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'What Light. What Possibilities. What Hope.' Revolutionary Millennialism in José Rivera's Marisol

Rebecca A K Turner
College of William and Mary

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“What Light. What Possibilities. What Hope.”
Revolutionary Millennialism in José Rivera’s *Marisol*

Rebecca A. K. Turner
April 11, 2014

**“What Light. What Possibilities. What Hope.”
Revolutionary Millennialism in José Rivera’s *Marisol***

A thesis submitted to the Department of Theatre, Speech, and Dance in
partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelors of Arts
from The College of William and Mary

by

Rebecca A. K. Turner

Accepted for HIGHEST HONORS
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)



Laurie J. Wolf, Director



Artisia Green



Richard H. Palmer



Free Williams

Williamsburg, VA
April 11, 2014

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Congratulations to the merry band of misfits known as the Theatre (and Miles) Honor Symposium. Do the delis serve champagne?

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Dr. Mary Helan Vesenka Turner. You may not be able to ask “What's up, Doc?” yet, but at least you can say your daughter is one heck of a B.A.

Rebecca A. K. Turner
April 11, 2014

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Abstract

This thesis examines José Rivera's 1992 play *Marisol* as an apocalyptic and millennial text. The play responds to the cultural climate of America at the end of the twenty-first century, presenting a social critique by playing on the nation's widespread premillennial anxieties and anticipations. By paralleling the play with the Christian Apocalypse found in the book of Revelation, Rivera further plays with the audience's expectations, but ultimately rewrites the millennial narrative to emphasize human agency over divine intervention. This is characteristic of revolutionary millenarian movements, which seek to recreate the world when faced with situations of extreme social distress. In the end, Rivera remains ambivalent to the legitimacy of violent revolution, but encourages the audience to determine their own methods of achieving change. Any theatrical production of *Marisol* must maintain this balance of millennial transformation and individual reflection. By subverting cultural expectations and fashioning new millennial narratives, Rivera creates a unique form of revolutionary millenarianism encouraging the audience to enact significant, human-driven social change.

Introduction

In February of 2014, the William and Mary Theatre presented José Rivera's *Marisol* as part of its Second Season, directed by Kevin Place. The play, first produced in 1992 at the Humana Festival,¹ tells the story of a young Puerto Rican-American woman, the eponymous Marisol, living in a dystopian New York City at the turn of the twenty-first century. The city, controlled by credit card companies and patrolled by Neo-Nazi gangs, is beset with disasters: natural, manmade—and divine. Marisol is abruptly introduced to this dangerous heavenly reality in a visitation by her Guardian Angel, who brings a warning: God's senility has led to universal decay, and the only solution is an angelic revolution which will kill God and revitalize Creation. Although Marisol initially dismisses her vision as a dream, the Angel's warnings soon become reality: the outbreak of the angelic war transforms the city into an unrecognizable wasteland. Lost in the apocalyptic landscape, Marisol attempts to forge human connections and wrestles with her growing disillusionment for the social and religious systems around her. Marisol gradually comes to terms with the Angel's ideology and sides with the angelic revolution, ultimately leading to her death but also the ultimate success of the revolution when combined with worldwide human insurrection.

Rivera's play covers an extensive range of consequential topics, from race relations to homelessness to environmental destruction to the role of religion in society. Even this last theme, within the play, lends itself to a myriad of interpretations. This thesis will examine a specific subset of the play's religious aspects, namely, the revolutionary millenarianism it both creates and engenders. Rivera uses preexisting millennial anxieties and traditions to

¹ The 1992 Annual Humana Festival of New American Plays at the Actors Theatre of Louisville in Louisville, Kentucky.

form his own version of millenarian belief that calls for engaged human responsibility and action.

In order to explore these topics, a brief discussion of the pertinent concepts may be helpful. We will start with an assumption foundational to this work: that *Marisol* is an apocalyptic text. In popular culture, the term “apocalypse” has come to mean, generically, the end of the world: any catastrophic event resulting in destruction and devastation on a global scale. In recent media an apocalypse can be anything from nuclear war to natural cataclysms to zombie epidemics. Its derivative “apocalyptic” is simply the adjectival form, reasonably synonymous with “cataclysmic” or “catastrophic.” Strictly speaking, however, “apocalypse” comes from the Greek for “revelation;” its most familiar use comes from the final book of the Christian New Testament, known as the book of Revelation or, colloquially, the Apocalypse (Collins, McGinn, and Stein 1: xiii). In this sense, apocalypse refers to a specific kind of revealed eschatological information, or the literary genre of this kind of revelatory material. Apocalypse as a genre has several specific characteristics; the classic definition is “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world” (J. Collins 9). In simpler terms, an apocalypse tells the story of a supernatural being revealing secret or previously unknown information about the end of the world and the new reality which will then come into being. This new reality will be an unimaginable improvement upon the preexisting world, and will be physically realized in both space and time.

Using this definition, we can easily classify *Marisol* as an apocalyptic work in two ways: within the world it presents and as a text in and of itself. Within the narrative of the play, Marisol is visited by her guardian angel who reveals information about the existence of a supernatural realm and about a forthcoming eschatological event: the angelic war, which the Angel cautions will irrevocably transform the world as Marisol knows it (Rivera 16). This revelation predicts an imminent collective salvation and renewal and references a detached celestial realm, thus meeting both the temporal and spatial qualifications for an apocalyptic work. The Angel's visitation in Act One is an apocalypse in miniature, and the rest of the play serves as a framework to develop and fulfill that revelation.

In a broader sense, *Marisol* as a text can also be seen as apocalyptic. In this case, the reader (or audience) experiences a revelation in which the combined worlds of New York and Heaven and the transformative effects of the angelic warfare disclose a temporal and spatial reality framed in transcendent language and experience. In this interpretation, Rivera assumes the role of otherworldly mediator, which may seem to somewhat stretch the definition. However, the classic image of the artist as a receptacle for the divine spark of inspiration supplies an otherworldly sense which allows for Rivera to form a bridge between the reality of the play and the reality in which it is received (cf. Shelley 18).

Ultimately, *Marisol* is clearly apocalyptic both in the academic sense, in that it involves the revelation of a transcendent reality with eschatological import, and in the popular sense, in that it involves a cataclysmic destruction of the world as known. Throughout this work, the term "Apocalypse" will be used predominantly in its common usage referring to an ultimately and irrevocably catastrophic event, in brief, the "End of the World." However, the implicit assumption remains that Rivera's work provides a mystical

presentation of not only the devastation, but also the salvation that follows, and is thus apocalyptic in the fullest sense.

The concept of the Apocalypse is frequently intertwined with other originally Christian terms: the Millennium and millennial, or millenarian, beliefs. Like “apocalypse,” the concept of the Millennium comes from the book of Revelation, specifically chapter 20, which describes the events preceding the Last Judgment. According to Revelation, upon returning to Earth Christ will create a perfect kingdom and rule over it for one thousand years before destroying evil once and for all. This kingdom will be a place of total peace and perfection, populated by those who were faithful to Christ unto death (Cohn 13). This kingdom is known colloquially as the Millennium, and beliefs revolving around this concept are millennial—or millenarian, an essentially equivalent term (Wessinger, *Millennialism* 7). Eventually, the term “millennial” grew to refer to the idea of a salvationist and transformative age, regardless of its specific adherence to the form laid out in Revelation 20. Norman Cohn’s 1970 description of millenarian beliefs has become the seminal definition, and merits full reproduction here. According to Cohn, millenarians believe in a salvation that is:

- (a) collective, in the sense that it is to be enjoyed by the faithful as a collectivity;
- (b) terrestrial, in the sense that it is to be realized on this earth and not in some other-worldly heaven;
- (c) imminent, in the sense that it is to come both soon and suddenly;

- (d) total, in the sense that it is utterly to transform life on earth, so that the new dispensation will be no mere improvement on the present but perfection itself;
- (e) miraculous, in the sense that it is to be accomplished by, or with the help of, supernatural agencies. (13)

Following Cohn, any movement or ideology that has these five characteristics may be deemed millenarian, whether Christian or no. Later writers have supplemented this definition with additional features common to millenarian movements, including social unrest, repeated disasters, a preexisting history of millennial traditions, and the emergence of a prophetic or charismatic leader.

This thesis contends that *Marisol* presents its own kind of millenarian belief by demonstrating the applicability of the aforementioned characteristics to the play. The first chapter provides a social context for the writing of the play in the early 1990s, and explores the pre-millennial (in the temporal as well as religious sense) anxieties prevalent in America at the time. I relate the various millennial views found in the U.S. to the world views of characters within the play, arguing that Rivera capitalizes on the “millennial hysteria” at the end of the twentieth century to create a social critique and closely connect his audience to the narrative of the play.

