2011.]

Gary Wolfe is also aware of the effect of historical events on the genre. *'In the decade and a half following the Second World War ... science fiction produced a great many works of an apocalyptic nature.... Sometimes such stories have been termed 'awful warning' or 'holocaust' stories....'* Wolfe however disagrees with John Clute and his colleagues in certain fundamental respects. *'First, most of the titles mentioned above are not by 'mainstream' science-fiction writers.... [Somewhat confusingly, when Wolfe says 'mainstream' in this context, he means 'genre'.] ...many of the major science-fiction works in which nuclear war played a part used it as a part of the exposition for a narrative that actually takes place centuries or generations afterward.... It is apparent that not even in these works describing technologically generated holocausts are there expressed substantial doubts about the efficacy of technology.... It can even be argued ... that such works express as much faith in science and technology as do science fiction works of other genres.'* [Wolfe, 1979.]

I do not wish to take issue with Wolfe over his general remarks about the treatment of the Holocaust in science fiction, though I think some people might. I do not however think his remarks are right in reference to Walter Miller.

Miller is a science fiction writer. He is not mainstream. For several years he wrote commercial stories for the science fiction magazines. *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, though different in many ways from those stories, is very clearly genre sf.

Miller, too, is just as aware as Wolfe that the events in post-Holocaust novels take place centuries or generations later. He expresses the point more elegantly than Wolfe does. '*The actual Megawar happens offstage, between stories, and the rest is about the survivors, the orphans of a psychopathic civilisation.*' [Miller and Greenberg, 1985.]

I would suggest that the phrase 'psychopathic civilisation' does in fact, *pace* Mr Wolfe, suggest 'substantial doubts about the efficacy of technology'. That would be consistent with Miller's presentation, discussed above, of science as not only evil but fascistic.

Miller quite explicitly sees future-set Holocaust stories as being about the past. He also, very interestingly for the writer of a novel about Catholic monks, compares future-set Holocaust stories with pagan myth. '*There is a nostalgia for things lost that reminds me of ancient underworld myth... the quality of sadness and the yearning for ancient days and ancient ways remind one of the sighing shades in Virgil's Hades and Dante's Hell.... Survivors don't really live in such a world; they haunt it.*' [Miller and Greenberg, 1985.]

This seems to me to be quite an extraordinary passage. The language is striking. Science fiction writers are not I think supposed to write like that. The image of survivors haunting the world, rather than living in it, is strongly post-traumatic. It is however the central thought that is most remarkable. Miller is saying that Holocaust stories express a nostalgia for something lost, rather than a fear about the loss of what is still possessed.

It is tempting to speculate about what it is that is the object of nostalgia in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. In a novel about Original Sin, I think there is only one possibility. What has been lost is innocence.

I think if we had to suggest a time in his life when Miller personally lost his innocence, there is a particular period which would be a very strong candidate. That is the period of his wartime military service.

It is also I think true what seems to have followed Miller's war service – I am relying on his published writings here – was a prolonged period of reflection. It was these reflections, I think, which finally led to the abandonment of Miller's primitive faith in technology. It was above all the reality of nuclear weapons and the fear of a nuclear Holocaust that caused Miller to change his mind about science. Writing about the Holocaust was for Miller a kind of liberation.

As a post-Holocaust novel, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* has been highly praised. To Gary Wolfe, '*A Canticle for Leibowitz... [is] generally, and justly, regarded as the best of science fiction's post-holocaust works.*' [Wolfe, 1979.]

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* is not just a post-Holocaust novel. It is also a Ruined Earth novel. '*In the longer term, as generations pass and memories of the actual catastrophe fade and blur, post-holocaust settings merge almost seamlessly into the gentler, often rustically stable society of the Ruined Earth.*' Thus the Encyclopedia. [Clute, et al., 2011.]

The world outside the abbey of the Order of Leibowitz is not gentle. In other ways, this passage describes quite well the world of *Fiat Homo*, the first part of the novel.

The book has also been highly praised as a Ruined Earth novel. '*Perhaps paramount among sf ruined-earth scenarios is Walter M Miller's A Canticle for Leibowitz... an ironic black comedy about the ways in which a post-holocaust civilization's history recycles and recapitulates the errors of its predecessor.... The book is vivid, morose and ebulliently inventive; it has been very influential.*' [Clute, et al., 2011.]

In the final chapter, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* becomes a Dying Earth novel. This is described as: '*...a not uncommon category of sf story which has now developed its own melancholy mythology.*' According to the Encyclopedia, '*Jack Vance gave this Far Future subgenre its name in The Dying Earth,*' a collection of linked stories from 1950. [Clute, et al., 2011.]

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* also comes close to a scenario called Medieval Futurism, although it does not fit the definition exactly. Medieval Futurism usually

refers to a combination of feudal society and futuristic weapons technology. However the Encyclopedia recognises a variant, without the futuristic weaponry, of which *A Canticle for Leibowitz* clearly forms a part. '*The term comes close to describing the medieval style of governance commonly found in Post Holocaust and Ruined Earth tales set in a feudal England... or in balkanized versions of America....*' [Clute, et al., 2011.]

The balkanisation of the former United States is made very clear in the second part of *A Canticle for Leibowitz, Fiat Lux*. Miller imagines the territorial ambitions of Hannegan, the Mayor of Texarkana. Hannegan is a mad relative of the mad scientist Pfordentrott. '*All Laredo's forces are committed to the Plains. Mad Bear has broken camp... the State of Chihuahua is threatening Laredo from the South. So Hannegan is getting ready to send Texarkana forces to the Rio Grande.... After Laredo's firmly leashed... the next move will be on Denver.*' [Leibowitz, 17.]

The world of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is built on the ruins of the European-American civilisation in the same way that Europe was built on the ruins of Rome. '*... the ruins [in the desert outside the abbey] had gradually been eroded into these anomalous heaps of stone by generations of monks and occasional strangers, men seeking a load of stone or looking for the bits of rusty steel ... mysteriously planted in the rocks by men of an age almost forgotten to the world.*' [Leibowitz, 1.]

This is reminiscent of the description of the ruins of Roman Bath in a well-known fragment of an Anglo-Saxon poem.

*Wondrous is this wall-stead, wasted by fate.*

*Battlements broken, giant's work shattered.* [Exeter Book.]

Brother Francis experiences something similar when he visits New Rome for the canonisation of the founder of his Order. '*During the ceremony of canonisation and the Mass that followed, Brother Francis had noticed only the majestic splendour of the building. Now the aged monsignor pointed to crumbling masonry, places in need of repair, and the shameful condition of some of the older frescoes.*' The church, like the civilisation that sustained it, has decayed. [Leibowitz, 11.]

A similar sense of the present being built on the ruins of the past is expressed in *Fiat Lux* by Marcus Apollo, the urbane, humanistic papal legate to the court of Texarkana. '*Marcus Apollo ... walked to the window and stared out at the sunlit city, a*

*sprawling disorderly city built mostly of rubble from another age.... It had grown slowly over an ancient ruin, as perhaps someday another city would grow over the ruin of this one.'*

[Leibowitz, 12.]

Finally, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is an Alternative History. 'An alternate history – some writers and commentators prefer the designation "alternative history" on grammatical grounds... is an account of Earth... as it might have become in consequence of some hypothetical alteration in history'. [Clute, et al., 1979.] The hypothetical alteration in history, in the case of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, is of course the first nuclear Holocaust – the Flame Deluge.

Wolfe seems to suggest that only non-genre writers using – or misusing - science fiction conventions for a particular purpose were writing 'awful warning' stories. It is part of his more general argument that science fiction writers maintained their loyalty to rationalism and materialism. In Miller's case, neither Wolfe's specific contention nor the more general one holds true. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is a very awful warning. And Miller, by the time he wrote it, was no longer a rationalist or a materialist.

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* is an explicitly prophetic book. '... the wind wrapped [Dom Paulo's] habit bandage-tight about his stooped body, making him look like an emaciated Ezekiel with a strangely round little paunch.' Ezekiel is of course one of the Hebrew prophets. [Leibowitz, 13.]

Dom Paulo's prophetic intimations, and his psychological state, are described in some detail. Prophecy, in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, is an important theme.

The papal legate, the humanistically-named Marcus Apollo, writes to Dom Paulo from Texarkana. Ostensibly Marcus Apollo is writing to let Dom Paulo know of Pfordentrott's interest in the Memorabilia. Pfordentrott's visit, when it occurs, provides the main dramatic action of *Fiat Lux*, the second and central part of the novel.

Marcus Apollo's letter affects the abbot deeply. 'Their ruler had seemed moody of late, and given to strange forebodings.' Dom Paulo does not think that Pfordentrott's interest is the problem. 'What danger could there be in letting the secular scholar study at the abbey?' He is convinced that the legate is hinting at something. 'Marcus was trying

*to warn him – but of what?'* The reader is likely to suppose initially that the legate's warning is most probably about Hannegan's warlike intentions. The language which Miller gives to Dom Paulo is however too full of menace for that. *'The tone of the letter was mildly flippant, but it seemed full of ominous incongruities which might have been designed to add up to some single dark congruity, if only he could add them up right.'* Something very similar could be said about the tone of Miller's novel. [Leibowitz, 13.]

Dom Paulo thinks in terms of fate. '[Dom Paulo] ...felt foreboding. Some nameless threat lurked just around the corner of the world for the sun to rise again.' The past has somehow compromised the future. *'...since the arrival of the letter... Dom Paulo... brooded overmuch on the past as if looking for something that might have been done differently in order to avert the future.'* Miller does not make the threat explicit. Yet the ominous fate which is hinted at in Pfardentrott's interest in the Memorabilia is surely the recurrence of the Holocaust. [Leibowitz, 13.]

Dom Paulo's intimations of a dark future are a form, if inarticulate, of prophecy. Miller uses graphic imagery to insist on the nebulous evil which is the subject of Dom Paulo's premonitions. *'There was the sense of the imminent, the remorseless, the mindless; it coiled like a heat-maddened rattler, ready to strike at rolling tumbleweed. It was a devil with which he was trying to come to grips, the abbot decided....'* The diabolism mentioned here has been introduced in *Fiat Homo*, the first part of the novel. It is taken up again in *Fiat Voluntas Tua*, the third part of the novel, in the striking imagery of Lucifer. [Leibowitz, 13.]

