



Bookshelf

2015

Apocalyptic Sentimentalism: Love and Fear in U.S. Antebellum Literature

Kevin Pelletier

University of Richmond, kpelleti@richmond.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/bookshelf>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pelletier, Kevin. *Apocalyptic Sentimentalism: Love and Fear in U.S. Antebellum Literature*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015.

NOTE: This PDF preview of *Apocalyptic Sentimentalism: Love and Fear in U.S. Antebellum Literature* includes only the preface and/or introduction. To purchase the full text, please click [here](#).

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bookshelf by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

UR FAC
PS
217
.355
P45
2015

Apocalyptic Sentimentalism

*Love and Fear in
U.S. Antebellum Literature*

KEVIN PELLETIER

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA PRESS Athens and London

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
VIRGINIA 23173

INTRODUCTION

The Sentimental Apocalypse

There is no need of entering upon a laboured proof of the doctrine so plainly declared, *That there will be a day of Judgment for mankind.* It is what seems written by the finger of God himself upon the consciences of men.

—*Elibu Baldwin, "The Final Judgment," 1827*

Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright.

—*Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, 1851*

In an 1829 entry from the *New-York Gospel Herald* titled "Remarks on the Term Vengeance," a writer identifying himself as PAULUS expresses frustration at how "orthodox christians" have manipulated ideas of God's vengeance to justify their own vengeful natures. By "orthodox christians," PAULUS mostly likely means Calvinists, and his entry exemplifies larger shifts that were rapidly taking place within American religious culture, where practitioners of more "liberal" faiths were beginning to contest the authority of their Calvinist predecessors.¹ "The vengeance of an orthodox christian . . .," PAULUS observes, "is *only* to consign his enemies to an endless future *hell*, and then to laugh at them" as they suffer eternal torment. Because this application of vengeance has no redemptive aim, it fails to accord with the example first established by the Christian God who, says PAULUS, exacts vengeance for a very specific purpose: to "*vindicate* the cause of the oppressed." Eager to challenge orthodox accounts, which seem unduly sadistic, the writer of this entry cannot simply repudiate vengeance as an unnecessary evil, in part because he has already conceded that the "Christian Lord" promises to engage in acts of vengeance to defend and deliver the oppressed. As troubling as the orthodox view might be, vengeance nevertheless remains an organizing force within a providentially designed universe. PAULUS resolves this dilemma by insisting on an apparent paradox: if, as Christ's apostles once asserted, "GOD IS LOVE," then, concludes PAULUS, "the vengeance of God is the

vengeance of *Love* . . . it is the vengeance of a *Saviour*.” Rather than reject or marginalize vengeance, PAULUS affirms it as a characteristic of God and a sign of his loving nature. “As ‘God is love,’” he reasons, “and as ‘God is our Saviour,’ his vengeance is compatible with love; is the reverse of hatred, and is, also, in his wonder working hand, a means of effecting the lasting good and happiness of his creatures.”² What initially seem like inherently distinct and antagonistic impulses, PAULUS sees as perfectly compatible, arguing that examples of God’s vengeance are a reflection of God’s love and a sign of his redemptive power. Indeed, he goes so far as to conflate the two, suggesting that vengeance is an *expression* of God’s love. When God commits acts of retribution against the reprobate, he is displaying compassion for those he chooses to redeem. The Christian God, in this writer’s view, is simultaneously a God of love and vengeance, compassion and wrath. By suggesting that love and vengeance are cooperative and even interchangeable urges, PAULUS is able to counter what he sees as the orthodox Christian view, which treats vengeance as an end in and of itself. In its place, he offers a perspective that regards God’s vengeance as a means to some greater end, namely, “effecting the lasting good and happiness of his creatures.”³