The second chapter compares the millennial theology found in *Marisol* to the most well-known millennial text, the book of Revelation. After providing an introduction to the history, structure, and goals of Revelation, I discuss Rivera’s appropriation of the biblical framework to instead call for action to change society’s broken and oppressive systems. The close parallels in both imagery and structure between the biblical text and the play create an

obvious and deliberate connection between the two, which plays on the audience's expectations before subverting them towards an active and critical goal. In this way, a pre-existing strain of millenarian belief is used to contrast and build a new millennial ideology. In this chapter I refer to various methods of interpreting texts, arguing that *Marisol* on its own creates a subversion of the Revelation narrative independent from—but supported by—Rivera's intentionality as a playwright.

The third chapter synthesizes and builds upon the material presented in the prior chapters to assert that the millenarianism present in *Marisol* is, specifically, of a revolutionary nature. In this chapter I develop the ideological and practical relationship between revolutionary movements and millenarian belief, delving into the various conditions required to turn millennial beliefs into an active movement seeking total destruction of oppressive or unjust systems. I then demonstrate how *Marisol* provides each of those requirements, creating a perfect environment leading to *Marisol*'s ultimate acceptance of the revolutionary call. Ultimately, I argue that although *Marisol* completely embraces the revolution and its potentially millenarian outcome, Rivera remains much more ambivalent about the potential success of millennial movements or violent revolution. The ultimate goal of the text is to awaken the audience to the urgent need for change and provide a hope for renewal, but without prescribing a particular revolutionary or religious path.

The fourth chapter differs to an extent from the previous three, in that it switches to a more practical application of this research, rather than theoretical. The fourth chapter is a description of my work as dramaturg for the William and Mary Theatre's production of *Marisol*. As dramaturg, I worked closely with the director in formulating and supporting his vision and interpretation of Rivera's work. My role involved close analysis of the text as well

as contextual research to provide a clearer examination of some of Rivera's references and intentions. The fourth chapter explores two particular aspects of my involvement: the research and analysis required to make certain necessary changes from the text in the production, and the dramaturgical materials I provided to the audience to facilitate their experience of the play. In particular, the chapter explores an installation of artwork and text created to accompany the production. Overall, this chapter seeks to connect my theoretical research to the production, and discusses some of the challenges inherent therein.

Given the mix of theoretical analysis and practical application present in this thesis with regard to Rivera's text, we will by necessity return frequently to the concept of authorial intent: what it is, if it matters, and how the play, both as a text and a produced work, can exist independently of Rivera's original intentions. A good place to start an exploration of Rivera's purpose in writing *Marisol* is establishing the cultural and historical context to which his play responds, which is where we shall begin the first chapter.

Premillennial Jitters: America at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century

The final decades of the twentieth century in America were a time of paradox. Old enemies were seemingly defeated, but new and unknown adversaries surfaced. Some technological advances promised to simplify and ease our daily life; others carried the potential to annihilate our species. Telltale signs of environmental damage shadowed the victory of human dominion over nature. Overall, the glamorous façade of post-war consumerism and capitalist excesses finally began to crack, revealing far-reaching consequences for the United States and humanity as a whole.

Throughout all of this ran a feeling of uncertainty—uncertainty about our role as a nation and as a species and about beliefs and expectations that had never before been questioned. In response to this uncertainty, millennial feelings arose across the nation in a variety of manifestations. These ranged from textbook cases of millennialism—the Christian expectation of Christ’s return ushering in a 1000-year reign of peace and prosperity—to broader anticipation that *something* was bound to happen—some massive social change, for better or worse. These beliefs and expectations tended to focus on the year 2000 C.E. For many, the new millennium would be nothing other than *the* Millennium: a new age unprecedented in human history.

Marisol, first produced in 1992, appeared towards the height of this millennial expectation and is a direct reflection of—and response to—these widely expressed feelings of anticipation and apprehension. Rivera’s characters register the range of apocalyptic opinion, from fatalistic prophecy to skepticism to indecision. The play’s exploration and, to an extent, validation of the audience’s various conscious and subconscious millennial anxieties encourage the audience to contemplate and evaluate their own relationship with the

year 2000. Furthermore, Rivera capitalizes on the premillennial tension felt in America to create a strong social critique, offering a chance for national self-reflection in the interest of transformation and improvement in the new millennium, and placing the responsibility for change on humans themselves. Ultimately, Rivera's exploration of the millennial mindset in the 1990s provides a cathartic expression of the qualms and anxieties felt by many Americans at the time.

While the close of the twentieth century brought about many exciting developments, from the creation of Personal Computers and the World Wide Web to the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was more commonly characterized by dissatisfaction and growing uncertainty. This uncertainty stemmed from factors both religious and secular and found expression in a variety of apocalyptic anxieties and millennial responses. In his introduction to a 1997 collection of essays on the upcoming millennium, Charles B. Strozier asserts that the prevalence of nuclear weapons created an unavoidable preoccupation with death and destruction for even the average American. As he puts it, "If once it took an act of imagination to think about the end time, now it takes an act of imagination, or a numbing, *not* to think about it. In such a world we all become end timers" (*Year 2000* 5, original emphasis). Especially during the tension of the Cold War, it did not require a great effort for the American psyche to envision a collective and unavoidable destruction—an apocalypse on American soil.

Religiously, this preoccupation with the end inspired a surge of fundamentalist Christian apocalyptic prophecy based on biblical interpretation during the latter half of the twentieth century (Boyer 5-11). The Cold War played a significant role in these predictions; several widely-read and -referenced prophetic preachers interpreted the antagonistic nation of

“Gog” from Revelation as none other than the Soviet Union (152, 157-169). These warnings were not limited to the fringes of American culture; Hal Lindsey’s 1970 book *The Late Great Planet Earth*, in which he assigned prophetic significance to current events to prove the imminence of the Apocalypse, was the number one non-fiction bestseller of the 1970s (Basham 2).

Apart from the political and military conflicts of the late twentieth century, additional threats to American peace and prosperity rose on different fronts. Environmental concerns became more pressing than in previous decades, with real questions being asked about humanity’s effect on the climate and the atmosphere (cf. Lorentzen 145). At the same time, the emergence and epidemic spread of AIDS in the U.S. was at once seemingly unknowable and unstoppable. AIDS was made even more terrifying by the social stigma it carried—it was not only lethal, it was unspeakable, consigned to the shadows of a silent apocalypse (Long 1-2). The stock market crash of 1987 also ate at the secure foundations of American consumerist complacency, fueled as it was in part by the misuse of computer-driven trading that led towards uncontrollable and unexpected market changes (Carlson 15).² Each of these social disturbances served to reinforce the growing awareness that, despite our perceived progress in the realms of health, technology, and improving the quality of life, humanity still faced daunting and dangerous threats, many of which we had helped to create.

In brief, towards the end of the twentieth century, the U.S. was experiencing social, political, economic, and environmental distress, which, research shows, are all factors that

² Economists generally agree that the role of computer-driven “program trading” in the 1987 crash was only one of several contributing factors, and are divided on the actual extent of its influence (Carlson 15-16); however, the amount of discussion expressing concerns with computer trading both before and after the crash (4), as well as the haste to blame program trading afterwards, indicates a certain level of discomfort or uncertainty at the time with the use of new technology and its potential consequences.

lead to millennial and apocalyptic thought (Rinehart 32-33). This was certainly the case in the U.S., which experienced an increase in millennial preoccupation at the century's close. One significant expression of this kind of thinking came from religious groups, particularly among fundamentalist and evangelical Christians. For many, the disasters and difficulties were "signs of the times:" indicators of the coming Rapture foretold in the Bible.

Earthquakes and AIDS were interpreted as the promised catastrophes and plagues that would precede the End of Days (Strozier, *Year 2000* 7). Even apparently innocuous political developments evoked sensational evaluation; the creation of unifying organizations such as the United Nations, NATO, and the Common Market were seen as precursors to the single world government over which the Beast, an agent of Satan, will rule during the Tribulation (Boyer 277). It is important to note that these religious millennial expectations were simultaneously fatalistic and joyous. Popular preachers graphically described the inexorable and fearsome destruction of the End Times, but they eagerly awaited the heavenly bliss and perfection that would emerge from this chaos (Strozier, *Year 2000*). Militia groups stockpiled food, weapons, and ammunition in preparation for a final armed conflict with the U.S. government, who they felt would inevitably abolish their Constitutional—and thus God-given—rights. This anticipated uprising was seen in religious terms as a necessary and vindicated battle against evil to restore righteousness (Gibson 184-185, 186; cf. Barkun, "Racist Apocalypse" 195-196). As seen in these examples, millenarian viewpoints are inherently paradoxical; one may fear the destruction required to create a new world while still desiring the resulting paradise.