Miller emphasises is that there is danger in the future, and the danger is quite real. '[Dom Paulo] ...was being warned, and he knew it. Whether the warning came from an angel, from a demon, or from his own conscience, it told him to beware of himself and of some reality not yet faced.' Miller quite deliberately leaves the nature of Dom Paulo's experience ambiguous. By offering the possibility of a rational explanation – 'his own conscience' - Miller makes it more difficult to dismiss Dom Paulo's fears as superstition, or worse. [Leibowitz, 13.]

In conversations which Dom Paulo has, for example with Benjamin, the concept of prophecy is made overt. '*If you wait to examine the entrails of an era until it's born, it's too late to prophesy its birth.*' [Leibowitz, 16.]

Dom Paulo is also quite capable of recognising that Pfardentrott's predictions are precisely a prophecy; a rival prophecy, perhaps. '*Dom Paulo's hopes sank, for the prophecy gave form to the scholar's probable outlook.*' Miller could hardly have emphasised the point about prophecy more strongly, or made it any clearer. Mr Wolfe's strictures do not apply in Miller's case. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is most definitely an Awful Warning story. [Leibowitz, 20.]

In the Alternative History of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the nuclear Holocaust occurs twice. It occurs once a few years after the time when Miller was writing. This is six hundred years before *A Canticle for Leibowitz* begins. The Holocaust then occurs again. The second occurrence is two thousand years in the future, relative to the point of composition.

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* predicts the second Holocaust. The world in which the second Holocaust occurs is a few decades ahead of the 1960s in terms of its technology. When the second Holocaust does occur, it does so not just in the not so distant future, but very near our own time. Miller is therefore predicting, in *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, that a nuclear Holocaust will occur not long after 1960.

The early Christians predicted the Second Coming. They believed it to be imminent. Miller believed that the Holocaust was imminent. Like the early Christians, he lived long enough to have been obliged to modify his view.

The double prediction of the Holocaust is of course a particular instance of the cyclical idea of history that Miller is working with. It strengthens a sense of inevitability that is in some way tragic, despite the comedic tone of much of the book.

The prediction of the Holocaust suggests a pagan view of fate. It suggests that humanity is doomed by an innate and inescapable flaw. We are, in the words of Miller's monks, '*... chained to the pendulum of our own mad clockwork....*' [Leibowitz, 24.]

These are also Miller's words.

## **Flame Deluge**

In *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the first nuclear Holocaust is known as the 'Flame Deluge'. The recording of the memories of the nuclear holocaust is imagined as being done by ecclesiastical writers who use quasi-biblical expressions. The scriptural pastiches are done with great gusto. One supposes that Miller enjoyed writing them. *'The author... had a liking for scriptural mimicry.'* Something similar could be said of Miller.

[*Leibowitz*, 18.]

The simple and vivid term 'Flame Deluge' gives the partly remembered occurrence a mythical status. It also makes explicit the parallel with the biblical flood.

*'It was said that God, in order to test mankind which had become swelled with pride as in the time of Noah, had commanded the wise men of that age, among them the Blessed Leibowitz, to devise great engines of war such as had never before been upon the Earth, weapons of such might that they contained the very fires of Hell, and that God had suffered these magi to place the weapons in the hands of princes, and to say to each prince: "Only because thy enemies have such a thing have we devised this for thee, in order that they may know that thou hast it also, and fear to strike. See to it, m'Lord, that thou fearest them as much as they shall now fear thee, that none may unleash this dread thing which we have wrought."'* [*Leibowitz*, 6.]

This is a rendering of the theory of 'mutually assured destruction'. This theory supposedly underpinned the logic, if one can call it that, of nuclear deterrence. To have the idea stated in quasi-biblical language such as this is to make it both amusing and shocking. The pastiche is appropriate to the fictional context. Miller is using it to make clear that the politicians are just as responsible - or, more accurately, just as irresponsible - as the scientists. *'Such was the folly of princes, and there followed the Flame Deluge.'* [*Leibowitz*, 6.]

The idea of the Flame Deluge is so convincing in context that it is I think worth pointing out that the phrase is another invention of Miller's. It has since been taken up, as a brief foray on Google will quickly reveal, by rock bands and games creators.

The urge for dominance is just as important as a cause of mass destruction as the possession of nuclear weapons. *'For the mighty of the Earth did contend among themselves for supreme power over all....'* [Leibowitz, 6.]

By the use of the expression 'Lucifer' Miller also clearly associates the destructiveness of nuclear weapons with the diabolic. *'... for the Lord God had suffered the wise men of those times to learn the means by which the world itself might be destroyed, and into their hands was given the sword of the Archangel wherewith Lucifer had been cast down, that men and princes might fear God and humble themselves before the Most High. But they were not humbled.... But the prince answered him not and God said: "YOU HAVE MADE ME A HOLOCAUST OF MY SONS."* [Leibowitz, 6.]

The idea of a 'Flame Deluge' is based directly on the biblical story of the flood. It is also based on other biblical predictions which concern the end of the world. They have been associated in popular belief with the myth of the flood.

After the great flood, God promised Noah there would not be another one. *'... neither shall there be any more a flood to destroy the earth.'* [Genesis 9:11.]

God is said to have put the rainbow in the sky as a sign of his promise. *'I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.'* [Genesis 9:13.]

In the Book of Revelations the end of the world is predicted. *'... the first heaven and the first earth were passed away....'* [Revelation 21:1.]

The Second Epistle of Peter predicts specifically that the earth will end in fire: *'But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.'* [2 Peter, 3:10.]

These different sources have been combined in popular belief into the notion of 'the fire next time'. The phrase was used by the writer James Baldwin to great effect as the title of a famous essay. [Baldwin, 1963.]

The space ship in which a small band of monks leave the earth when the second Flame Deluge is unleashed is symbolically another Ark. It saves not animals, but documents. In a light touch, the documents have been transferred to microfilm.

God in the biblical myth sent the flood because of the wickedness of humanity. He saved Noah and his family because Noah was the one just man.

By association, 'European-American civilisation' in Miller's novel is presumably destroyed because it is wicked. The church, the only institution which survives, presumably does so because of some special merit. The merit must be institutional rather than individual. Miller's churchmen are all humanly flawed. At the end of the novel a revived scientific civilisation is destroyed again.

Lucifer, referred to in the passage of biblical pastiche above, is Satan. Lucifer is the angel who rebels against God, just as humanity does. Lucifer is cast out of heaven. '*And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world; he was cast out into the world, and his angels were cast out with him.*' The name Lucifer is only applied to the devil in later Christian tradition. [Revelation, 12:9.]

The association with Lucifer makes it clear that the nuclear holocaust in *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is not just the work of scientists and politicians. It is also the work of the devil. 'Lucifer' is the codeword for the outbreak of nuclear war. '*LUCIFER IS FALLEN; the code words, flashed electronically across the continent....*' [Leibowitz, 24.]

We can assume that the use of the phrase 'Lucifer is fallen', rather than some other phrase including the word 'Lucifer', is deliberate. The Fall of Lucifer and his expulsion from heaven parallels the Fall of Man, and the expulsion from the Garden.

The rebellion of Lucifer is introduced by these allusions into *Fiat Voluntas Tua*, the last part of the novel. At the heart of *Fiat Voluntas Tua* is the rebellion of humanity. The rebellion of humanity is the Fall of Man, the primal loss of innocence. The introduction of the Fall of Lucifer heightens the eschatological significance of the events of the novel.

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* describes a future in which the nuclear Holocaust has already happened and is inevitably doomed to happen again. Miller attributes this to the innate destructiveness and self-destructiveness of the human species. Miller uses a heretical version of Christian theology to make sense of what he sees as the human capacity for evil.

## *Flame Deluge*

In the future history of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the past is repeated. The Flame Deluge occurs in the sixth decade of the twentieth century, about six centuries before the novel begins. The future then repeats the history of the Christian era, and the Holocaust occurs again. '*In swift retaliation, an ancient city died.*' The future in the finale of the novel is also the present. [*Leibowitz*, 25.]

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* is dominated by the fear of the destruction of the Earth, and the self-destruction of humanity, by nuclear weapons. In the years since Miller wrote the nuclear Holocaust has of course not happened. That could be taken as invalidating Miller's prophecy. I do not believe that it does.

Miller, at the date and time he wrote, is specifically concerned with the nuclear Holocaust. He is however aware of other possibilities of human self-destructiveness, some of them ecological. This was also increasingly part of the mood of the times. *Silent Spring* was published in 1962.

*Dark Benediction* (1951) deals with a plague, while in *Conditionally Human* (1952) the concern is with over-population. In *The Ties that Bind* (1954) Miller portrays the human propensity for conflict as genetic and ineradicable. Miller's prediction concerns a humanity which has become dependent on a technological civilisation, and will destroy itself.

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* is about nuclear weapons. More fundamentally, it is about the loss of innocence, and the loss of a world.

## **Trauma**

During the Second World War, Miller served in the United States Army Air Force. He enlisted in February 1942. He was at that time a student at the University of Tennessee.

Miller became a sergeant. He was apparently decorated. I have no details about either the decoration or the promotion.

Miller was a radio operator and air gunner. He flew in bombers and was posted to the Mediterranean theatre, flying fifty-five combat sorties. [Roberson, 2011.] Over fifty sorties in bombers would have been considered by many at the time to be at or beyond the limits of endurance. In the Second World War, bombers were one of the most dangerous arms of service. Casualties were also very high in the infantry.

During his tour of overseas duty, Miller participated in the bombing of the Abbey of Monte Cassino in Italy. The abbey was in a protected historical zone, and at the time of the raid it was not defended. Miller's participation in the raid is generally accepted to have played an important role in the genesis, many years later, of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

The raid on the abbey of Monte Cassino in which Miller took part occurred during the Battle of Monte Cassino, in the early months of 1944. The Battle of Monte Cassino was a series of attempts to break through the German defensive position in Italy known as the Winter Line. The hoped-for breakthrough was supposed to lead to a victorious march on Rome.

The strategic objectives of the Italian campaign had always been somewhat obscure. It was a campaign that had a lot to do with Churchill's mistrust of the British army, and his desire to postpone the opening of the so-called Second Front in France as long as possible.