While PAULUS’s account might initially seem to modern readers like a singular instance of illogic, the pairing of love and vengeance was common in early-nineteenth-century religious, political, and aesthetic culture. Vengeance played a crucial role in attempts to construct a moral world; reminders of God’s possible vengeance, and the fear that these reminders produced, served as an incentive to be good and were meant to guide individuals to live righteously. Antebellum readers were surrounded by appeals to the most radical form of moral vengeance—namely, depictions of religious apocalypse—and representations of God’s apocalyptic wrath were ubiquitous in the first half of the nineteenth century. From mainstream best-sellers to other forms of cultural production, including broadsides, emblem books, juvenile literature, ballads, religious hymns, and political caricatures, depictions of apocalypse made up a foundational part of antebellum religious culture. While Christian orthodoxy enjoined its followers to nurture a compassionate heart and to follow God’s mandate to love one’s neighbor, it also warned of his impending wrath and judgment for those who failed to abide by God’s laws. Vengeance, in short, was the repercussion for failing to love.

Nowhere is this dynamic—in which the fear of God’s wrath is used to bolster compassionate feelings—more visible than in the foremost discourse of love in the nineteenth century: sentimentalism. This claim may surprise readers who have come to view nineteenth-century sentimentality as a philosophy of sympathetic affections. While the scholarly tradition has thoroughly delineated the ways in which sentimentalism is both premised on and promotional of feelings of deep-seated love to facilitate interpersonal connections as well

as generate widespread social transformation, it has tended to overlook how foundational threats of God's vengeance, and the terror these threats inspire, are within the nineteenth-century culture of sentiment.⁴ When, for example, Harriet Beecher Stowe famously asserted that the moral growth of the nation ultimately depended on each citizen's ability to "feel right," she voiced a sentiment shared by many of her contemporaries who felt that most Americans were insufficiently sympathetic toward Negro slaves. And it is no surprise that scholars have assumed Stowe's injunction to "feel right" was a call to feel compassion and love, for it was ostensibly through a rhetoric of Christian love that Stowe was able to foment a passionate outcry against slavery among many of her Northern readers. Indeed, sentimentalism's transformative potential is best expressed in Stowe's antislavery writing, and scholars continue to uphold her fiction as the paradigmatic example of nineteenth-century abolitionist sentimentality. What made sentimentalism powerful, as evinced by Stowe's best-selling novels, was that it fostered a community whose members were bonded together by an abiding sense of sympathetic love. "Compassion," Philip Fisher succinctly puts it, "is, of course, the primary emotional goal of sentimental narration,"⁵ and critics continue to read Stowe's novels specifically, and the sentimental tradition more generally, as confirmation that the nineteenth-century culture of sentiment remained deeply committed to love's transformative capabilities, especially as a means to challenge an institution as hegemonic and pernicious as slavery.⁶

The problem with this widely shared view, however, is that while scholars continue to treat love as the autonomous force of the sentimental tradition, nineteenth-century sentimentalists, including Stowe, expressed profound misgivings about the capacity of love to establish the kinds of sympathetic bonds contemporary critics now take for granted. *Apocalyptic Sentimentalism* reevaluates this scholarly view by investigating a crucial but neglected dimension of the nineteenth-century culture of sentiment: its passionate investment in fear as an indispensable engine of cultural and political transformation. When sentimental writers like Stowe could not depend on love to produce a sympathetic response in readers, fear often served as an incentive to love, energizing love's power and underwriting its potential to convert Americans from fallible sinners into moral beings. Fear exists at the center of nineteenth-century sentimental strategies for effecting social change and cohering disparate communities, often bolstering love when love falters and operating as a principal mechanism for establishing sympathetic connections across lines of difference. In order to inspire a profound sense of fear in their audience, nineteenth-century sentimentalists often deployed prophecies of God's apocalyptic vengeance, a familiar source of dread in Protestant America and one of the most efficient ways to politicize terror in the antebellum period.⁷ Rather than existing outside of or in conflict with sentimentalism, apocalyptic vengeance helped to shape the very formation of