The promise and paradox of millennial hopes were not confined to the religious sphere, however. This became especially noticeable after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

As alluded to above, the Cold War played a significant role in late twentieth century Christian prophecy, which predicted a Soviet invasion of Israel and an ensuing worldwide nuclear war based on interpretations of Revelation and Ezekiel (Boyer 157-162, 130). One might then conclude that the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 would throw water on the millennial fires. To a certain extent, it did; prophetic evangelists were forced to amend prior claims and seek new interpretations (325-326). However, in the realm of secular millennialism the fall of the Soviet Union spurred millennial expectations and assumptions in many ways. On the one hand, some scholars, historians, and public figures saw the fall of the Soviet Union as a clear sign of democracy's victory worldwide. This led to some, in retrospect, extraordinary claims about what the new millennium would hold. Some historians, notably Francis Fukuyama, went so far as to declare "the End of History," asserting that in the "post-communism" years, with democracy and a market economy firmly established as the ideal system, humanity had essentially overcome all fundamental ideological conflicts (Kumar 206; cf. Falk 170). While many scholars and individuals ascribed to this line of thought, they were not always optimistic about its effects; Fukuyama himself felt that the End of History would be "a very sad time," characterized by strategic calculation, problem-solving, and increased consumerism in place of human passions and ideals (Kumar 206-207). Whether celebratory or resigned about its meaning, Fukuyama and his assenting colleagues felt that the fall of the Soviet Union marked a concrete end point to human history.

Not everyone held such unambiguous views about the approaching millennium. Somewhere between apocalyptic fatalism and utopian optimism lay the majority American opinion with regards to the millennium: a sense of uncertain, ambiguous anticipation. These

people did not subscribe to the prophetic doom and gloom of fundamentalist Christians, but neither could they reconcile the statement that democracy had “won.” The fall of the Soviet Union was a victory, surely, but it left a void of unfocused energy and fear, influenced by the unknown factor of Yeltsin’s presidency. The “looming sense of dread” that had permeated the long years of the Cold War did not simply vanish in 1991; instead, Americans found new menaces to fill the vacuum in a “displacement of apocalyptic anxieties onto other enemies, and [a] diffusion of fears to include ecological threats as well as military” (O’Leary 422). Another response was to turn inward; in the absence of the nation’s longstanding foe, much of the U.S. became introspective, recognizing the country’s faults and admitting a general apathy (Kumar 206). This combination of uncertainty and unfocused energy found its expression in a collective anticipation of the new age. Caught between the polarized extremes of religious prophecy and secular appeals to “progress,” much of America succumbed to “millennial hysteria,” a fact which scholars decried but could not deny (Strozier, *Year 2000* 4). Even those who dismissed the preoccupation with the approaching calendar change implicitly acknowledged its significance for many Americans (Stearns viii-ix). Regardless of the lack of academic rationale, the close of the twentieth century saw many Americans honing in on the impending millennium, waiting for it in various states of anticipation or apprehension.

Marisol arrives in the midst of this climate of uncertainty and millennial anticipation. Rivera’s apocalyptic drama absorbs and reflects the millennial anxieties of the late twentieth century to create a narrative that would especially resonate with its audience’s conscious and subconscious fears. Specifically, Rivera uses an apocalyptic framework to structure his play so as to provide a cathartic expression for the millennial fears and concerns of his time.

Rivera places his play within a setting that was both exaggerated and familiar to American viewers during the 1990s. The world he creates, both in the New York City we see and in passing references to the wider world, shares notable resemblances to its contemporaneous reality, albeit to a hyperbolized degree. In Marisol's world, the banks and credit card companies have swollen to enormous excesses of power and control. Debt literally threatens people's lives; those who fall behind on credit payments are imprisoned, tortured, and even killed. Industry and environmental exploitation has turned the skies ashen, the rains acidic, and all foodstuffs salty and inedible. The preoccupation of the government with inane concerns and wild solutions prevents any sort of social service, so that the tired, poor, and huddled masses remain on the streets, living in fear. Apples are extinct. The moon has vanished. Anarchy and fascism rule the streets. And people turn to worship anything they can find—including fire hydrants—in a desperate search for hope or faith.

The world of the play is obviously degraded to a far greater extent than the American reality of the 1990s, although they share the basic core conflicts. In addition, Rivera presents the catastrophes of the play within a religious context, framing them in the angelic warfare with a dying God and couching them in mystical, elevated language. In doing so, one might think Rivera distracts his audience from the very real problems being discussed, including government corruption, fiscal irresponsibility, and environmental decay. However, the opposite is true. To be sure, Rivera provides some distance for his audience by setting his play in a fantastically crippled America. But in the process, Rivera allows his audience to confront some of their most basic and prominent fears of the time: death, abandonment, loss of faith, and the apparent general decline of America and the world.

Rivera could have written a play about a dystopian, damaged New York that addressed the fears of his time without using a millennial and apocalyptic setting. By acknowledging and using his audience's pre-millennial tension, however, Rivera encourages them to analyze and explore their own hopes, anxieties, and assumptions about what the new millennium will hold. One key way in which he accomplishes this is through the millennial beliefs of his major characters. Lenny, the Angel, June, and Marisol cover the spectrum of millennial views, allowing the audience to view their own opinions in relationship to those expressed in the play.

Lenny is a textbook example of a fatalistic, apocalyptic prophet. His premonitions of impending change go largely ignored, falling for years on a deaf audience (Rivera 29). Although his forebodings are predominantly secular in nature, Lenny reflects the grim, pessimistic outlook shared by radical right-wing Christian militia groups at the time, who viewed the country's ostensible degradation as a precursor to further death and destruction (Barkun, "Racist Apocalypse" 197-198, 200). Similarly, many of Lenny's apparent "conspiracy theories" about the brutality of the credit card companies and their government cronies would fit seamlessly into the manifestos and newsletters of such paramilitary groups, who viewed the American government as the "embodiment of totalitarian evil" (Gibson 186).³ These organizations commonly used the phrase "jack booted government thugs" to refer to federal agents (187), creating clear parallels to the Neo-Nazi death squads patrolling Rivera's New York City and Lenny's rants about "federally funded torture center[s]" (Rivera 25).

³ It should be noted that in the worldview of many Christian right-wing paramilitary organizations, who tend to be virulently anti-semitic, the totalitarian U.S. government is said to be under the control of a world-wide Jewish conspiracy (c.f. Barkun, "Racist Apocalypse", esp.195-196). This anti-semitism is completely absent from Rivera's work.

The distinctive feature of Lenny's prophecies and theories, of course, is that they turn out to be correct: the credit card companies are, in fact, torturing debtors in Brooklyn, and cataclysmic change is, in fact, right around the corner. Rivera's choice to vindicate and validate Lenny's fears creates an entirely unexpected shift for the audience, who would be primed to reject such extreme conjectures. In the 1980s and 1990s an American audience would be used to hearing about the violent demise of groups like Jonestown or, after *Marisol's* first production, the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas. The media portrayed these groups as "cults," brainwashed followers controlled by leaders who espoused insane, frantic rhetoric about American conspiracies and the impending Apocalypse (Wessinger, *Millennium 4*; cf. Abanes). During the first act of the play, Lenny appears as a prime candidate for such cults: a paranoid, violent and mentally deranged weirdo who should elicit, at most, pity from the audience, and whose fears are therefore dismissible.

The second act, however, upends these expectations. Lenny's nightmare world has come to life, fully revealing the city's dystopian foundation. This shift in reality creates a corresponding shift in Lenny's character; whereas before he seemed grotesque and outside society, now he acts with confidence and knowledge. In Act One, June says that Marisol knows "the vocabulary on the street" (Rivera 31), but in Act Two, the streets have become Lenny's domain. In validating Lenny's worldview, Rivera forces the audience to confront the fears that may be lurking in their subconscious: fears about governmental oppression, economic instability, and collective death related to the upcoming millennium. Lenny voices the anxieties that an educated, cultured audience of the 1990s would not be willing to admit, much less express. By creating a character with seemingly dismissible fears and then

realizing those fears, Rivera places the secret terrors of a nation on display, allowing for their cathartic expression and release.

In contrast to Lenny's macabre predictions, the Angel embodies the utopian millennial fervor felt by many Christian evangelists, who lamented the upcoming Tribulation but rejoiced at the paradisiac new world that would emerge from the destruction. The Angel's vision of the new millennium is reminiscent of the divine Kingdom that many Christian Americans eagerly awaited, a new age of physical, moral, and spiritual perfection. Like the Angel, these believers regretted the divine destruction that would rend the world apart but saw it as a necessary step to the purification of the Earth (Strozier, *Year 2000* 2).