The mountainous terrain around Monte Cassino favoured the defence, and conditions in winter were atrocious. The eventual Allied victory was bought at a cost of 55,000 casualties. At Monte Cassino, as in Normandy, the intensity of the fighting resembled that of the trenches in the First World War. German commanders compared the battlefield to that of the Somme in 1916.

During the fighting for Monte Cassino the Allies were taking extremely heavy casualties, particularly from accurate German artillery fire. Allied generals, without definite intelligence, came to believe the Abbey of Monte Cassino was being used as an artillery observation post. They ordered a raid by American bombers in which 1,400 tons of high explosive was dropped. The bombing of the Abbey caused 'widespread damage'.

The casualties were mostly among refugees from the surrounding area, mainly women and children, who had taken refuge in the abbey from the bombardment. In *Fiat Lux* the Abbey of the Order of Leibowitz in the same way gives shelter to civilian refugees.

After the raid on Monte Cassino German paratroopers established defensive positions in the rubble. The destruction had been completely pointless. [*Battle of Monte Cassino*, Wikipedia.]

The Abbey of Monte Cassino was thought by Allied commanders to have been militarised, and was badly damaged by bombing. Similarly, the Abbey of the Order of Leibowitz is assessed as a fortress by the officers of Hannegan of Texarkana, the ruler of one of the early modern states that re-emerge in the second part of the novel. The Abbey is eventually destroyed by a nuclear strike.

The attack on the Abbey of Monte Cassino was amongst other things a form of cultural vandalism. This is exactly what Abbot Paulo fears in *Fiat Lux*, the second part of the novel. '*I am sure he [Hannegan] would have the wisdom – or at least the wise counsellors to lead him – to understand that our abbey's value as a storehouse of ancient wisdom is many times greater than its value as a citadel.*' [Leibowitz, 20.]

Much has been made of Miller's participation in the raid on Monte Cassino. It has been assumed that he had post-traumatic stress disorder as a consequence. The assertion is made on the record, no doubt in good faith, by the science fiction writer Joe Haldeman. In an article in the fanzine *Locus*, cited on Wikipedia, Haldeman claims that Miller had PTSD, and reports – as if it clinches his argument – that Miller displayed a photo of Ron Kovic prominently. I have not been able to examine the article directly. [Haldeman, 1996.]

Haldeman had been wounded while serving in Vietnam. He is best known for his military science fiction series, *The Forever War*. It is written from a perspective that is very sympathetic to the grunts.

Ron Kovic, whose photograph Haldeman mentions, was a decorated former Marine Corps sergeant who was wounded and paralysed in Vietnam. Kovic became an anti-war activist and was arrested twelve times. Kovic is known among other things for his autobiography *Born on the Fourth of July*. [Ron Kovic, Wikipedia.]

Post-traumatic stress disorder as a diagnosis did not enter the Diagnostic and Standards Manual of the American Psychological Association until 1980. It did so partly as a result of lobbying by Vietnam veterans groups. The term had been mooted over a decade before. The condition, under different names, had been recognised for some considerable time.

It is quite clear that the bombing of Monte Cassino affected Miller deeply. He incorporated the experience in a powerful way into *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, his most important single work. He universalised his experience by integrating it with the fear of a nuclear Holocaust and a heretical notion of Original Sin. It is an experience which can hardly have been more important. According to reports, Miller talked about the bombing frequently.

Miller's story *Wolf Pack* clearly shows his concern about the bombing of civilian targets and civilian casualties. "You goddamn murderer, you killed my mother! You wrecked my church, and you shattered my city...." *Wolf Pack* also shows that Miller was aware of combat fatigue, as PTSD was then known. "Combat fatigue? Hell, Pappy, it could happen to anybody." [Wolf Pack, 1953.]

The choice of the phrase 'Wolf Pack' as the title of a story about a squadron of bombers by a decorated Air Force veteran hardly needs comment. Miller was at the very least highly ambivalent about his wartime experience.

Miller's concerns about attacks on civilian targets are obvious. There is however no clear sign in the public record that Miller suffered from either hyper-vigilance or memory disturbance. Those are the two most distinctive clinical indicators of PTSD. The public record is admittedly exiguous.

Miller may well have been affected emotionally by his wartime experience. I think he probably was. Yet there is no clear indication that he was particularly affected by one bombing raid out of fifty-five.

It is fairly clear there was something about Miller's military experience other than air raids on civilian targets that bothered him. The possibilities include the violence, the misogyny, the tendency of men without women to form gangs, and the resemblance of those gangs to fascism. This is shown in stories like *Dumb Waiter*, *Dark Benediction*, *Crucifixus Etiam*, *The Lineman* and *The Ties that Bind*.

Miller also reports a potentially traumatic experience of the kind that affected many servicemen. He reports it in the hard-boiled language that servicemen often use to cope with such experiences. '*I still have a piece of [the Hermann Goering Panzer Division's] shrapnel I dug out of the fuselage a few inches from my ass the day I found out what cordite smells like. They killed a friend of mine.*' [Miller and Greenberg, 1985.]

It was forty years before Miller mentioned this incident on the record. That is extraordinary in itself.

If Miller kept the shell fragment for forty years, the incident was clearly important to him. Miller does not say who the friend was that the Germans killed.

Miller himself, in another article quoted on Wikipedia, gives some support to Haldeman's view. '*I went to war with very romantic ideas about war, and I came back sick.*' [Garvey, 1996.]

Miller, it is clear, believed he was ill when he returned from the war. He told people so. He does not appear to have said, on the record, what he believed that the illness was.

Miller as a mature man was as deeply - or more deeply - concerned about the nuclear Holocaust as he was about the bombing of Monte Cassino. Yet when Miller heard about the Holocaust as a young, newly-married airman, he celebrated. '*I remember celebrating Hiroshima. Harry Truman gave it to me and my new wife as a wedding present.... It meant I would be discharged by October 1945, and would not, after all, have to go back into combat, this time in the Pacific. I did not rejoice in the hundreds of kilodeaths among the enemy, whom my society had persuaded me to hate.*' The concern

with the nuclear Holocaust comes, I think, from reflection rather than sickness. [*Beyond Armageddon*, 1985].

It is also often assumed that Miller was depressed. There is some evidence for this. Miller had difficulties with work and money. He also had difficulties in his relationships with other people. There are other possible explanations for both traits, but they are certainly consistent with depression. As time went on Miller also fairly clearly had difficulty getting things done. That too is consistent with depression.

There are a number of events and experiences that we know of which might have led to Miller being depressed: his war service, a life-threatening automobile accident, Anne Miller nearly dying in childbirth, the end of Miller's relationship with Judith Merrill, and family and financial difficulties. Miller was also unhappier about writing science fiction and the science fiction community than seems to have been clearly realised.

What we lack is any reliable information about Miller's subjective state. Without that we cannot be sure that Miller was in fact depressed, and we cannot know what he was depressed about. There is in general a lack of information about Miller.

Miller is a man we do not really know.

## **Archive**

Little is known about Miller. Less is known certainly.

What we do know has been very usefully assembled by William H. Roberson in *Walter M. Miller, Jr.: A Reference Guide to his Fiction and his Life*. In this chapter and the next two I rely mainly on Roberson, in particular on the entry *Miller, Walter Michael, Jr.* [Roberson, 2011.]

There appears to be very little archive material. Roberson lists seventeen letters from Miller to Chad Oliver, and one to Oliver from Anne Miller. Oliver was an anthropologist and science fiction writer, who for a while at least was a friend of Miller's. These letters are in the Chad Oliver collection in the Cushing Memorial Library and Archives at Texas A&M University, College Station. Roberson also lists four letters addressed to Roberson personally by Miller.

I have no knowledge of any other letters, diaries, notebooks, or preserved drafts. I do not even know if Miller had any papers when he died. If he had, his grand-daughter might know what happened to them. It was Miller's grand-daughter, at his request, who administered his estate. Roberson, possibly out of protectiveness, does not mention the grand-daughter's name.

The only other possible source of information would be the literary agency Don Congdon Associates. Michael Congdon says that there are business letters between Miller and Congdon's father, the founder of the firm, in the papers of the agency. These are kept in the Butler Library at Columbia University.

Michael Congdon took over the agency on the death of his father, Don Congdon, who had been Miller's agent. It was Don Congdon who passed the unfinished manuscript of *Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman* to Terry Bisson. Don Congdon might have known if there was other material in existence.

Michael Congdon also says that Miller's granddaughter is not interested in opening Miller's files 'such as they are, to the general public'. Miller's granddaughter is the administrator of Miller's estate and the spokesman for it. [Michael Congdon, personal communication, December 12, 2016.]

By way of a fairly random counter-example, the Clifford D. Simak papers in the University of Minnesota fill seventeen boxes and occupy nine feet of shelf space.

If there is little documentation about Miller, it is presumably because Miller did not want us to have the information it might contain.

## **Paperback Writer**

*ACanticle for Leibowitz* has been a critical success, and popular with readers. It has never been out of print.

In 1960 *A Canticle for Leibowitz* won the Hugo Award for the best novel. The Hugo awards, with the Nebula, are the most prestigious in science fiction. The Hugos are given at the World Science Fiction Convention.

This was not the only Hugo that Miller won. In 1955 Miller's story *The Darfsteller* won the Hugo for 'best novelette'. A novelette, apparently, is shorter than a novella.

When *A Canticle for Leibowitz* was published, it was reviewed in the mainstream press. This is quite unusual for a novel published as science fiction. The reviews in the *New Yorker* and *Time* are said to have been negative and the review in the *Spectator* mixed. The *New York Times Book Review* and the *Chicago Tribune Magazine of Books* were apparently very favourable.

I am not aware how many copies *A Canticle for Leibowitz* has sold. Orbit Books, the current publisher, did not reply to my email. I do not know if *A Canticle for Leibowitz* was ever a best seller.

*ACanticle for Leibowitz* has certainly been a steady seller. Estimates of the number of new editions and reprints vary. They range from twenty-five to forty.

After the publication of *ACanticle for Leibowitz*, Miller almost completely stopped writing. He was at that time thirty-four. For over thirty years after the publication of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Miller wrote little, as far as we know, and published less. Miller however frequently allowed people to think he was about to start a new project.

Miller co-edited the anthology *Beyond Armageddon* with Martin Greenberg. It was published in 1985. *Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman* was finished by Terry Bisson with Miller's agreement. It is a competent but conventional novel.

*Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman* develops the imaginary world of *Fiat Lux*, the second part of *ACanticle for Leibowitz*. There are nomads, mutants, pregnant nuns, a crusade and a pope with a shoulder holster over his cassock. *Saint Leibowitz*

*and the Wild Horse Woman* was published after Miller's death in 1997. That, as far as we know, was all that Miller wrote.

It has always seemed difficult to understand why someone who could produce something as good as *A Canticle for Leibowitz* should then write nothing more. Various explanations have been advanced for Miller ceasing to write in this abrupt way. It has often been suggested that Miller was afraid he would not write anything so good again. Don Congdon believed it was depression that stopped Miller writing. Haldeman thought it was PTSD. These explanations are all rather speculative.

Miller himself talked about shame. Miller was rather good at pulling the wool over people's eyes. That I think is what he may have been doing when he made that remark.

Miller tends to be seen as a successful writer. This is largely hindsight, based on the reception of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Following the publication of the novel, various commentators have found merit in his magazine stories. In my opinion most of the stories are undistinguished, and some of them are very bad indeed.

It is not just the fact that Miller stopped writing that requires explanation. Miller was a commercial writer who up to that date had written nothing exceptional. It is not at all obvious how he came, quite unexpectedly, to write something as good as *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

Miller started to write commercially when he was in hospital after an automobile accident. The sources are vague on the date.

That vagueness in itself is quite shocking. The accident is a highly significant event in the life of a historically important writer. While Miller was still alive, it seems that nobody thought to ask the important questions. If they did, they don't appear to have written the answers down.

What we know is that the accident occurred only months before Miller was due to graduate from the University of Texas in Austin. He had enrolled at the University of Texas on the GI Bill in 1947.

Miller broke both legs and one arm. He was in hospital and in plaster for six months. He was on crutches for another six months. While Miller was in hospital the

doctors apparently recommended writing as therapy for the arm muscles that he had not been using. This is said to be when Miller wrote his first two stories and sold them to the magazines.

The first two stories were not science fiction. The stories were published early in 1950. The accident, therefore, most probably happened in 1949. 1949 was also the year in which Anne Miller nearly died in childbirth.

The levels of stress that the Millers experienced in that year are hard to imagine. They had three young children.

Miller did not return to college after the accident. He never completed his degree.

According to the sources Miller wrote the stories quickly and sold them easily. This encouraged him to become a professional writer. Miller apparently expressed this as his having 'caught the disease of writer's heart'.

Miller's statements about himself often seem to show more in the way of linguistic flair than of regard for factual accuracy. The association of writing with illness is however quite striking. It is not a particularly usual association. It is I think significant.

Miller had always been interested in writing. He had apparently been encouraged at high school. Such signs of promise are often detected in the early histories of children who go on to find success as writers. They are less often noticed when they occur in the early histories of the tens of thousands of children who do not go on to do any such thing.

Miller's father wanted him to do something 'more practical'. When Miller registered at the University of Tennessee in 1940 it was nominally to study electrical engineering. Miller however was apparently resistant to specialisation. He took an 'eclectic' range of courses including physics, poetry and philosophy.

Miller finally adopted commercial writing as a career during his recovery from his accident. It was at least partly a way of avoiding specialisation. Miller did not as far as I know wear funny clothes or advocate free love. He did however reject a conventional career. He was to that extent bohemian.

One would imagine the accident was life-threatening. It is never discussed. There are no reports that Miller talked about it with friends. The accident is not obviously reflected in his writing. That seems extraordinary.

Friends of Miller's were prepared to assume that Miller had post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of his war service. That is not wholly unreasonable, though it is probably wrong. The effect of nearly dying in a car crash, and being incapacitated for several months, seems not to have been considered. The emotional impact of Anne Miller's nearly dying has also been discounted.

It is in the context of these extremely stressful experiences that Miller dropped out of university. It was at the same time that Miller made his decision to become a professional writer.

We have no information about Miller's state of mind or his thinking when he took the decision. This sort of information is usually lacking where Miller is concerned.

Miller's decision may have been associated with a sense of incapacity or of being trapped. Writing may well have been an escape.

Before the publication of *ACanticle for Leibowitz*, Miller had been publishing commercial science fiction stories in the magazines for six years - 1951 to 1956, inclusive. There were also the two earlier, non-science fiction stories that were published in 1950.

Miller was not, in fact, a commercial writer for much longer than he was a Catholic. Over the whole period he published forty-one stories. This includes the serial versions of the three parts of *ACanticle for Leibowitz*, published originally as separate stories.

By some standards forty-one published stories sounds like quite a lot. By the standards of those who submit literary short stories to the subsidised quarterlies, for example, it would represent a remarkable level of success. Professional science fiction writers, however, like other genre writers, are often very prolific. They frequently use multiple pseudonyms. They may write hundreds of stories.

Writing a lot was one of the things science fiction writers had to do to make a living. On its own, however, it was not enough. Most science fiction writers, like

most other commercial writers, also had to do hack work and editorial work of various kinds.

Miller did not make enough money to support his family from his writing. From time to time he took short-term manual jobs. We do not know how often he did this. Miller is known for instance to have worked briefly on the railroad and as a professional fisherman. [Roberson, 2011.]

Miller quite clearly had the skills required for hackwork and editing. His work on the anthology *Beyond Armageddon* occasionally shows a rather awkward levity, but other than that it seems very professional. However Miller does not seem to have looked for editorial work at the time he was publishing stories in the magazines. Living in Florida rather than New York may have made it difficult, and Miller did not like the science-fiction community. In a letter cited by Roberson and dated 17 August, 1956, he says: *'I'm coming to hate everything in the field....'* [Roberson, 2011.]

Miller did some hackwork. He wrote two series of fifteen episodes each for the wonderfully if improbably-named TV series *Captain Video and his Video Rangers*. This was in 1952 and 1953. There were five episodes a week of the series, which ran from 1949-1955.

*Captain Video and his Video Rangers* was apparently the first science fiction to be regularly broadcast on American television. From the rather meagre descriptions that I have read of it, I am rather surprised that it was not also the last. A number of other distinguished science fiction writers also wrote for the series.

In Miller's clumsy and unsatisfactory story *The Will* [1954], *Captain Video and his Video Rangers* is savagely and rather obviously satirised as 'Captain Chronos' and the 'Temporal Guard'. *The Will* was published after the writing of the second series of scripts for *Captain Video and his Video Rangers*. This was after Miller's break-up with Merrill, and before the publication of Miller's very significant short novel, *The Darfsteller*.

The protagonist of *The Will* is Kenny, a fourteen-year old fan of Captain Chronos. Kenny has leukaemia. Leukaemia, at that time, was incurable. Kenny builds a time ship in a maple tree in the yard. The time ship works. This is

completely implausible. Miller does not waste much literary effort in trying to make it plausible in any way.

Kenny has buried his stamp collection. He has left a note instructing that the collection should be sold to build a time machine so he can return. Kenny does not return. At the end of the story he is still missing.

Miller portrays the makers of the programme as willing to exploit sick and vulnerable children for commercial purposes. '*... the publicity department... wanted a picture of the time-ship with Kenny inside, looking out through the fish bowl canopy.*' [*The Will*, 1954.]

Miller is clearly unhappy with this kind of commercialism, and sees it as exploitative. '*It would appear that Captain Chronos, for the sake of nutritious and delicious Fluffy Crunkles, made it his habit to comfort the afflicted, the crippled and the dying, if it were convenient and seemed somehow advantageous. He also visited the children's wards of hospitals, it seemed.*' [*The Will*, 1954.]

On a deeper level the meanings of the story are interesting. Those meanings involve the power of the imagination, the abuse of that power, and sickness.

Kenny uses the power of imagination to make his time-ship, and escape illness. His imagination is stronger than that of the makers of the Captain Chronos programmes, who do not believe in what they are doing.

In the same way Miller used the power of imagination, in the form of freelance fiction writing, to escape the incapacity he suffered after his accident.

Miller escaped from illness into writing, as Kenny escapes illness with his time machine. Like Kenny, Miller found it difficult if not impossible to get back.

### **Adulterous Cohabitation**

In 1953 Miller became involved for a while with Judith Merrill. Merrill was a science fiction writer. She later became an influential editor of anthologies.

In the days when science fiction was mainly a matter of short fiction in magazines, anthologies were important. Stories could have an extended life and generate extra income.

Merrill republished at least one story of Miller's, *Wolf Pack*. It is in her 1954 anthology, *Beyond the Barriers of Space and Time*.

Within twelve months of the end of his relationship with Merrill, Miller had decided to stop writing science fiction. It is difficult to see how the two events could not be connected in some way. It is even more difficult to work out what precisely that connection might be.

Miller went to see Merrill on a trip to New York on which he was to work on the second series of scripts for *Captain Video and his Video Rangers*. I do not know if Miller and Merrill had met before.

Judith Merrill was an interesting person. She was something of a character.

Merril was a published author. She used the given name of her older daughter, Merrill, as her writing name. Her family name was Grossman.

Merril had already written a solo novel, *Shadow on the Hearth* [1950]. It describes nuclear war from the point of view of a housewife and mother. It is rather awful. It was well received at the time.

Merril had written a number of stories, and two novels in collaboration with Cyril Kornbluth. Kornbluth was known as a prolific writer of short stories. Merrill also had experience as a ghost writer and research assistant.

Merril was well-connected in the world of science fiction. She had been involved in the thirties and early forties with the Futurians, a legendary group of New York science fiction fans. Several of the Futurians became prominent science fiction writers. Among them were Frederick Pohl, Isaac Asimov, James Blish, Cyril Kornbluth, who was to become Merrill's co-author, and Damon Knight. Some of the Futurians, such as Frederick Pohl, were later influential magazine editors.

Like several other Futurians, Merrill was originally a Marxist in politics. Most of the Futurians left the Young Communist League after the Stalin-Ribbentrop pact. Merrill's response was to join the Trotskyites. Merrill met her first husband at the age of sixteen at a Trotskyite picnic.

Merril campaigned for higher standards in science fiction and was a founder of the Milford Writers convention, which still exists. She later became a well-known editor of anthologies. As an editor Merrill was strongly identified with the British 'New Wave' in science fiction, which she promoted energetically in the United States.