the nineteenth-century sentimental tradition. The preceding example of PAULUS illustrates the sentimental dynamic I elaborate in the following pages. PAULUS links love and vengeance—an unsurprising move within an evolving Calvinist/Puritan religious tradition. What *is* surprising is how this tradition has been removed and segregated from sentimental discourse. I seek to reestablish the link between this religious tradition and the sentimental tradition, to recover how during the antebellum period antislavery advocates worked to connect sympathy for the slave to an apocalyptic tradition, and to reveal how this linkage came to be erased in modern accounts of the relationship between sentimentality and antislavery reform. Investigating this intersection of love and fear, *Apocalyptic Sentimentalism* proposes a new genealogy for understanding literary sentimentalism as a complex negotiation of seemingly oppositional emotional economies. I read love and fear not as competing and fundamentally separate emotional impulses but as imbricated. I call this imbrication “apocalyptic sentimentalism” to emphasize that sentimental writers did not simply construct a self-generating and self-sustaining account of sympathetic love, but instead used the fear of an imminent apocalypse to augment love’s force. Conversely, these writers often saw sympathetic love as inspiring a fearful vengeance, both on the part of God and in those they saw as his messengers on earth. The threat of God’s vengeful wrath and the terror that this threat produces are what ultimately ensure the culture of sentiment’s confidence in sympathy.⁸

Taking my cue from Stowe, whose early writing brought a powerful sentimental aesthetic to bear on antebellum debates over slavery, I focus my investigation by specifically attending to nineteenth-century antislavery writing and the tradition of abolitionist sentimentality. Perhaps no reform movement was more effective at marshaling a rhetoric of wrath than Northern abolition, with abolitionists often using ideas of divine vengeance as the ultimate penalty for a nation that held other human beings in abject bondage. For most antislavery reformers, slavery constituted an egregious violation against God and a breach of the nation’s political and moral foundations, and thus it required an urgent response. Among their many shortcomings, slaveholders lacked a compassionate heart toward their slaves. Antislavery reformers employed a range of tactics to challenge the logic of race-based slavery, one of which was to encourage a greater emotional connection between defenders of slavery and enslaved blacks, a strategy that might, in turn, persuade the slaveholder to relinquish his slaveholding practices. To this end, they frequently reminded audiences of the fearful consequences of failing to establish a sympathetic bond with slaves. In William Lloyd Garrison’s preface to Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative*, for example, Garrison remarks that a reader “who can peruse” Douglass’s narrative “without a tearful eye, a heaving breast, an afflicted spirit” and who is not “filled with an unutterable abhorrence of slavery and all its abettors . . . —without trembling

for the fate of this country in the hands of a righteous God, who is ever on the side of the oppressed, and whose arm is not shortened that it cannot save,— must have a flinty heart, and be qualified to act the part of a trafficker ‘in slaves and the souls of men.’”⁹ Garrison calls for a classic sentimental response, with the requisite tearful eyes and afflicted spirit. It is when readers with hardened hearts remain unmoved, however, that Garrison reminds them that God will not let the sins of slavery go unpunished, invoking God’s wrath in order to incite a sympathetic connection that will lead to some form of action against slavery. If sympathetic love is Garrison’s goal, vengeance is his vehicle.

Readers already familiar with nineteenth-century sentimentality can appreciate why Garrison would use its conventions in his prefatory comments. Sentimentality was thought by its practitioners to encourage intersubjective relations predicated on sympathy and love, offering a powerful mechanism for reformers to imagine egalitarian forms of social exchange and for antislavery activists in particular to argue for interracial bonds based on deep affect.¹⁰ What reformers who used sentimental conventions also knew, and what is missing from the scholarly narrative, was the extent to which vengeance and terror helped energize calls for sympathy and love, and how love might generate acts of vengeance. It is not only the tearful eye and afflicted spirit, but also the warning of God’s wrath, that mark Garrison’s preface as sentimental. I chart the development of apocalyptic sentimentality by tracing a surprising genealogy, one that begins with David Walker, Nat Turner, and Maria Stewart, moves through the antislavery fiction of Harriet Beecher Stowe, and culminates in 1859 at Harpers Ferry with John Brown. Each of these figures makes critical contributions to the evolution of apocalyptic sentimentalism in the thirty years leading up to the Civil War precisely by treating God’s love and his vengeance not as antithetical but, in the spirit of PAULUS, necessarily cooperative and inseparably intermingled.