June, in contrast to both Lenny and the Angel, is hugely dismissive of all the panic related to the upcoming millennium. What she terms "premillennial jitters" some scholars at the time called "millennial hysteria" (Strozier, *Year 2000* 4). They scoffed at the infatuation with the End of Time, arguing that this preoccupation with endism and with arbitrarily chosen dates was nothing new to human history, and had never come to fruition (4). Many pointed out that the calendar date of 2000 C.E. had no real significance, as the calendar is a completely human-made construct that has undergone numerous revisions over centuries (Stearns 15-19, 35-49). What is more, even if we were to accept the calendar as valid for calculations of time, the real millennium would occur on January 1st, 2001: the year 2000 is the final year of the twentieth century, not the beginning of the twenty-first (vii). January 1st, 2000 C.E. would be just like any other day in human history; it had no mystical destiny to be of any greater or lesser import.

Despite their best intentions, these attempts of skeptics to diminish the waves of pre-millennial anticipation were largely futile. Regardless of the historical or scientific

appropriateness of fixation with the year 2000, it was undeniably a feature of American life, at all levels of society. The facts of the situation became much less important than the reality of its existence, and dismissing this preoccupation as unfounded hysteria neglected an important social phenomenon.

June embodies both this disdainful response and its potential hazards. While she admits that times are hard, relating the current situation to the Fall of Rome (Rivera 20), she refuses to acknowledge or support any extreme anxieties, whether expressed by the masses, Lenny, or even Marisol. She tells Marisol to be ready to fight against “them,” but rejects the possibility of a corrupt government or of the brutality happening across the street from her apartment (20, 25-26). June sees the world crumbling around her but wants to “carry on like normal” (22). In the second act, she completely reverses polarity, her head trauma and the changed world around her creating a new, right-wing, fanatic personality. This might seem like an absurd shift of extremes. However, underneath the changed façade of political affiliation, June stays largely consistent. She blames superficial causes—first the abstract concepts of “freaks” and the Bronx, then ethnic minorities and homosexuals during her Neo-Nazi delirium—rather than opening her eyes to the bigger reality. By treating the Apocalypse as any other social crisis in American history, June finds herself completely unprepared to deal with the drastically changed reality around her.

While Rivera is not advocating that the year 2000 will, in fact, bring about the end of the world, he uses June’s conscious denial to warn against the dangers of self-imposed oblivion. The nation’s heightened awareness of the impending calendar change presented an opportunity for collective reflection and transformation; Rivera argues that we dismiss this chance to reflect on our past—and take charge of our future—at our own risk.

Initially, Marisol neither accepts nor completely rejects the possibility of forthcoming significant change. She spends much of the play caught firmly between the extremes of millennial belief. As such, she shares the position of a majority of Americans at the end of the twentieth century. Marisol's position is characterized by uncertainty. Unwilling to believe the gruesome and conspiratorial nature of Lenny's prophecies, she nevertheless senses that the world's ailments are more than run-of-the-mill. Unlike June, she keenly feels that the world is riding on the edge of destruction and that "we're at the part of history where everything breaks down" (Rivera 21). This vague sense of discontent and unsettled minds, an unvoiced anticipation of what was to come, resonated with common American perceptions of the approaching millennium.

This undefined anxiety was influenced not only by the aforementioned social, environmental, and political concerns of the Nineties, but also by increasingly unorthodox spiritual movements of the time. Starting in the 1960s, a growing discontent with mainstream religion appeared in the U.S.; this waned during the 1980s but resurfaced in the 1990s, continuing well into the 2000s (Putnam and Campbell 80-82). During these periods of dissatisfaction with organized religion, more and more people chose not to affiliate themselves with any established religious tradition, but instead advocated for a more individualized and personal spiritual search (96-97, 122-123, 126). This manifested in America in a variety of "New Age" movements, including, at the extreme fringes, an assortment of so-called "UFO cults" that synthesized preexisting religious ideas with beliefs in extraterrestrial life (Singer 135). This generalized spread of "spiritual" thought could account for part of the American fascination with the millennium, beyond the external factors discussed above. Because of a widespread awareness and focus on what lay beyond sensory

reality, Americans could ascribe their premillennial anticipation to spiritual sources without having to rely on or believe in more established religious, particularly Christian, traditions.

Marisol, in comparison, is set apart from the other characters by her unique spiritual worldview, which is awakened through her relationship with the Angel. The others who admit to angelic visitations—the Man with Golf Club and the Man with Scar Tissue—descend into insanity or alcoholism as a result of their supernatural experience. Marisol, however, weathers her celestial vision with sanity largely intact, and comes through it with a keener perception of the underlying reality around her. Her sense of the divine realm now extends beyond her previous, superficial religious understanding, opening her mind to new spiritual possibilities and experiences. Marisol's heightened spirituality corresponds to a large segment of the American population at that time, who felt drawn to millennial possibilities despite belonging to neither fundamentalist Christianity nor fringe conspiracy groups.

Although she can subconsciously sense the world's impending demise, Marisol does not know how to interpret or process those feelings, and her uncertainty is central to Rivera's distinct characterization of the American millennial apocalypse. As we shall further discuss in Chapter Two, apocalyptic literature generally implies a certain amount of foreknowledge on the part of the righteous: because they are forewarned, they can anticipate the End. Fundamentalist Christians who believed in the Rapture looked forward to the millennium with this sense of security, comfortable in the knowledge that they would safely survey the earthly destruction from a heavenly vantage point (Strozier, *Apocalypse* 120). The rest of America, however, had no such reassuring certainties. As such, any anxieties became multiplied—without the language provided by Christian apocalypticism, it was difficult to

verbalize and legitimize genuine fears about collective death and destruction. Rivera deals with this difficulty by combining many potential sources of millennial anxiety—social, political, economic, environmental, and religious—into his one play. In *Marisol*, he addresses the threat of domineering governments, uncontrolled consumerism, social anarchy, and more, all within the framework of a religious apocalypse. In doing so, Rivera uses a recognized and pre-established religious system of beliefs and images to voice secular concerns about the approaching millennium, providing a cathartic outlet for America's widespread fears and encouraging collective reflection on what the nation should strive for in the next millennium. As we shall see in the next chapter, Rivera also subverts these millennial expectations to further his own ideological goals by drawing from the most well-known Western Apocalypse: the book of Revelation.

A Revolution of Angels: Rivera's Take on the Revelation of John

The Book of Revelation is the prototypical millennial text, as well as one of the most well-known and widely-recognized examples of a literary apocalypse. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Rivera would draw from Revelation for the creation of his own apocalyptic and millenarian narrative. What is perhaps surprising is the way in which he takes the imagery, structure, and goals of Revelation and subverts them so as to reinforce and support his own call for human engagement. In this chapter, we shall examine Rivera's use of Revelation, his counter to common interpretations of the biblical apocalypse, and the methods by which he encourages independent audience evaluation of the different kinds of salvation proffered by the prophet John and Marisol's own Angel.

For the purposes of this discussion, a certain understanding of the book of Revelation is required. First, some initial information about the composition and context of Revelation will provide an introduction to the biblical text. Following this contextualization, three aspects of Revelation will form the basis of this chapter's analysis of *Marisol*: the widespread use and adaptation of Revelation's imagery, the violent dualistic worldview it creates within the central narrative of the heavenly war, and the four main purposes or goals of the text. Once these factors have been discussed, we can then explore Rivera's use of and relationship to Revelation in *Marisol*.

The book of Revelation dates back to the last few decades of the first century CE. Opinions on the specific date are largely divided into two camps: a minority who believe it was written before the Second Destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in 70 CE, and a majority who believe its composition falls under Domitian's reign, around 96 CE (Kovacs 3). Its author, who gives his name as John, was at one time conflated with the John of the

Gospels, but is now more commonly identified as a separate individual (15). The book is epistolary at its beginning and end, as John writes a letter to seven churches in Asia Minor from his exile on the isle of Patmos. He writes of a vision that came to him, which he describes as the “revelation of Jesus Christ” (*New Revised Standard Version*, Rev. 1:1, 10). In his vision, John lays out a vivid description of the events that, he believes, are soon to occur: the end of the world as we know it and the realization of God’s perfect Kingdom on Earth. The creation of the New Earth and New Heaven is the culmination of all bliss, peace and perfection; however, to reach that apex of existence the earth must first endure trials and tribulations the likes of which have never before been seen. Plagues, earthquakes, political oppression, immorality and injustice, famine and disease all feature prominently in the imagery of John’s apocalypse.

Revelation’s highly symbolic language and convoluted structure has inspired great volumes of scholarly research while simultaneously intimidating nonacademic readers. Commentator after commentator notes that “mainline” Christianity⁴ shows a marked reluctance to approach Revelation and its vengeful, violent narrative. For example, the common cycle of liturgies in both Protestant and Catholic churches include passages from Revelation only infrequently, and then only verses from the beginning and end of the text, which contain largely innocuous passages of hope and rebirth (Harrington 10-11; Hays and Alkier 2). Clearly, many mainline Christians display an obvious discomfort with or misunderstanding of the Book of Revelation.