Merril lived for a while near the Portobello Road, a bohemian quarter in London, and was friends with Michael Moorcock. Moorcock was a prolific writer of science fiction and fantasy. He was also the editor of the influential magazine *New Worlds*, and an energetic publicist for the New Wave.

Merril and her younger daughter were involved in the political protests of 1968 in the United States. Merrill drove her daughter, her daughter's friends and their silkscreen press to Chicago for the anti-war protests outside the Democratic convention. In the riot which ensued, Chicago police shocked the world by the violence of their attacks on the demonstrators.

Merril moved to Canada in the same year, and was to become a Canadian citizen. On a later occasion Merrill dressed up as a witch, and went to Ottawa to cast spells on the Canadian government.

Merril donated her large science fiction collection as the core of the Merrill Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation, and Fantasy. When she was broke, it was said that she slept on a cot in the office.

Merril and Miller were fellow writers. Merrill was also what Miller was not, an experienced industry professional. Had their relationship worked, it would seem quite possible that Merrill would have been in a position to help Miller to establish himself in the field in some way.

Some time before Miller and Merrill started living together, it appears that Walter and Anne Miller had agreed on a trial separation. *'They had been discussing*

*separation for some time.... [Walter] was on a trial separation from Anne....' [Merril and Pohl-Weary, 2002.]*

We have no information about why the Millers were considering separation. Given the nature of the record, this lack of information is hardly surprising. Merrill, by the time she became involved with Miller, was in the process of separating from Frederick Pohl. Pohl's standing in the science fiction community was very high.

Pohl was Merrill's second husband. Merrill was Pohl's third wife. Merrill and Pohl would both marry again, Merrill once and Pohl twice. Merrill's daughter with Frederick Pohl lived with Merrill and Miller while they were together, as did at different times two or three of Miller's children. Only the baby stayed the whole time with Anne Miller. It all seems a little complicated.

Whatever else Miller and Merrill were, they were certainly not star-crossed teenagers. They were nevertheless – at the beginning of the relationship, at any rate – happy together. *'During our first few days together in that motel [in Austin, Texas] we were happy. ... [Walter] said to me, "You know, the two of us are like absolute hams. We have each found the perfect audience for our work. And now the question is, having found the perfect audience, will we ever think of performing for anyone else again?"'* [Merril and Pohl-Weary, 2002.]

The use of the words 'audience' and 'perform' suggest that part of the rapport between Miller and Merrill was to do with their both being writers. It is not clear whether Miller is using 'ham' in the sense of an amateur radio operator. It would fit the context. Part of the fun of being a ham was finding other hams on the airwaves. He may however have meant the word 'ham' in the sense of 'amateur actor'.

In this conversation with Merrill, Miller is using two or perhaps three theatrical terms. He is using these terms to make a point about being a writer. The identification between writing and theatrical performance is an intriguing hint of the genesis of *The Darfsteller*.

Miller and Merrill moved about quite a lot. During this period Merrill obtained a Mexican divorce. Merrill and Pohl were in dispute, apparently quite acrimoniously, about the custody of their daughter Ann.

At one point, Miller and Pohl had a physical confrontation. Miller asked Pohl to leave the house that Miller shared with Merrill. Pohl refused. Miller is said to have brandished an unloaded hunting rifle. Pohl, who was the bigger man, wrestled Miller to the ground. Neither Miller nor Pohl were fighters.

The whole incident seems rather foolish. There is a fuller account, for those who wish to consult it, in Merrill's biography. [Miller and Pohl-Weary, 2002.]

There were financial problems. *'The biggest problem was that neither of us was getting a lot of writing done – which was why we were so damn broke.'* Merrill was also advised that her relationship with Miller was a problem in the lawsuit over the custody of her daughter. *'In the end the [Florida] judge's decision was based entirely on the matter of adulterous cohabitation.'* [Merril and Pohl-Weary, 2002.]

The Millers were divorced in September 1953. Mrs Miller's feelings at the time are not recorded. She clearly became very unhappy. While there is no independent record, Merrill rather vividly describes a phone call from Anne's mother. *'Walt ... got a phone call from his almost-ex-mother-in-law telling him Anne was having a nervous breakdown, with asthma attacks, and had taken to her bed. She was crying all day. She only wanted him to come back.'* [Merril and Pohl-Weary, 2002.]

What is being called asthma here may have been what would now be described as a panic attack. Fairly clearly Anne Miller was extremely anxious. Taking to her bed and weeping suggest that Mrs Miller was also seriously depressed.

According to Merrill – and I see no reason to doubt this – the decisive fact in the end of her relationship with Miller was Anne Miller's state of mind. *'... it seemed as if the only sensible thing was to let someone get what they wanted.'* [Merril and Pohl-Weary, 2002.]

Walter and Anne Miller were remarried at the end of 1953. They stayed together until Anne Miller's death in 1995, the year before Miller's.

Miller and Merrill only saw each twice more after they separated. Merrill seems to have been quite hurt that Miller did not get in touch before he died. *'...his wife had died six months before he did and he made no attempt to see me.'* [Merril and Pohl-Weary, 2002.]

Merril acknowledged that her story *Connection Completed* [1954] is about Miller. It deals with a couple both of whom have ESP powers. 'Connection Completed is more or less about Walt. It's what was going on between us, how two people can find each other and no longer feel at all alone.' [Merril and Pohl-Weary, 2002.]

In *Connection Completed* a shy couple who have been in touch through ESP meet in what we now call 'real life'. 'Hello. Darling, I'm glad you waited. I couldn't do anything else. She smiled wryly. I'm glad I waited, too. Hello.' [*Connection Completed*, 1954.] The technique is realistic. The tone is sentimental.

Miller also has a story about ESP, *Command Performance*, also known as *Anybody Else Like Me?* In Miller's story ESP is a metaphor for the fear of madness, and for the radical loneliness that is experienced after the loss of love. '... for the first time in her life she felt the confinement of total isolation and knew it for what it was.' [*Anybody Else Like Me?* 1952.] The theme of loss of love occurs again in *The Darfsteller* [1955].

Miller and Merrill were clearly attracted to each other. They were in some ways compatible. They had a brief relationship. The relationship was overwhelmed by practicalities, and by their responsibilities for other people. In Miller's case, his responsibility was principally for his wife Anne. In Merrill's case, it was her younger daughter.

It is against this background that Miller began to write his most important work, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

## Literary Suicide

Miller published *The Last Canticle* in 1957. It was to become *Fiat Voluntas Tua*, the third and last part of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. In the same year Miller also published *The Lineman*, *Vengeance for Nikolai*, and something called *The Corpse in Your Bed is Me*. [Roberson, 2011.]

*The Corpse in Your Bed is Me*, according to the credits, was co-authored with a gentleman called Lincoln Boone. Mr Boone is an author of such profound obscurity that even the compendious *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* does not seem to know who he was. [Clute, et al., 2011.] My guess, for what it is worth, is that 'Lincoln Boone' - combining as it does the names of two American folk heroes - is a pseudonym.

After that, Miller published no more stories in magazines. He withdrew more or less completely from the science fiction community. He published nothing for twenty-five years. The only fiction Miller is known to have written in these years was the novel *Saint Leibowitz and the Wild Horse Woman*. It was finished by someone else and published after his death.

In January 1955 Miller published *The Darfsteller*. This was barely a year after the end of his relationship with Merrill. It was only three months before the publication of the first part of what was to become *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

*The Darfsteller* has been variously described as a long story, a novelette and a short novel. It is one of Miller's critically best-received works. Like *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, it won a Hugo.

*The Darfsteller* is a Near Future story. It describes a world in which human actors have been replaced in the theatre by 'mannequins'. The mannequins are controlled by 'Maestro', a form of computer. The mannequins and Maestro are the only futuristic technology directly involved in the story. 'Air cars' are mentioned incidentally.

The technology and the Near Future scenario are enough to make *The Darfsteller* science fiction. The use of a scenario makes *The Darfsteller* genre science fiction. Yet *The Darfsteller* is not hard sf. The view of technology is ambivalent, and the intention is satirical.

As is normal in commercial science fiction, there is quite a lot of exposition. *"Maestro gets feedback from the stage, continuously directs the show. It can do a lot of compensating, too."* The mannequins can be programmed to reproduce the style of particular human actors. It is this capacity, coupled with the ability of Maestro to respond in real time, that drives the plot. [*The Darfsteller*, 1955.]

The protagonist is a former actor, Thornier, who is now working as a janitor in a theatre. Thornier is intensely nostalgic. He yearns to go to a theatrical performance with human actors. A matinee is all he can afford. *'After watching the wretched machinery of dramaturgical art every day at the New Empire Theater where he worked as a janitor, the chance to see real theater again would be like a breath of clean air.'* [*The Darfsteller*, 1955.]

Thornier's only friend, Rick, is the technician responsible for the machinery. Thornier's employer makes it difficult for him to see the matinee. Thornier announces his intention of quitting. Rick thinks Thornier is being self-dramatising. *"But you've been making that promise for years, Thorny," said the man in the central booth.... "Did you tell D'Uccia you quit?"* Self-dramatisation is part of Thornier's character. [*The Darfsteller*, 1955.]

The characterisation in *The Darfsteller* has often been admired. I do not agree. Thornier is I think a stereotype of the aging Thespian. He is peevish, histrionic and vain. Like many actors trained in the theatre in the age of television and film, he has difficulty in accepting change. *"Thorny, can't you get it through your head that theater's dead?"* Rick in the control room is the voice of rationality. In a treatment with a more sophisticated approach to character, his would be an inner voice. [*The Darfsteller*, 1955.]

Thornier interferes with the tapes to sabotage the show. He volunteers to act with the mannequins. The play is something called 'The Anarch'. Before human actors were replaced by mannequins, Thornier had been supposed to star in a revival. He was to act opposite his lost love, Mela. The show was cancelled.

Thornier is nostalgic. Initially he does not quite realize what is going on. *"The Anarch' rehearsals were the last time Mela and I were on stage together."* Rick knows what is really happening. *"But she's in this version, Thorny!... She's playing*

*Marka.... Well, I mean her mannequin is playing it."* Mela's tape is being used for this performance. Mela is doing a personal appearance to promote the show. For Thornier, this is painful. Mela, his lover, '*...bought security with the sacrifice of principle.*' She is a 'scab'. [*The Darfsteller*, 1955.]