While I argue that fear occupies an essential place within the nineteenth-century culture of sentiment, I am not suggesting that every work of sentimental narration is necessarily predicated on the deployment of terror as part of its structure of affect. As Cindy Weinstein has incisively observed, the structure of sympathy is not always the same among the many works comprising the vast tradition of literary sentimentalism. There was, rather, an “extraordinarily rich and ideologically diverse debate about sympathy that was taking place in the antebellum period.”¹¹ Following Weinstein, I recognize that there are multiple sentimental traditions circulating during this period, and one in particular—abolitionist sentimentality—that becomes increasingly linked and indebted to an apocalyptic account of love and judgment. I aim in *Apocalyptic Sentimentalism* to recover how sympathy was produced within antislavery discourses without making broad claims about all works of sentimental literature.¹² Some

works, for example, like Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, explicitly disavow ideas of vengeance and reject fear as part of their sentimental makeup. In *Hope Leslie*, Puritan forebears like Governor Winthrop, generally viewed as synonymous with an austere Calvinism, are represented more like benevolent patriarchs. For Sedgwick, the type of theological terror embodied by the Puritans runs counter to the aims of domestic fiction.¹³

Conversely, Harriet Beecher Stowe was deeply committed to fear as a sentimental register, especially in her early antislavery fiction. Throughout *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Dred*, expressions of love and reminders of God's retribution appear together, suggesting that terror is just as fundamental as love to Stowe's theory of sentimentality. Susan Warner's *The Wide Wide World* occupies a middle ground between *Hope Leslie* and Stowe's antislavery fiction. Unlike Sedgwick, Warner does not completely discount the usefulness of fear in establishing a moral worldview and nurturing intimate bonds between persons, but she does not go so far as to organize her novel around the vibrant interplay between love and terror like Stowe does. For instance, in a scene from Warner's best-seller that portrays a crucial moment in Ellen Montgomery's religious education, Ellen listens to her mentor and confidant, Alice Humphreys, explain how important it is to be "full of love to our Saviour." When Ellen laments that she does not know precisely how to ensure that she remain loving toward God and others, Alice replies, first, by gently warning Ellen that they must remain "mindful to do nothing we shall not wish to remember in the great day of account," and, second, by asking Ellen to open her Bible to the book of Revelation, chapter 20: "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. . . . And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." Alice affirms Ellen's understandable response of "That is dreadful!" by noting, "It will be a dreadful day to all but those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."¹⁴ Instead of turning to the Gospels so that Ellen might see examples of Jesus's loving and merciful nature, Alice instead looks to the concluding book of the New Testament, with its descriptions of death and everlasting hellfire, to encourage Ellen to cultivate a properly loving heart. Warner's depictions of judgment as an incentive for greater love fall along a continuum with Sedgwick on one end, Stowe on the other, and this continuum within the sentimental tradition serves as a microcosm of the highly turbulent religious context of antebellum culture, where Americans in religious, political, and artistic circles were wrestling with complex and, for some, contradictory scriptural representations of God's mercy and wrath.¹⁵

By returning apocalyptic terror to the sentimental tradition, I challenge the way scholars often read the development of sentimentalism within the