However, this does not mean that these same Christians—or, indeed, Americans of all denominations and faiths—have not been exposed to the images and narratives contained

⁴ Non-evangelical and non-fundamentalist Catholic and Protestant churches, tending to skew towards the moderate or liberal end of the political and social spectrum.

within Revelation. In fact, these motifs are undoubtedly widely recognized and used within Western culture, to both secular and religious ends. The author of a book tracing Revelation's influence on literature, history, and popular culture asserts that the biblical text has "permeated our popular culture...Revelation is imprinted on the Western imagination, and has been for twenty centuries...it soaks into our very consciousness" (Kirsch). Countless examples of Revelation's imagery in popular culture appear even in just the past few decades; the "river of blood" and "streets of gold" in Prince's 1992 song "7," Terry Pratchett's affectionate sendup of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse in his 2001 novel *Thief of Time*, and the 2013 comedy film *Rapture-Palooza*, which features Apocalyptic symbols ranging from the satanic Beasts to locusts with human faces, are just some of the many appropriations of Revelation's symbols. The prevalence of these references stems from the archetypal nature of Revelation's images and the passionate and vivid narrative expressed therein, which lend themselves to creative and arresting storytelling. Much of this memorable worldview comes from the central narrative of Revelation: the heavenly war between God and Satan.

In Revelation, Satan and his minions fight against God and God's angels of righteousness. There is no room for doubt about which side to be on. Revelation is the textbook case for a battle between good and evil. The narrative is simple: The Devil rebels, God defends, and Evil is overthrown and destroyed. Noted New Testament scholar Brian Blount explains that "[t]his apocalyptic understanding is built upon a dualistic understanding of reality....The option is either/or, not both/and.... In every case, it means that [humans] must choose sides. They must put themselves on God's side, as the apocalyptic writer

understands God's side" (*Revelation* 17-18). Revelation leaves its audience secure in the triumph of light over darkness, but also unquestioning of who is right and who is dead.

This dualistic worldview sets up scenarios of extreme and widespread violence. Revelation is unquestionably violent; whether one describes that violence as "vengeance" or "vindication" depends on one's particular world view. It is for precisely this reason that the book of Revelation presents such a challenge to Christians; the divine massacres in the text initially seem at odds with the Christ who calls on believers to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39). Myriad interpretations of Revelation have arisen that address this and other challenges in the text; these range from metaphorical exegesis to ultra-literal fundamentalist readings. Within all of these interpretations, however, there are four widely agreed-upon goals present in Revelation which address and rationalize, in various ways, the text's extremely vivid imagery and its horrific violence.

First, Revelation *consoles* its audience during a time of persecution and fear. John firmly believes in a just and righteous God, but the potential for doubt exists in the unjust persecution of obedient Christian believers. The book of Revelation seeks to resolve this issue; as Adela Yarbro Collins puts it, "[t]he task of Revelation was to overcome the unbearable tension perceived by the author between what was and what ought to have been" (141). The eschatology present in Revelation reconciles John's—and his readers'—spiritual beliefs with his real-world observations by promising an imminent rebalancing of the cosmic scales. Although the world may seem terrible and unjust now, God will soon descend in righteous and awesome splendor to lay waste to the wicked and reward the just. In the meantime, any and all suffering is ultimately part of God's plan leading towards eventual justice (Witherington 34, 38). John further consoles his reader with the certainty of God's

victory over evil. God *will* win; the only question is when this victory will come to pass. As one scholar notes, “[t]his [certain] truth is the hope even in the midst of a horrific present,” allowing believers to continually reconcile their oppression within the context of a greater divine plan (Blount, *Revelation* 17).

Second, Revelation *prepares* its readers for a future that, as far as John is concerned, could happen at any minute. John firmly believes that Christ’s return is close at hand, and his visions convey that sense of immediacy. However, there is a very clear distinction between present and future within the text. The events John foresees have not yet become a reality, granting believers time to reflect and ready themselves for the forthcoming changes. John writes with the intention of preparing his audience so that, when the time comes, they will recognize the signs and rejoice that the end is near.

Third, Revelation *warns* Christians who may be experiencing doubts or fears to return to the church and obedient belief and practice (Blount, *Revelation* 2). The text equally emphasizes the rewards of following God’s path and the punishment for rejecting divine authority. One commentator sees the events of Revelation as God’s “victory over human rebelliousness,” celebrating the benefits of spiritual obedience and commitment to God while stressing the consequences of obstinate waywardness (Harrington 17). John’s visions strongly encourage lapsing Christians to return to the fold and toe the line, for only in the way of the Lord will humans live an eternal life and escape the lake of fire (Rev. 20: 14-15).

Fourth, Revelation *advises* a course of action for good Christians in preparing for the end. Of all the themes of Revelation, this last point is perhaps the most widely discussed. Depending on the commentator or tradition, the interpretation of John’s prescribed course of action can be very different. Some traditions use the text to withdraw from the world,

passively enduring until Judgment comes and justice is restored (McGinn 77). Others assert that action is required over passivity, and call for believers to prepare the way through witnessing to and spreading the Word of God (Blount, *Themes*). To some this witnessing means aggressive evangelizing; to others it encompasses a more personalized embodiment of Christ's teachings and principles (Harrington 22).

These varied interpretations all share one important factor, however. Regardless of humanity's role in the events leading up to the Apocalypse, there can be no doubt that God will be the sole and supreme agent in the actual transformation of the world. Christians will be present, wrapped up in the change and chaos. They may even be necessary to prepare the world for the final drama. But, ultimately, they rely on God (or Christ's) divine intervention to bring about the dawning of a new age. Humans may set the scene, but God takes center stage. On this point, commentators are all but unanimously agreed (c.f. Witherington 27, A.Y. Collins 156, Harrington 22).

In mainline interpretations of Revelation, this emphasis on God's agency creates two important effects. First, it wholly justifies the horrible violence present in Revelation. How could it be otherwise, since it is inflicted by a righteous God? Blount notes that John understands the violence he envisions as "constructively oriented violence... a just response to the cries of God's people" (*Revelation* 2-3). The violence becomes part of the divine plan, a wholly justified and necessary step towards the establishment of a righteous and perfect kingdom and the rebirth of Creation. God's violence in Revelation frees the oppressed from their oppressors and cleanses Heaven and Earth for a new existence.

Second, placing the agency in God's hands necessarily removes agency from human individuals. Since God will ultimately set the events of Revelation in motion, humans are, to

a large extent, entirely reliant on God's plan and God's timeline, and cannot presume to ever fully conquer injustice themselves. Commentators on Revelation acknowledge this, but reply by emphasizing the sense of hope and peace that comes with the acceptance of God's agency. In response to the criticism that John's vision engenders passivity and withdrawal from the world, one commentator asserts that "the author has [not] given up on history, as is sometimes asserted, but rather he places his trust in what God can finally make of history rather than in what humans can accomplish in history" (Witherington 40). This comment returns to the consolatory purpose of Revelation noted above, interpreting the text as promising God's eventual justice. This promise is especially needed in times where human agency seems removed. Another scholar notes that "[Revelation] is a text that enables hearers or readers to cope in extreme circumstances. In a situation where direct political action is not feasible, it is a text that keeps alive the expectation of a better world" (A.Y. Collins 156). In other words, Revelation creates a vision of divine intervention to maintain the hope of transformation in a damaged world.

Rivera's *Marisol* uses the framework and imagery of Revelation extensively but, as we shall see, completely rejects the central tenets of the biblical text in favor of a human-centered ideology. Before opposing Revelation's eschatology, however, Rivera first creates an environment within the play that frequently alludes to John's visions, creating a connection between the two texts that ultimately strengthens the contrast of goals.

Marisol is a clear example of just how prevalent and archetypal the imagery in Revelation can be in modern media. The play strongly parallels Revelation on many different levels. The various related images are far too numerous to exhaustively mention here; they range from specific motifs like plagues, comets, references to carrion, and armed angels to

broader shared themes of social upheaval and creation through destruction. For the purpose of this discussion, an in-depth example of the interrelations between Revelation and *Marisol* will be useful in analyzing Rivera's intentionality and its effects on the audience. To take just one example, let us look at one of Revelation's most well-known and iconic images: the Four Horsemen.

The Four Horsemen feature prominently in popular usage of Revelation imagery, although the prevailing conception of this group differs somewhat from the biblical source. The Four Horsemen are commonly identified as Famine, War, Pestilence, and Death. The original text, however, contains a slightly different description. Here, the first rider comes out "conquering and to conquer" (Rev. 6:2). The second rider is "permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people would slaughter one another" (6:4). The third holds a pair of scales, and a voice in the background announces inflationary prices on essential grains while maintaining the price of luxury food items (6:5-6). The final rider is unquestionably named as Death, and "Hades followed with him" (6:8). Ultimately all four are given the power to "kill with sword, famine, and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth" (6:8). So, with this text in mind, the more accurate identification of the Four Horsemen would be a Conqueror, War, Famine/Economic Concerns, and Death.