Thornier intends to create one last spectacular performance that he will be remembered by, and then quit. '*If only I could give them one last performance! he thought. One last great role.... I'll make them know who I am just once, he thought, before I go. I'll make them remember, and they won't ever forget.*' [*The Darfsteller*, 1955.]

Thornier is contemptuous of the mechanical theatre. "*Nauseating, overplayed, perfectly directed for a gum-chewing bag-rattling crowd. A crowd that wants it overplayed so it won't have to think about what's going on.*" Thornier accepts, however, that commercial entertainment has always been like that. "*The only thing wrong with autodrama is that it's scaled down to the moron-level – but show business always has been, and probably should be.*" [*The Darfsteller*, 1955.] The story *The Will* [1954] suggests rather strongly that Miller's contempt for show business may have been reinforced by his brush with television.

Thornier then goes on to analyse the reasons some actors could adapt to 'auto-theatre', and allow tapes to be made of their acting style, while others could not. Mela, his lost love, is one of the first kind. Thornier is conceited enough to see himself as one of the second.

Thornier distinguishes between two kinds of actors, those who follow instructions and others who draw on something inward. With this I think we are close to the heart of the story.

This analysis of acting styles has been identified, I think correctly, as a discussion of Method acting. Miller may very well have done his 'research' by reading a manual by Stanislavsky or something similar. What is curious is that there is no evidence that Miller ever took an interest in theatre, apart from one reported conversation with Merrill. There is no record that he ever attended a theatrical performance.

Thornier calls the two types of actor *Schauspieler* and *Darfsteller*. *Schauspieler* is the usual German word for actor. *Schauspieler*, literally, means 'show player'. Miller may be identifying '*Schau*', in this context, with 'show business'.

The form *Darfsteller* that Miller uses appears to be a mistake. '*Darstellen*', without an *f*, can mean 'represent', in the sense of 'portray'. This would be appropriate here. The prefix '*dar*' – sometimes *da*, if it is followed by a consonant – means 'there'.

'*Darf*' is unrelated. It is the third person singular of the modal verb *dürfen*, which means 'can' or 'may'. It does not make sense in this context.

Thornier says: "*I'm no schauspieler.*" Miller is rather casual about the rule in German that requires all nouns to have initial capitals. Miller then has Thornier explain what he means. '*Some actors were not "cybergenic" .... These were the portrayers, whose art was inward, whose roles had to be lived rather than played.... The darfsteller, the undirectable portrayer whose acting welled from unconscious sources with no external strings – directors were inclined to hate them.... A mannequin, however, was the perfect schauspieler, the actor that a director could play like an instrument.*' [The *Darfsteller*, 1955.]

Thornier's decision to sabotage the show is an instance of a theme of rebellion which is very important in Miller's writings. The theme of rebellion occurs in *The Ties that Bind* [1954]. In *Crucifixus Etiam* [1953], *The Lineman* [1957] and *Wolf Pack* [1953] rebellion is risky. In *Way of the Rebel* [1954] it is overtly suicidal.

Thornier's decision to rebel is compounded with suicidal intentions. Thornier loads the pistol that his co-star will use with live rounds. He intends to commit suicide on stage.

Thornier then has second thoughts. His second thoughts go wrong. He ends up being wounded, but not killed.

At the end of the story Thornier's friend Rick in the control room makes a speech against Luddism. "*I guess there'll always be a sucker to rerun this particular relay race... Last century, it was between a Chinese abacus operator and an IBM machine... And the century before that, it was between a longhand secretary and a typewriting machine... And before that, the handweavers against the automatic looms.*" I am not sure whether

the technophilia is being included mainly for the magazine editors. It is possible that Miller is still trying to convince himself. [*The Darfsteller*, 1955.]

Jade, the producer of the show, is an old friend of Thornier's. Jade is at ease in the new world. "I can get you a job tomorrow.... With Smithfield. Sales promotion." [*The Darfsteller*, 1955.]

Smithfield, here, is the production company. I am not sure that Miller is aware that Smithfield is also the name of the wholesale meat market in London. If he was, it would be quite funny.

Jade does not forgive Thornier for sabotaging the show. This is despite the fact that his botched on-stage suicide generated enormous publicity, and the show is a commercial success.

Mela was very ill at ease with Thornier during the show. Mela now forgives Thornier. She visits him in hospital.

*The Darfsteller* is rich with meaning. Some of those meanings are not obvious on the surface. The connections have to be made.

**Note**

*The Darfsteller* is not about the theatre. It is about science fiction. It satirises science fiction as a sub-sector of the publishing industry and as a community.

*The Darfsteller* is written in a fairly simple code. It is a literary suicide note.

The code is easy to crack. It is a fairly straightforward transposition.

The theatre is the world of science fiction. The actors are science fiction writers. Science fiction is commercial and mechanical.

Some writers are creative. The source of their writing is internal and deep. Other writers just imitate. They are like robots. What makes it worse is that the imitators are prepared to do what they're told.

Miller identifies with the protagonist. Miller believes he is better than the other science fiction writers. In particular, Miller believes he has an artistic integrity which the other writers lack.

Thornier's decision to resign as the janitor of the theatre represents Miller's decision to quit science fiction. Miller representing himself as a janitor is very bitter.

Thornier's determination to put on one last great performance and commit suicide represents Miller's decision to write *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Miller did not think he would ever write science fiction again.

Thornier's lost love, Mela, is Judith Merrill. She is Judith Merrill as a fellow artist. Mela has sold out. She is a 'scab'. This suggests a certain bitterness against Merrill.

Thornier's friend, Jade – who could get him a job 'tomorrow' – is also Judith Merrill. Jade is Judith Merrill as the competent industry professional.

When Mela visits Thornier in hospital, she has become Anne Miller. Judith Merrill never had occasion to visit Miller in hospital. Anne Miller did.

Mela has clearly forgiven Thornier. One imagines that, 'in real life', Anne Miller forgave her husband his adultery. She was after all willing to get married again.

The loss of the relationship with Merrill, and the return to Anne Miller, are clearly very important in the decision to quit science fiction. It is not clear what that importance was.

As we have already seen, Miller decided to become a science fiction writer under stressful circumstances. He was recovering in hospital from serious injuries. Becoming a writer may have been an escape. At the end of *The Darfsteller*, Thornier is in hospital, recovering from serious injuries. The escape failed.

There is a clear parallel. Something, for Miller, has come full circle.

When Miller writes *The Darfsteller*, he has already taken a conscious and deliberate decision to stop writing science fiction. He probably took the decision in the earlier part of 1954.

Miller's relationship with Merrill was over by the end of 1953. *The Darfsteller* was published in January 1955. The inevitable lead-time in publishing suggests strongly that *The Darfsteller* must have been written some months before the end of 1954. The decision must have been taken before that. My guess would be the first half of the year. If that is right then Miller took the decision to quit science fiction within six months of leaving Judith Merrill and going back to Anne Miller.

Miller announced his decision to quit science fiction in *The Darfsteller*. It is not clear however that he told anybody that he had made the announcement.

One imagines that he may have told Anne Miller. She was after all his wife. There is no indication in the record that he did so. There is no indication, either, that he told Chad Oliver or Don Congdon. Congdon, his agent, might in particular have been thought to have a right to know.

I have found no hint, in the printed sources or online, that anyone noticed Miller's announcement. I haven't, it is true, read all the journal material. I feel nevertheless that if there was anything out there, someone as diligent as Roberson – whom I have read – would certainly have picked it up.

If the word 'masterpiece' has any value, it surely applies to *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. We have some clear, if unexamined, ideas of how masterpieces are produced. We do not think that they are produced by writers who have shown no previous sign of unusual ability. And we certainly do not think that any writer can produce a masterpiece by conscious decision. Yet that is exactly what Miller did.

I can easily imagine people deciding to write a masterpiece. I can imagine some of them waking up in the morning and saying to themselves, 'No, that's silly,' and not bothering.

I can imagine other people not noticing how silly it is when they wake up in the morning, trying to write a masterpiece, and failing. But to decide to write a masterpiece, to stick to that intention and then to succeed takes a special kind of craziness.

Miller had that special kind of craziness. Most writers don't.

Roberson cites letters that confirm Miller's anger about the science fiction community. '*The trouble with the field is too much psycholiterary incest....*' That is strong language. [23 August 1957, cited in Roberson, 2011.]

Within a couple of years of the publication of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* Harlan Ellison, Samuel Delaney, Ursula Le Guin and Thomas M. Disch, amongst others, had all started publishing science fiction. They and other writers of that generation all aimed to produce work that was more 'literary' than the magazine fiction of the Golden Age. At the time they tended to be associated with the New Wave. Miller, although he may not have known it, was not alone.

We do not know what Miller thought of the New Wave writers. We do not even know if he read their books. There is in fact no confirmation in the record, odd as it may seem, that Miller ever read a book.

Miller, eerily, knew exactly what effect the decision to quit science fiction and write a masterpiece would have on him. He has Rick point it out to Thornier. "*Thorny, if you ever played a one-last-great.... there wouldn't be a thing left to live for, would there?*" ...*the pleasant fantasy was alarming as well as pleasant.*' [The Darfsteller, 1955.]

Miller never did find anything else to live for.

## **Fix-up**

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* was not planned in the first instance as a single work. It developed from three stories, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (April, 1955), *And the Light is Risen* (August, 1956) and *The Last Canticle* (February, 1957). They were thematically linked but originally separate. The process of turning several stories into a novel is known in the trade, somewhat inelegantly, as a 'fix-up'.

The stories were originally published in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. They were later broadcast as radio dramas on National Public Radio. [Samuelson, 1976.]

In April 1955 the most prominent name on the cover of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* was that of J. Francis McComas. McComas, now obscure, was a writer and editor. He was apparently quite important in setting the direction of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and in bringing science fiction to a wider audience. [Clute *et al.*, 2011.]

McComas's name appears in the top right-hand corner, under the title of his 'novelet', *Parallel*. The name of Walter M. Miller, Jr, appears down in the bottom left-hand corner with the also-rans. Miller's name is second to that of Lord Dunsany. That is rather amusing. *A Canticle for Leibowitz* starts on page 93.

In August 1956 *Fear is a Business* by the well-established writer Theodore Sturgeon has the top right-hand corner slot on the cover. Right under the masthead, in larger type than that used for Sturgeon's story and Sturgeon's name, the editors announce *And the Light is Risen*. They describe this as a 'short novel' by Walter M. Miller, Jr.