American context. Scholars have argued that because of its roots in the Scottish Enlightenment, sentimentalism exists in opposition to the more severe and pessimistic dimensions of Calvinist theology.¹⁶ In contrast to Calvinism's deeply negative view of human nature, the Scottish Common Sense tradition offered a more optimistic vision of sociality in which individuals cohere into communities, in part, through acts of sympathetic identification, and it is this impulse that strongly influenced U.S. sentimental culture.¹⁷ Many scholars see the rise of sentimentalism to be coterminous with and even partly responsible for the decline of Calvinist thought. This view has been most forcefully articulated by Ann Douglas, who maintained that the "sentimentalization of theological and secular culture" subverted the scrupulously intellectual Calvinism that characterized American Protestant thought until the 1820s.¹⁸ It is for Douglas an "obvious historical fact" that "American Calvinism possessed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and lost in the nineteenth, a sternness, an intellectual rigor which our society then and since has been accustomed to identify with 'masculinity' in some not totally inaccurate if circular sense."¹⁹ Such sentimentalizing trends precipitated a crisis of masculinity, a sign for Douglas of American culture's vitiated intellectual and theological foundations. "For economic and social reasons," Douglas explains, "Calvinism was largely defeated by an anti-intellectual sentimentalism purveyed by men and women whose victory did not achieve their finest goals; America lost its male-dominated theological tradition without gaining a comprehensive feminism or an adequately modernized religious sensibility."²⁰

Douglas's seminal work, *The Feminization of American Culture*, is a book that has set the terms of the critical debate for over thirty years and, in my view, misreads the sentimental tradition as emerging in opposition to a strong masculinist Calvinism. Indeed, modern scholarship on sentimentalism is, via Douglas, born out of this false opposition between nineteenth-century sentimentality and Calvinist theology. The many critics who have challenged Douglas for her unfair treatment of sentimentalism's feminist underpinnings have nevertheless accepted her animating premise that Calvinism and the sentimental are opposed rather than often working in close concert. Some critics, like Jane Tompkins and Gregg Camfield, have recognized, along with Douglas, the apocalypticism of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for example, without reading this theological dimension as a part of the novel's sentimentality. Most critics, however, tend to ignore the apocalyptic altogether. What was fundamental to antislavery sentimentality—the energizing force of vengeance—has fallen completely out of scholarly view. Recuperating this relationship between love and vengeance within abolitionist discourses, I demonstrate that a prominent strand of sentimentalism actually included much of the same Puritanical authoritativeness that Douglas lauds in a writer like Herman Melville. This authority and sternness is expressed within

an apocalyptic register, suggesting that the so-called feminization of American culture does not exclude the apocalyptic but is, at times, thoroughly dependent on it. Indeed, antislavery discourse stands as the clearest example of the fact that this period was not as religiously liberal as is commonly thought.

By ignoring the dynamic between sentiment and hardline religious orthodoxy, or treating their interaction as an intractable tension, scholars of the sentimental tradition have unwittingly generated a rigid binary, with wrath on one side and love on the other, that ultimately fails to explain fully the ongoing interaction between calls for love and threats of divine retribution within nineteenth-century religious and sentimental culture. Modern readers often impose the same broad binary onto the Christian Bible, locating wrath exclusively in the Old Testament, love in the New. This view obscures the many instances in which the New Testament foretells an apocalyptic end to history, most notably in the book of Revelation. Such a view also elides the many narratives of love that pervade the Old Testament. Nineteenth-century Americans, however, perceived a far greater continuity between the Old and New Testaments than the scholarly tradition appreciates, especially regarding apocalyptic prophecy.²¹