These four personages are mirrored in Rivera's text with the four tertiary characters who either inflict or attempt to inflict violence upon Marisol: the Man with Golf Club, Sandy, the Man with Ice Cream, and the Woman in Furs. The first, the Man with Golf Club, matches the Conquering Horseman. The language that the Man with Golf Club uses in his intimidation and assault of Marisol is not only aggressive, it is *possessive*. He dwells on the idea that he could "change the entire course of your life...I could turn you into one of me"

(Rivera 7). The Man with Golf Club's attack is physical, to be sure, but it is couched in such a way as to seem especially disturbing psychologically: he seeks to conquer Marisol's identity. In fact, he succeeds to a certain extent in this regard. Throughout the rest of the play Marisol's selfhood is called into question as a result of the death of another Marisol Perez, murdered by, presumably, the same golf club-wielding assailant under eerily similar circumstances. Marisol's experience with the Man with Golf Club creates a context in which she herself questions her identity; thus, he conquers a part of her self until she recovers it in revolutionary action at the play's conclusion.

Sandy, an antagonistic unseen voice outside Marisol's apartment in Scene Three, parallels the biblical Horseman of War. Believing her boyfriend is cheating on her, Sandy threatens to "kill everyone in this apartment building including the children!" (10). Of all the human characters in the play, Sandy is the sole individual who threatens to commit mass murder, rather than individual instances of violence.⁵ Her presence in the play is exclusively characterized by belligerence and aggression, and, unlike other assailants within the text, she receives no sympathetic treatment whatsoever. Her presence is heralded by uniformly aggressive sounds: "a high-decibel shriek," "furious pounding," and the cocking of a gun (10-11). More than any other aggressor in *Marisol*, Sandy represents pure violence and disturbance of the peace, and so reflects the Horseman of War.

The Third Horseman appears in the play as the Man with Ice Cream, who engages Marisol in a discussion of a financial nature: specifically, his outstanding payment for an acting job. His concerns revolve around economic topics, from paying his agent to the costs of private preschools to the price of ice cream itself (23). From the character's point of view,

⁵ The Angel, of course, a distinctly non-human character, commits revolutionary violence on a mass scale.

his is a story of economic disparity and injustice; having not been fairly recompensed for his work, he cannot afford the things to which he feels entitled. From an outside perspective, the inclusion of ice cream in his list of money-related woes interjects a note of absurdity, as it equates an essentially luxury food item with his seemingly more serious debts like rent and child care. The combination of essential and inessential costs, along with the prioritizing of excess material fulfillment over basic necessities, reflects the Third Horseman and the economic scarcity and imbalance with which he is associated.

The final Horseman finds its parallel in the Woman in Furs. This comparison is perhaps the most immediately apparent of all those who perpetrate violence against Marisol: the Woman in Furs is the only one to succeed in bringing about her death. Furthermore, Marisol's demise is immediately followed by her description of the destruction and carnage of the heavenly war. Thus, much as Hell follows on the heels of Death in Revelation, universal chaos follows Marisol's death at the hands of the Woman in Furs.

The level of analysis involved in making these connections between the Four Horsemen and Rivera's characters begs an obvious question: to what extent did Rivera consciously draw these parallels? Was he definitively thinking of the Four Horsemen when he created the Man with Golf Club, Sandy, the Man with Ice Cream, and the Woman in Furs? How much did the biblical text explicitly factor into any of the many similarities that can be seen between Revelation and Rivera's play?

This is a question of authorial intentionality and the value thereof, which has garnered much academic discussion. The opinions vary, ranging from the historical-cultural view, which argues that understanding a text demands knowledge of the author's goals and his or her social and historical context, to a complete devaluing of the author's intention. Paul

Ricoeur champions this second position; he suggests that the only valid view of interpreting and understanding a text comes from examining the world that the text creates in and of itself. In this way, the text exists and has meaning independent of its author's intentions (92).

Adela Yarbro Collins discusses Ricoeur's theories in the context of interpreting Revelation, agreeing that the meaning of a text can supersede its author's original goals. However, Collins argues that summarily dismissing authorial intent and context cuts a reader off from a complete understanding of the text. She proposes that in order to maximize understanding and fully support an interpretation of a text, a reader must be willing to both consider *and* go beyond what the author intended when writing it (18-19).

This method of reading and understanding a text sheds significant light on the use of Revelation-based imagery in Rivera's *Marisol*. If we begin with Ricoeur's perspective, it becomes quickly apparent that the question of Rivera's conscious intent is immaterial. The parallels to Revelation undeniably exist within *Marisol*, thus creating a world to which the audience will react, independent of Rivera's explicit motives. In fact, the prior example of the Four Horsemen motif in *Marisol* may support the premise that Rivera was *not* consciously referring to Revelation while writing the play. As noted, the characters in the play more closely follow the original biblical text than the popular misconception. If Rivera were consciously attempting to draw a connection for the audience, would he not have accommodated their (mis)conception of the Four Horsemen, perhaps by including a plague-ridden inflictor of violence to represent Pestilence? Instead, the world of the play independently suggests these parallels to the biblical text, creating, as Collins puts it, "a probably infinite range of possible interpretations" (A.Y. Collins 19). These interpretations are made possible by the archetypal quality of Revelation's images, and the audience will

respond to them, even if subconsciously. Thus, regardless of intentionality, Rivera's text richly reflects the vivid imagery of the biblical verses, and an understanding of these parallels enhances an individual's experience of the play.

However, we cannot totally dismiss an author's opinion (A.Y. Collins 19). And indeed, at times Rivera alludes to Revelation so blatantly that it proves at least partial intent. Following Collins' method, by examining the points at which Rivera's references to Revelation are explicitly clear, as well as the context in which he makes these parallels, we can discover much about the structure and effect of the play as a whole.

The clearest and most explicit reference to Revelation is none other than a direct quote from the biblical text. In Scene Four, following the Angel's declaration of her rebellious intent, Marisol recites from chapter twelve, verse seven of the book of Revelation: "And there was war in heaven; and Michael and his angels fought against the Dragon, and the Dragon fought..." (Rivera 16). Not only does Rivera choose to directly quote Revelation, he selects one of its most well-known and recognizable passages. This shouts out intent: Rivera wants the audience to be thinking of the biblical Apocalypse. Even more, he makes this connection within the context of a heavenly war, an event which comprises the central theme of both his play and John's visions.

As noted above, the war in Revelation relies on a crystal clear dualism and the certainty of God's righteousness and ultimate victory. But in Rivera's play, such security is nowhere to be found. In Rivera's take on the celestial war, Marisol's Angel rebels against God. The protagonist's protector, with whom the audience must connect and relate, now assumes the role of Satan within the established structure of Revelation that Rivera himself has already explicitly referenced. This juxtaposition seems initially problematic. By

introducing a Revelation-based framework, the Angel's rebellion instinctively feeds into a cultural narrative that raises doubts about the very nature of her cause. In a battle between God and a rebellious angel, formulated using Revelation's imagery and language, who can we possibly root for? Can the Angel's strategy possess any sort of virtue or justification? Is it even remotely possible for her to succeed? The use of Revelation seems to irredeemably undermine the Angel's strength and righteousness and doom her rebellion before it begins.

However, an examination of Rivera's apparent intention helps recontextualize this moment of the script. It is evident, from the central concept of overthrowing God, that Rivera in some way opposes the narrative presented by Revelation. The extent and target of his opposition becomes clear by comparing Rivera's goals and ideology with the aforementioned purposes of Revelation: to console, prepare, warn, and advise Christian believers before God ultimately enacts a total transformation of Heaven and Earth. Rivera counters each of these goals to instead create a narrative of human agency and responsibility.

Where Revelation consoles, Rivera *disturbs*. With the Angel's declaration of God's senility, corroborated by the clear dystopian aspects of Marisol's world, any possible comfort or reliance on the deity disappears. However, the Angel does not yet seem a sufficient replacement of external assurance. The familiar narrative of Revelation decrees that her rebellion will fail, so her ideology, regardless of its potential righteousness or relevance, cannot offer security. Thus, the text distinctly avoids any reconciliation between what is and what ought to be, such as may be found in Revelation; in the play, no promise of cosmic justice and renewal exists outside the Angel's propagandistic utterances.