*And the Light is Risen* is the first story in the August 1956 issue. It starts on page 3, which is the first page after the table of contents.

*The Last Canticle* has a similar prominence in February 1957, both on the cover and inside. Clearly there was something happening, and the editors knew it.

One of the stories about *A Canticle for Leibowitz* is that Miller did not originally realise he was writing a novel. 'It was while writing the third "novelette" that Miller realised he was really completing a novel.' [Roberson and Battenfield, 1992.] It is an

attractive story with a certain symbolic value. It may not be literal fact. In that, it is very like Miller's other stories. Miller was nothing if not a writer of fiction.

*The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* was intended to be a magazine of quality, which I think is significant. Miller's erstwhile lover Judith Merrill was very much an advocate of quality, and continued to be so.

The magazine published both original material and reprints. Each story had an introduction written by the editorial staff which gave background material and was intended to lead the reader into the story. Miller followed a similar model when he edited *Beyond Armageddon*. [Miller and Greenberg, 1985.]

*The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* still exists. A recent survey found that over 90% of readers have first degrees, and nearly 30% have a postgraduate qualification. In formal terms, they are a well-educated group. [Wikipedia.]

The three stories became respectively *Fiat Homo*, *Fiat Lux* and *Fiat Voluntas Tua*, the three parts of the finished novel. In the process of combining the three shorter works into a single novel, Miller is said to have carried out 'extensive revisions'. [Samuelson, 1976.]

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* was transformed by revisions. For a start, the magazine version is 20 pages. In the 1993 Orbit paperback edition, *Fiat Homo* is 124 pages. The difference in length is not quite as great as the raw page count makes it seem. The magazine has a larger format and the type is a smaller point size. It is also set in double columns, which saves space. Nevertheless, I would estimate that the version in the novel is about three times as long. There are significant additions.

The core of the story that we are familiar with from the novel is in the magazine version of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. It is recognisable.

Brother Francis Gerard of Utah is doing his Lenten vigil in the desert. He meets a pilgrim who finds him a rock to complete his wolf-shelter. Brother Francis finds a box of archaeological objects from the time of the Deluge of Flame. In the novel the Deluge of Flame becomes the 'Flame Deluge'. The objects are probably relics of the Blessed Leibowitz, the founder of the order to which Francis belongs.

The Abbot – in the magazine version the Abbot is called Juan – worries that too many miracles will spoil the case for the canonisation of the founder. He also worries that the other novices think that the pilgrim was the Blessed Leibowitz.

Abbot Juan tries to force Francis to deny that he saw Leibowitz. Francis refuses. He is not allowed to proceed to his full vows.

The Abbey is visited by the inquisitor and the Devil's Advocate. This is in connection with the canonisation. The relics are declared authentic. Francis is then allowed to make his vows as a fully-fledged monk. He is promoted from the kitchen to the scriptorium.

In the scriptorium Brother Francis works on an illuminated copy of the blueprint from the box he found in the desert. He is mocked for doing so by another monk, Brother Jeris.

Francis travels to New Rome to attend the canonisation of the Blessed Leibowitz. He takes the illuminated blueprint as a gift for the pope. On the way to New Rome Francis is robbed by mutants. They take the copy but leave him the original.

On the way back to the Abbey Brother Francis goes back to the place where he was robbed. He intends to persuade the robbers to give him the illuminated copy back. And there the story ends. [*A Canticle for Leibowitz*, 1955.]

What is absolutely fascinating is what is not included. One is tempted to say, 'what is omitted', but that is almost certainly not the process.

The version in the book is much more imaginative. Incidents are more fully realised. The alternative reality of the world after the Flame Deluge is worked out in more detail. The subjective state of Brother Francis is created more fully.

Clearly this expansion is partly to do with space. It is also I think the effect of being free from the constraints of the magazine editors' requirements. In the book version there is for example much more Latin. One cannot imagine the magazine editors thinking that more Latin was something their readers particularly required.

In the story, there is nothing supernatural about the pilgrim, and Brother Francis does not fear that the pilgrim might be a mutant. There is no clash between the monk and the pilgrim, who does not shake his stick at Brother Francis. The

pilgrim is not the Trickster. He does not write Hebrew letters on a rock. He is not, in this first part, the Wandering Jew. There is no Brother Fingo. The wood carving of the founder is introduced later, in *And the Light is Risen*. In the story, the pilgrim is not Leibowitz. What is missing from the magazine story, amongst other things, is the magic and the mystery of the novel version.

In the story, there is no Fallout Shelter. The Fallout Shelter brings the original nuclear Holocaust, six hundred years before, into the world of the Medieval Future and the Ruined Earth. The Holocaust, in the book version, is present, just as it was in the 1950s when Miller wrote. This is explicitly political, in a way that the magazine story is not.

Not having the Fallout Shelter, the magazine story also does not have the skull of Leibowitz's wife, Emily. In the novel the skull is in the Outer Chamber. It grins. There is a gold tooth in Emily's mouth. It is a macabre and powerful image.

In the book version Brother Francis is killed by the robbers on his return journey. He is buried by the pilgrim. This is when we learn that the pilgrim is the Wandering Jew, and is searching for a Messiah who never comes.

The magazine story lacks the fatalism and the pessimism of the fully developed version in the novel. The ending of this part in the novel is dark. It is perhaps not something a magazine editor would have been happy with.

*And the Light is Risen* and *The Last Canticle* are not significantly shorter than *Fiat Lux* and *Fiat Voluntas Tua* respectively. While there are significant changes, there is not a great deal of additional material in the novel.

In the brief introduction to *And the Light is Risen* the editors have this, amongst other things, to say: '*F&SF does not, as a usual thing, devote so much of an issue to a single story: but occasionally a writer hits upon an idea which demands length and scope, and yet does not break easily for serialisation.*' They fairly clearly recognised they were dealing with something special. [*And the Light is Risen*, 1956.]

The opening of *And the Light is Risen* is the same as that of *Fiat Lux*. There is the same wonderfully urbane encounter between two sophisticated men, Marcus Apollo, the papal legate, and Don Thaddeo Pfardentrott – to give him his full, pompous and slightly ridiculous nomenclature – the secular scientist.

Don Thaddeo only becomes a 'Thon' in the novel. One imagines Miller is having fun with the idea of successor languages to ancient English. The phenomenon is I believe known in linguistics as a 'consonant shift'.

There is the same potential for conflict between Church and State in the story and the novel, and the same dark discussion of the ancient and now quite mysterious civilisation that vanished with the nuclear Holocaust. The scene then moves to the monastery, as it does in *And the Light is Risen*, and there is the same anxious consideration of Marcus Apollo's letter to the abbot. The abbot, in the story, is Jerome. In the novel he is of course Paulo. [*And the Light is Risen*, 1956.]

There is more Latin in the novel, and even a little Hebrew. There is not so much of either language that a reader without an acquaintance with the ancient tongues would miss very much.

In the magazine story there is a lengthy discussion of '*... a source of knowledge other than the senses.... The ancient fathers had called it 'connaturality'.*' Despite the unusually abstruse content, this is a fairly typical example of the kind of exposition which so often mars science fiction. The discussion is omitted from the book version, which is as a consequence more subtle. [*And the Light is Risen*, 1956.]

It is in the novel that the term 'Memorabilia' – a very nice touch, I think – is introduced to describe the Abbey's collection of ancient documents. The prophetic nature of Dom Paulo's demon and the grin on the face of the wooden carving of Leibowitz remain the same.

In another interesting detail, the old hermit in the book is called Eleazer as well as Benjamin. This is the Hebrew equivalent of Lazarus. In the magazine story he is only called Benjamin.

Dom Paulo's conversation with Benjamin on the mesa is substantially the same. In *And the Light is Risen*, the 'old hermit' is identified with both Leibowitz and the Wandering Jew, as he is in the book. A couple of very significant lines are omitted from the novel: "*And what are you waiting for? An Era or a King?*" "*Hmmm-hnnn! It is enough that I wait.*" "*Your Messiah isn't coming, Benjamin.*" The effect of the omission is that the novel, once again, is more subtle. [*And the Light is Risen*, 1956.]

There is another very interesting omission from the novel. It occurs in the description of the arrival of Thon Thaddeo and his party at the abbey. In the story, Abbot Jerome enjoins the congregation to silence. *"Religious silence will be observed at all hours.... No brother may converse with our guests at any time, except as duty or courtesy may demand it.... Stay out of any discussion of a field of knowledge which is properly the domain of natural philosophers!"* The abbot is displaying an open fear of secularism. The device of the rule of silence, in the story, is quite quickly abandoned. It is clumsy. [*And the Light is Risen*, 1956.]

The narrative of the Thon's arrival in the novel is more effective. It focuses on the presence of nomads guiding the Thon's party. In the novel, the abbot's fears of secularism are postponed until the crisis. There is, I think, another gain in subtlety. Dramatically, the version in the novel is more effective.

An explicit discussion of the scholar as a man of his times is also omitted, as is a rather nice joke about the Blessed Leibowitz having been called a 'Security Risk'. The monks think this is a title of nobility.

It is in the description of the 'lamp of electricity' that there is the first major deviation. The monks in the magazine story use Latin, but it is Latin from the liturgy and the psalms. *"Domnus tecum... et cum spiritu tuo."* 'God be with you, and with thy spirit.' *"Beatus vir, qui timet Dominum."* 'A blessed man, who fears the Lord.' The tone, surprisingly for anyone who knows the novel, is respectful. [*And the Light is Risen*, 1956.]

In the novel, of course, the tone is nothing of the kind. The Latin quotations in the novel are from Genesis, and equate the generation of electricity with the creation by God of light. It is blasphemous, and it is an instance of Original Sin. This is the most significant difference between the *And the Light is Risen* and *Fiat Lux*. It is very significant indeed.

The novel and the story then proceed on identical lines, with one curious diversion. In the story, Abbot Jerome has a fantastic conversation with the carving in his study. The carving talks back. *"Wretch! You took up my burden, not he. Why were you all so eager to impress him with your accomplishments? For my sake?"* The onetime scientist and saint fingered his hangman's noose and his smile became annoying to the

abbot.' In the novel, of course, Dom Paulo has this kind of conversation with Benjamin. [*And the Light is Risen*, 1956.]

