

POSTAPOCALYPTIC FANTASIES IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICAN LITERATURE

Even before the Civil War, American writers were imagining life after a massive global catastrophe. For many, the blank slate of the American continent was instead a wreckage-strewn wasteland, a new world in ruins. Bringing together epic and lyric poems, fictional tales, travel narratives, and scientific texts, *Postapocalyptic Fantasies in Antebellum American Literature* reveals that US authors who enthusiastically celebrated the myths of primeval wilderness and virgin land also frequently resorted to speculations about the annihilation of civilizations, past and future. By examining such postapocalyptic fantasies, this study recovers an antebellum rhetoric untethered to claims for historical exceptionalism – a patriotic rhetoric that celebrates America while denying the United States a unique position outside of world history. As the scientific field of natural history produced new theories regarding biological extinction, geological transformation, and environmental collapse, American writers responded with wild visions of the ancient past and the distant future.

JOHN HAY is an assistant professor of English at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

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JOHN HAY

University of Nevada, Las Vegas



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