Where Revelation prepares, Rivera *confronts*. Unlike most apocalypses, including John's, Rivera does not set his narrative in some vague future, however imminent. The play

takes place in the early 1990s, the same time in which it was first produced. Thus, the text does not allow its audience to displace their apocalyptic fears onto an undetermined future. Rather, they must reconcile the horrors they see on stage with the injustice and degradation present in their own lives, along with the pre-millennial fears and anxieties they collectively share. Even within the narrative of the play, Marisol is not granted the safe distancing that John experiences during his vision. She finds herself caught desperately and unwillingly within the middle of the destruction, with no end in sight, and must come to terms with the apocalyptic reality while she lives within it.

Where Revelation warns us to keep in line with God's commands, Rivera *condemns* passive endurance and blind complacency as some of the worst violence that humans can commit. This message appears again and again throughout the play, voiced by several different characters. The Angel tells Marisol that she "can't *endure* anymore" (17, original emphasis). June proclaims that Marisol has "gotta be prepared to really *fight* now!" (20, original emphasis). In the second act, the Man with Scar Tissue sardonically advises Marisol, "Don't trust divine intervention or you're fucked" (48). These lines all emphasize Rivera's underlying rejection of sticking to the status quo. In Rivera's apocalypse, the only way to remain human is by opening one's eyes to the horrors of the world and responding to them, however one can. June's character, ironically, reflects the dangers of turning a blind eye. Despite her progressive-anarchic declarations in Act One, June remains in her Brooklyn bubble, unwilling to actually face the horrors that happen just across her street. In Act Two, she becomes an active enactor of violence in her Neo-Nazi persona. By linking these two

extremes within the character of June, Rivera suggests that refusing to acknowledge violence ultimately inflicts the same harm as if one were the actual perpetrator.⁶

Finally, where Revelation lays out a peaceful preparatory path for believers, Rivera *calls us to action* against the decaying institutions that hold us back, favoring revolutionary responses for the survival of the species. This stems from his rejection of complacent passivity as mentioned above. In Rivera's world, peaceful words and witness are not sufficient to engender change.⁷ In Act Two, Marisol tries to talk about the angelic rebellion with each character she encounters, but is often rebuffed; both the Woman in Furs and the Man with Scar Tissue retreat in panic at the mention of the celestial war. Thus, Marisol's attempts to peacefully discuss the situation fail to persuade those around her, sending the other characters back in fear and uncertainty to the oppressive institutions surrounding them. Change can only occur once Marisol and, ultimately, all of humankind make the decision to *actively* respond to injustice, in this case by fighting for their own survival. Importantly, Marisol does not die as a passive martyr, killed for her peaceful refusal to recant. Instead, she dies as a revolutionary, attempting to recruit others and on her way to join in the battle. Her death triggers a world-wide human response that embraces action over endurance.

The importance of this human involvement at the play's conclusion cannot be overstated. Critically, where Revelation relies on divine agency in the final and crucial

⁶ Thanks go to Maddy Benjamin, who played June in the William and Mary Theatre production of *Marisol*, for pointing out this idea.

⁷ In the interest of fairness, it deserves mention that some Christians, especially those who follow what is known as liberation theology, believe that Revelation calls for an active opposition to oppression and a continual Christian struggle for justice (Smith 29). While this may be a valid interpretation of the biblical text, it does not pertain to the discussion here for two reasons. 1) Commentators who call for social justice based on Revelation still stress a nonviolent response to tyranny, differing from the violent solution chosen by Marisol and her Angel; 2) liberation theology still emphasizes divine inspiration and guidance, to which Rivera responds with the urgent necessity of human agency and responsibility. In this sense, Rivera's critique of Revelation does not totally factor in the possibility of liberationist interpretations, but continues to place critical importance on human action.

moments of societal transformation, Rivera places the power and responsibility in the hands of the people. He rejects wholesale any reliance on divine intervention. In Rivera's world, God cannot save humanity from its dying and decaying state because He, in His senility, is responsible for it. In the play, humans save themselves. The angels may assist with their celestial firepower, but, with Marisol's death and the ensuing worldwide rebellion, humans are both the catalyst and the turning point for universal rebirth. Rivera's narrative, therefore, could not more clearly contrast with that of Revelation. Where the biblical text tells of the destruction and rebirth of Creation in accordance with and under the auspices of God's divine plan, *Marisol* presents a story in which humans act to reclaim justice by rejecting and destroying the archaic institutions that hold them back.

But, one might argue, could Rivera not have created this apocalyptic narrative without relying on Revelation's imagery and framework? If Rivera wished to promote human engagement and reject divine intervention, why bother referencing a prototypical affirmation of God's sovereignty in the first place? The answer lies in how Rivera seeks to affect his audience and their worldview. Rivera subverts Revelation to exploit and ultimately reverse the audience's expectations of Apocalypse and spiritual rebirth. Even more critically, he does this so as to encourage the audience to form their own beliefs about the world and how to change it as needed. A particularly helpful source for understanding how Rivera creates this balance and space for thought comes from an article by Winfried Fluck on Wolfgang Iser's theory of reception aesthetics.

In the second section of the article, Fluck discusses Iser's analysis of Walter Pater's writings, which focus on the creation of an "aesthetic sphere" within an artistic work (180). This sphere is the "interpenetration of opposites" which has the effect of invalidating

‘existing norms without replacing them with others’” (180). As a result, the subject is able to gain “distance” from either the original norm or its opposite; distance in this case refers to “the opening up of a space for self-determination” (178). In other words, art that moves between two opposing ideas without confirming either one creates the possibility for the receiver of that art (the “subject”) to analyze both ideas and come to their own conclusions. Crucially, this back and forth movement between the extremes creates a continuous space for discussion. Iser is particularly interested in this constant fluctuation between the two ideas:

When this happens, the determinate becomes vague and permeated by a dark and still uncertain future, giving rise to a discernible moment of transition in which the old loses its validity and the new is not as yet firmly established. The two must interact, since the new depends on the old for its shape, gaining determinacy to the degree in which it erodes the old. (181)

Within the context of *Marisol*, this passage recalls our earlier discussion of Rivera’s goal to disturb the audience. As noted above, Rivera rejects Revelation’s structure of a benevolent and just God, but does not immediately confirm the Angel’s proposed alternative. He presents two opposing worldviews and then leaves Marisol—and the audience—in a limbo where definitive support for one side or the other cannot be found. Following Iser and Pater, then, the contrast between Revelation’s narrative and the Angel’s oppositional alternative creates an environment in which the audience must examine their reactions to both ideologies, weighing the pros and cons of each. This environment is no sterile place for calm and collected reflection, however. Iser’s “dark and still uncertain future” perfectly captures the feeling of *Marisol*, for the choice between old and new is fraught with uncertainty, and uncertainty frightens and disturbs. Marisol’s monologue halfway through Act Two

demonstrates the tense movement from one extreme to the other and back again; she vacillates angrily, fearfully, between clinging to God's supremacy and embracing the Angel's revolutionary call, and comes to no neat conclusion (Rivera 55).

Although the play does dwell in this liminal state for much of its duration, ultimately Marisol makes a choice between old and new, revolting against the past in the hope of a bright, millennial future. In the process of making this choice, Marisol becomes an Everywoman for the audience, who vicariously experiences the uncertainty of the Apocalypse through her journey. Alongside Marisol, members of the audience begin to question longstanding institutions of oppression and see their own power emerge, just as Marisol awakens to her own capabilities and agency. This might imply that Rivera in some way leads the audience to a clear and definitive resolution at the play's close. Marisol unhesitatingly chooses revolution, and she is the audience's stand-in throughout the play; does it not logically follow that the audience must choose revolution without further thought or analysis?

In fact, the dynamic space created through the juxtaposition of Revelation and revolution allows the audience to maintain analytical objectivity, even as Marisol definitively decides between the two. The final moments of the play are emotionally compelling, certainly; they affect the audience in such a way as to emphasize the need for change without making a convincing statement as to how that change should come about. Rivera undoubtedly calls for action, engagement, and human involvement. However, the contrast maintained between the two sides throughout the play ensures that the audience may still have doubts about the efficacy of violent rebellion in realizing perfect utopian change. As we shall see in the next chapter, this complicated relationship between revolutionary movements

and millenarian or spiritually utopian beliefs has existed throughout history, and finds a compelling exploration within Rivera's view of the Apocalypse.

New Earth, New History: the Hope and Risk of Revolutionary Millennialism in *Marisol*

Given the longstanding historical relationship between millennial thought and revolutionary ideology, a fairly extensive discussion of those two concepts is required before we can begin to apply them to *Marisol*. To start this discussion, we must first clarify what we mean by “millennialism” (or “millenarianism”) and “revolution.” A brief discussion of the former term in the context of this study appeared in the Introduction of this paper, but a more thorough examination of both concepts is now required.