Rather than separate the sentimental from the apocalyptic or disregard their linkage, I consider how the apocalyptic fundamentally shaped abolitionist narratives and antislavery politics. When love and vengeance are reconsidered as a mutually reinforcing pair, our understanding of the religious entanglements of sentimentalism, as well as our views on the organizing principles of abolition, must shift to accommodate a far deeper engagement with apocalyptic wrath. I examine the writings of antislavery activists who felt an overwhelming resolve to transform America's moral landscape and who often warned of God's coming judgment to inspire in their readers a sense of urgency to reform their hearts. Indeed, a discourse of apocalyptic sentimentalism is deployed first and foremost to incite action and galvanize a complacent nation to finally address the evils of slavery. Many antislavery reformers and sentimental writers understood that too few white Americans were sympathizing strongly enough with slaves, despite how wretched the slaves' conditions on the plantations were. The decade leading up to the war saw the expanding reach of slavery, first with the Fugitive Slave Act (1850) and then with the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854). Chief Justice Taney's ruling in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), moreover, inscribed into law what was already the operating assumption among most whites in the South as well as in the North: blacks not only lacked the legal status to sue in a court of law, but they also failed to meet the legal criteria for citizenship in antebellum America. "We think," Taney writes in his ruling, "that [Negroes] are not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word 'citizens' in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privi-

leges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States.”²² Alongside a government that legislated the expansion of slavery and a Supreme Court that sided with the Slave Power, Protestant clergy failed to offer a consensus on the morality of slaveholding, with many instead defending slavery as a reflection of God’s will.²³ Indeed, the major institutions in America either supported slavery or avoided the debate altogether. Given this reality, many antislavery sentimentalists appreciated that merely calling for sympathy, or representing scenes of sorrowful slaves that were meant to elicit an emotional response from white readers, was not necessarily going to compel white Americans to feel compassion for Negro slaves. Sympathy, in other words, was not sufficiently powerful on its own to enact the kind of transformation that it was deployed to achieve. The terror of being a potential victim of God’s wrath served as a prerequisite to sympathy when sympathy was not an automatic or guaranteed response.

Religion, Terror, Sentiment

Apocalyptic terror’s place within antebellum political and aesthetic discourse is not without its historical precedents. Indeed, a rhetoric of terror has been a central part of America’s religious culture since the arrival of Anglo-Protestants. The New England Puritans believed that they were a covenantal nation chosen by God to establish his earthly church, and Puritan ministers frequently warned of the severe penalties for backsliding. Such warnings served as a powerful incentive for believers within these Bible commonwealths to fulfill their covenantal obligations and abide by God’s word lest they find themselves in a perilous moral state. The Puritans understood from the start what antebellum Americans came to realize in their efforts to challenge slavery: forming a just community sometimes takes some coercion. One of the principal traits of the Puritan sermon, then, was fear, specifically fear of God’s retributive wrath. Such depictions, while designed to terrify congregants into choosing a life of righteousness over sin, are also intended to foster a communal attachment among congregants. In what is still the defining study of the Puritan sermon, Sacvan Bercovitch argues that the jeremiad “made anxiety its end as well as its means. Crisis was the social norm it sought to inculcate. . . . The future, though divinely assured, was never quite there, and New England’s Jeremiahs set out to provide the sense of insecurity that would ensure the outcome.”²⁴ By creating an atmosphere of crisis and alarm, the Puritan minister attempted to make certain that his Bible commonwealth would fulfill its religious duties. God’s displeasure with his chosen community and his subsequent retribution—two defining themes of the jeremiad—produced the requisite fear and anxiety to bind the Puritan society to its theological obligations and to compel its com-

municants to act with Christian virtue. Crisis, alarm, and fear—together with Christian love—were for the Puritans essential components of a communal-building economy.