In the story, Abbot Jerome – like Dom Paulo in the novel – has a furious dispute with Pfordentrott about the creation of Man and the temptation that led to the fall. In the novel, the dispute is interrupted by the arrival of Marcus Apollo's clerk. The clerk has barely survived torture. The clerk has with him a copy of Hannegan's declaration of the secession of the church in Texarkana from New Rome. This episode does not occur in the story. The story lacks the extra dimension of both historicity and politics which this episode creates.

The final episode, in which the dying Poet gives a badly-wounded cavalryman the *coup de grâce*, does not occur in the story either. Like the death of Brother Francis, it might not appeal to a magazine editor.

Each part of *A Canticle for Leibowitz* ends with a violent death. Brother Francis in *Fiat Homo*, the Poet, Abbot Zerchi in *Fiat Voluntas Tua*. It is one of the unifying devices.

The extra space has given Miller the opportunity to develop his ideas much more fully in *And the Light has Risen*, the second story. In the magazine version of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the first of the three stories, Miller was more constrained. The important change in the novel is that Miller plays down the emphasis on secularism and instead very powerfully dramatises the notion of Original Sin. Miller returns to the subject of secularism in *Fiat Voluntas Tua*.

I think we can safely say, with no disrespect, that when Miller wrote *And the Light has Risen*, he had not quite worked out the intellectual power of the complex story he was working with. He was to do so in *Fiat Lux* in the novel.

In the case of *The Last Canticle*, like *And the Light has Risen*, the additions are not extensive. They are however significant and powerful.

The pastiches of the news conferences are new in *Fiat Voluntas Tua*. They do not occur in *The Last Canticle*. The news conferences allow Miller to play with another voice and another style. This something he does well, and appears to enjoy.

The news conferences have other functions. Like the pastiche of scripture in *Fiat Lux* they allow him to insist that statesmen have as much responsibility as

scientists, or more, for nuclear destruction. It is interesting that Miller uses pastiche in both cases.

The news conferences are also political. The institution of the news conference is so recognisably twentieth century that Miller's prophecy about two thousand years in the future becomes a prophecy about the present.

Abbot Zerchi's conversation with Dr Cors in *Fiat Voluntas Tua* also emphasises the political element, in a way that *The Last Canticle* does not. "Due process, they call it," he growled. "Due process of mass, state-sponsored suicide. With all of society's blessings." "Well," said the visitor, "it's certainly better than letting them die horribly, by degrees." "Is it? Better for whom? The street cleaners? Better to have your living corpses walk to a central disposal station while they can still walk? Less public spectacle? Less horror lying around? Less disorder? A few million corpses lying around might start a rebellion against those responsible. That's what you and the government mean by better, isn't it?" [Leibowitz, 27.]

This expansion enables Miller to put into Dr Cors' mouth a very important defence of humanism. "I wouldn't know about the government," said the visitor, with only a trace of stiffness in his voice. "What I meant by better was 'more merciful.'" [Leibowitz, 27.]

What also occurs in *Fiat Voluntas Tua* but not in *And the Light has Risen* is the wonderful business of Abbot Zerchi and the Abominable Autoscribe. Apart from being very funny, this allows Miller to give extra precision and another level of complexity to his view of technology, and to give a more detailed account of Abbot Zerchi's personality.

Zerchi's tendency to act and his lack of affinity with the contemplative life is thus introduced very early in the narrative. It does not simply emerge out of the blue as it does in the magazine story, when Zerchi punches Dr Cors on the nose. Formally the version in the novel is much more satisfactory. [Leibowitz, 25.]

What is also missing from *And the Light has Risen* are several paragraphs in which the old beggar listens to the practice firing and is called Lazarus by the children. They are interspersed with the account of Brother Joshua taking his radiation readings.

This is very important. It underlines the preternatural survival of Leibowitz and his identity with the pilgrim of *Fiat Homo*. By extension, it underlines his identity with Benjamin of *Fiat Lux*. [*Leibowitz*, 24.]

There are a number of devices which help to integrate what started as three stories into a single novel. The occurrence of the old beggar in all three parts is perhaps the most important.

The conversations between Brother Joshua and Abbot Zerchi in *Fiat Voluntas Tua* have been much worked on. They are amongst other things simply better written. Miller takes the opportunity to develop his description of Brother Joshua's personality while Joshua is taking his readings. He did much the same thing with Zerchi's personality in the incident with the Autoscribe.

Brother Joshua, like Saint Leibowitz, is a widower who first took the Cistercian habit. That sort of parallelism is another way of integrating the different parts of the novel.

Miller also introduces Mrs Grales, although quite passively, in this chapter. He has Joshua see her across the freeway. This prompts Joshua to take the underpass to avoid her. Mrs Grales is important to the narrative. Introducing her as early as possible is another change which is much more satisfying formally. [*Leibowitz*, 24.]

In the magazine story, the plan for a small party to escape to the colony planets is called *Dismissal of Servants*. The phrase echoes *Nunc Dimittis*, the blessing at the end of the mass.

*Dismissal of Servants* is not bad. I happen to like *Quo Perigrinatur* better. [*Leibowitz*, 25.]

There are some changes of sequencing in the business of the euthanasia station, and the description of the suffering refugee and her daughter. There are some minor verbal changes. Other than that, the novel is substantially the same as the story.

In *Fiat Voluntas Tua* there is in general a much clearer emphasis on the politics, and more opportunity for the reader to identify with Zerchi and Joshua. There is also, and I think this is important, an explicit rejection of humanism.

There are then a number of changes between the three magazine stories and the novel. We can summarise the key changes quite simply.

The doctrine of Original Sin is much clearer in the novel than it is in the stories. So too are the supernatural qualities of the figure of Leibowitz/the old beggar/Benjamin/the Wandering Jew. In addition, Miller makes it clear that the politicians are as responsible for the impending holocaust as they were for the first one.

*A Canticle for Leibowitz* is emphatically science fiction. It is mythopoeic. It is political. Intellectually it is completely serious. It is these qualities that I think make it also something else.

I am not saying that myth, politics and intellectual seriousness are the only qualities that make a novel special. Nor would I want to say that all novels one would think of as special have those particular qualities. I am saying that these are qualities which *A Canticle for Leibowitz* quite definitely has.

What I would also say is that *A Canticle for Leibowitz* will stand up against anything that was written in English in the second half of the twentieth century. I am aware that this is a claim of value, and that any such claim is subjective. I would not make the same claim for many other novels.

## **Sacred Books**

1959 is the year shown on the copyright page of *Canticle for Leibowitz*. In the same year, at the other end of the world, an Egyptian writer called Naguib Mahfouz published a novel. He had written nothing new for publication since the Free Officers' coup of 1952. The novel in question is usually known in English as *Children of the Alley*.

Like *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, the novel *Children of the Alley* was first published in serial form. Unlike *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, *Children of the Alley* was a controversial book. It was condemned by the religious authorities. [Mehrez, 1993.] *Children of the Alley* was not published in book form until 1967, in Beirut. It was not finally published in book form in Egypt until 2004.

Born in 1911, Mahfouz was older than Miller. Unlike Miller, Mahfouz was an established novelist. By 1959 Mahfouz had already published eleven novels. Three of those novels were known collectively as *The Cairo Trilogy*. They were originally written as a single work. These books are said to have 'established the novel in Arabic'. Mahfouz is a very important writer.

Like Miller, Mahfouz adapts sacred books to create his story. Unlike Miller, Mahfouz grew up in what was at the time a thriving multi-cultural community. Mahfouz drew on the Hadith and the Qur'an as well as the Gospels and the Old Testament.

Mahfouz' story, like Miller's, spans several thousand years. Like Miller's, the parts – five in the case of Mahfouz, three for Miller – are separated by hundreds of years. As in Miller's story, only one enigmatic character in *The Children of the Alley* – the patriarch Gamaliya – occurs in all the parts.

Mahfouz' story does not use the concept of Original Sin. Instead, he manipulates the story of Adam and Eve, and the story of Joseph and his brothers, and creates a story of fraternal strife in paradise. Humanity, in Mahfouz' account, is descended from both Adam and the Devil.

The Alley is run by thugs, who answer to an overseer. A succession of reformers represents the three great Abrahamic religions. The followers of the various reformers occupy different parts of the alley. They are at loggerheads. Each

time the institutions are reformed, the thugs come back and the people sink into poverty and lassitude again.

Finally a magician creates a powerful explosive in a magic bottle. The magic bottle symbolises high explosive, but also nuclear weapons. It is tested in the desert, exactly like the Manhattan Project. The explosive enables the overseer to dominate the squabbling factions.

*Children of the Alley* is more allegorical than *A Canticle for Leibowitz*. Mahfouz was more radical at that time in his life than he later became. He is making two points.

He is saying that no political change in Egypt ever alleviates the poverty of the masses. He is also saying that fraternal strife in the Middle East has enabled the nuclear armed powers to dominate the region. At the time Mahfouz wrote, that was true.

These are powerful points. It is a powerful book.

There are intriguing formal similarities between the two books. It seems that any intelligent and imaginative writer who wanted to deal with something as huge as the invention of nuclear weapons at that time felt obliged to adopt some of the same strategies.

Miller and Mahfouz have something quite important in common. In the cultural provinces that are dominated by the Abrahamic religions there is – unlike, say, in China – no concept of secular spirituality. Miller and Mahfouz were both secular writers.

Mahfouz, although he understands Islam thoroughly well and retained an affection for it, had been secular since his teens. Miller, although a Catholic convert for a few years, was by the time he wrote *A Canticle for Leibowitz* secular once more.

Both Miller and Mahfouz wanted to tackle a subject of ultimate seriousness. Both men felt obliged to adopt religion as a metaphor. Miller's position was never properly understood.

Mahfouz, eventually, was stabbed in the neck by a thug. He never fully regained the use of his writing hand. Miller stopped writing.

Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize. He became a culture hero to the people of Egypt. Miller remained obscure.

There is no evidence that either Mahfouz or Miller knew of each other's existence.

**Death**

In 1995, Anne Miller died. The next year, Miller committed suicide.

Miller telephoned the police. He told them there was a dead man in front of his house.

Miller then walked outside. He shot himself.

Miller's death was not much noticed in the media.

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