Consider, for example, what is perhaps the most famous Puritan sermon: Jonathan Edwards's "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Edwards's exhortation is recognized for the depths to which he imagines human depravity and his extended descriptions of the extreme and vivid forms of violence God plans to inflict on sinners. For much of the sermon, Edwards instructs his listeners to reflect on their sins and appreciate that "were it not that so is the sovereign pleasure of God, the earth would not bear you one moment; for you are a burden to it."²⁵ Edwards warns that "there are the black clouds of God's wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm, and big with thunder; and were it not for the restraining hand of God it would immediately burst forth upon you."²⁶ Threats like these are pervasive in "Sinners," but they are meant to serve a greater spiritual purpose for members of the Enfield congregation where he first delivered the sermon.²⁷ At a crucial moment near the end of his discourse, Edwards redirects his listeners' attention away from their personal sins and asks them to consider the spiritual well-being of the entire church. "There is reason to think," says Edwards, "that there are many in this congregation now hearing this discourse, that will actually be the subjects of this very misery to all eternity." Up until this point, Edwards has encouraged his listeners to fixate on their own sinfulness, isolating each congregant from every other congregant, and therefore creating a false separation between a congregant's spiritual health and the spiritual health of the entire commonwealth. He aims to mend this division by imploring his audience to remain mindful of the entire community of believers: "If we knew that there was one person, and but one, in the whole congregation that was to be the subject of this misery, what an awful thing would it be to think of! If we knew who it was, what an awful sight would it be to see such a person! How might all the rest of the congregation *lift up a lamentable and bitter cry over him!*"²⁸ Edwards suggests that the very thought of a congregant's everlasting damnation might unify the entire congregation in a collective expression of grief and sorrow, presumably because each congregant would be able to feel the sinner's fear and despair, or at the very least imagine himself or herself in a similar state of anguish. Edwards asks his listeners to extend themselves in an act of compassion, and while he does not use the term "sympathy," he appears to be making a claim about the importance of fostering sympathetic bonds within a covenantal community.²⁹ This is not, of course, an example of sentimentality; Puritan accounts of love differ markedly from sentimental ones.³⁰ But the structure of Edwards's sermon serves as an ideological precursor to the structure of apocalyptic sentimentalism that I examine throughout this book. In order to motivate sentiments of

sympathy, Edwards spends considerable time focusing on the consequences of failing to be sufficiently sympathetic, and nineteenth-century sentimental writers will do the same.³¹

Edwards's sermon not only exemplifies the dimension of affect within the apocalyptic sentimental tradition, but it also illustrates the directional logic of two different but nevertheless entangled emotional impulses that the authors discussed throughout this study deploy in order to generate antislavery sentiment. Love, in the examples that follow, is inherently other-oriented; it brings a person into contact with another through an affective extension of the self. It is precisely because of the sentimental tradition's emphasis on sociality and promotion of intersubjective relations that some scholars have read it as an important component in the expansion of American democratic culture.³² Conversely, fear encourages self-interest and self-preservation.³³ Warnings of God's wrath like the one we see in Edwards's sermon are designed to promote introspection and a careful consideration of one's sins so that one might make the requisite changes to avoid God's disapproving judgment. For Edwards, as well as for the writers working within the tradition of abolitionist sentimentality, introspection energized by fear could lead to a renunciation of sin and might even generate a loving connection between oneself and another that was previously inhibited by some form of selfish interest or moral profligacy. That is, while love is the goal, it must at times be compelled by the threat of eternal torment. This is the sentimental structure that writers like David Walker and Harriet Beecher Stowe elaborate and depend on, a structure that was first expressed by America's Puritan forebears.

The tradition of apocalyptic sentimentalism I chart in this book develops alongside several major overlapping nineteenth-century religious and cultural transformations: the decline of Calvinist thought, the rise of evangelical Protestantism, and the advent of religious liberalism, running parallel to and intersecting with the period's denominational diversification.³⁴ While the antebellum period is often noted for the way evangelical and liberal Protestant churches challenged some of the more gloomy and orthodox tenets of Calvinism (i.e., total depravity in human beings, the absence of free will, and limited salvation for the elect), many of these denominations continued to believe in a revised (and often muted) version of apocalyptic theology, even as they emphasized the more loving and merciful aspects of Christ.³⁵ This amalgamation of end-times theology with an emphasis on God's redemptive power and promise of salvation was an especially prominent feature within the revivalist fervor of the Second Great Awakening, where ministers attempted to facilitate widespread conversion experiences and usher in God's millennial kingdom. Revivalist ministers exuberantly promoted ideas of Christ's second coming and enjoined their listeners to live piously as a way of ushering in a new heaven and a new earth.