The concept of the “millennium” originally referred very specifically to the Christian belief of the thousand years of peace and prosperity on Earth that will accompany Christ’s return, as set out in the book of Revelation (McGinn 74). “Millennial” beliefs, then, were beliefs that focused on the eventual creation and existence of this perfect period. As religious scholarship has expanded, however, the term has grown to include a variety of religious traditions, both Christian and non-Christian, and even secular movements. In its broadest sense, “millennialism” now refers to the idea that humankind, and the world as a whole, can be perfected, and that at some future point this perfection will be achieved (Rinehart 3). As discussed in the Introduction, Norman Cohn’s famous definition of millennial belief states that it anticipates a salvation that is collective, terrestrial, imminent, total, and miraculous (13). Despite this last emphasis on miraculous, i.e. supernatural, involvement, recent scholarship has broadened this definition to include secular movements, including Nazism and Communism (cf. Cohn). In these cases, the supernatural agent is replaced by specific human forces that will bring about the same kind of total change. In both cases, secular or religious, the transformation of the world must be total, and therefore necessitates the complete destruction of the imperfect, corrupt, or evil systems that are currently in place.

That does not mean that all millennial movements call for annihilation on a nuclear scale, however. Richard Landes describes various axes on which millennial beliefs may be charted; one of these axes runs between “transformative” and “cataclysmic.” The former involves gradual, peaceful transformation; the corrupt systems do completely disappear, but this occurs because they are supplanted by goodness, not violently displaced (Landes 33). Cataclysmic millennialism, on the other hand, requires a complete and violent reversal of norms to create the new, perfect world (31-33). Catherine Wessinger maps out a similar spectrum, although she labels the respective ideal types as “progressive” and “catastrophic” millennialism (Wessinger, *Millennialism* 7-8). Whether cataclysmic or catastrophic, the defining quality of this kind of millennialism is a violent, sudden, and total destruction of a contaminated world for the purposes of purification and rebirth. As the previous chapter demonstrates, the book of Revelation is a classic example of this kind of millennialism: the New Heaven and New Earth only descend after all evildoers and corrupted institutions have been thrown eternally into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:7-21:2). It is this idea of complete change, especially involving violence, that connects millennialism to revolutionary ideology.

For the purposes of this study, James F. Rinehart’s definition of revolution is particularly apt. Rinehart differentiates revolution from “other forms of social change [such as] reform or violent rebellion” by the desire for total and fundamental transformation present in revolutionary ideology. Rebellions seek to improve a flawed system; “in contrast, a revolutionary movement is a social movement committed to drastically altering or destroying existing institutions in a society...[F]ollowing a true revolution, few remnants of the previous regime remain intact” (Rinehart 7-8). Lewy presents a similar definition of political revolution, emphasizing that revolutionary action necessitates a change not only in

the political system but also in the underlying “principles of legitimacy” which support the system (6). Rebellions, on the other hand, “lack an ideology that differs from the values prevailing in the society in question” (7). The defining feature of a revolutionary movement or ideology is the desire to completely upend the existing, damaged institutions and start anew to create a better world.

With this in mind, the relationship between revolution and millennialism becomes clear: they both seek the complete and utter transformation of an unjust world. This relationship is so strong, in fact, that it has inspired considerable study. Various scholars use different terms and focus on distinct aspects of the relationship, but they all generally reach the conclusion that millennialism and revolution have long been intertwined. Rinehart sees the origins of millennialism developing as a response to political, social, and cultural oppression (Rinehart 18), while both Burrige and Wessinger emphasize that with regards to millennialism, one cannot separate the religious from the political (Burrige 219; Wessinger, *Millennialism* 7-8). Lewy argues that millenarian dreams have often been the catalyst for significant political revolutions (3); Landes takes this a step farther and conflates the two concepts, stating that “millennialism is a (perhaps the first) revolutionary ideology” (13).

This equation of millennialism and revolution raises two important questions, however. If both belief systems involve the complete overthrow of a preexisting structure for the creation of a better world, why bother making a distinction between the two? And if they are separate concepts, what specific factors are required for their convergence?

When evaluating why one should distinguish between the two, the specific differences between millennialism and revolution become crucial, as they point out what each concept can give to mutually support the other. Again, many scholars have examined

this topic, each using a slightly different rubric, but the essential concept may be stated thus: in situations of revolutionary millennialism, the millennial beliefs provide hope for a better future, while the revolutionary ideology provides a method for bringing about that future.

The underlying premise here holds that millennial beliefs on their own are insufficient to bring about significant social or political change. Millennial ideology provides vague and wonderful promises of future perfection: “its aims and premises are boundless” (Cohn 281). However, such ideologies do not prescribe any means of actively achieving that perfection. A major reason for this lies with the source of agency in many traditional strains of millennial thought. For much of its history, millennialism relied on the salvationist power of a divine or supernatural force, which would bring about the hoped-for transformation. By giving this agency for change to the divine, millennialism naturally lessened the burden of responsibility on humans. There is no reason to overthrow an oppressive government if God plans to do the overthrowing (Rinehart 65).

When revolutionary ideology becomes involved, however, it demands human action. In place of the vague-but-glorious promises of millenarianism, revolutionary action requires specific goals and a strategy to achieve those goals. When revolution and millennialism meet, therefore, a subtle but crucial change must occur whereby the reliance on divine intervention is lessened, if not eliminated, and the source of power shifts to human individuals involved in the movement. In this way, revolution provides a structure for the compelling imagery of millennial thought. The emphasis on eliminating the evils of this world to usher in a better age is shared by both movements; all that shifts is who bears the responsibility—and ability—for enacting this change. At the same time, millennial belief relies on the premise that existence can be not only improved upon, but perfected. This potential for perfection

embedded in millennial belief provides revolutionaries with the basic idea that total transformation is possible. The two ideologies thus mutually support and reinforce each other in the active pursuit of societal reconstruction. To paraphrase Rinehart: millennialism provides the passion, while revolution gives it a focus and goal (Rinehart 65, c.f. Kumar 214).

Clearly, millennial and revolutionary ideologies can not only coexist, but can also mutually benefit each other by addressing their respective disparities. To return to our second question above, then, what factors are needed for these two worldviews to successfully interact?

Rinehart outlines three necessary conditions for the emergence of revolutionary millennialism, which are supported and expanded upon in several other sources. The first of these is “when a lengthy and durable tradition of religiously inspired chiliasm⁸ pervades society; when there is a collective attachment to thinking about the end time of the world largely in religious terms and when messianic beliefs are at the core of a widely held eschatological doctrine” (Rinehart 32). Rinehart’s study examines these beliefs in Chinese, Mexican, and Iranian societies during the 20th century; however, such beliefs are widely found in many cultures across the world and throughout history. In his study of five millennialist protest movements in European-colonized societies in the 1800s, Michael Adas points out that this tradition of millennial thought can either be indigenous to the society or introduced via external influences (92).⁹ Whether native or imported, a widespread

⁸ Another term for millennialism; chiliasm comes from the Greek root meaning “thousand,” while millennialism uses the equivalent Latin root.

⁹ Despite its common inclusion in criteria for millenarian movements, Adas feels that the emphasis on pre-existing millennial traditions is perhaps overstated; he places more importance on the role of the prophetic leader in creating or synthesizing millenarian ideology (see below).

recognition of and immersion in millennial ideas of salvation prepares a foundation for specifically revolutionary millennialism to occur.

The second requirement is “social disorder and disaster, [such as] when a society comes to experience extreme distress, disorientation, and social dislocation, the causes of which are largely unclear to the mass of population” (Rinehart 32). This “disorder and disaster” can take a various forms and stem from a number of causes, both internal and external. External causes could be natural disasters: earthquakes, floods, famines, droughts, or any such unforeseen and catastrophic event. These external causes are perhaps what most immediately spring to mind when people think of apocalyptic or eschatological situations. Internal disorder, however, can be just as damaging and disorienting to a society as natural cataclysms. This kind of disaster can affect all aspects of a community’s life: social, political, and economic (Cohn 53). Corrupt and oppressive regimes certainly create a huge sense of social dislocation and unrest; in fact, Rinehart speaks of a “paradigm” of revolutionary millenarianism that involves a society “dominated by a tyrannical and immoral power of seemingly demonic dimension” (19). The existence of a dominating authority throws off the social balance within a community, breaking relationships that were previously supportive. This can be a particularly damaging source of social distress, as humanizing relationships are crucial to maintaining a satisfied and functioning public. Thus, when oppressive regimes or sudden and extreme social change break apart longstanding avenues for social interaction and connection, millennial ideology can step in to provide new meaningful social relationships and re-humanize individuals who feel lost in their changing world (Adas 113). Whether internal or external, rapid and unforeseen changes create the most powerful sense of social disorder; Barkun asserts that “[m]uch of the force of a disaster comes from the sudden

manner in which it assaults unprepared societies, institutions, and psyches” (*Disaster* 57).

When one’s world appears to drastically shift, without an apparent or understandable reason, it becomes natural to expect the final End.

The relationship between catastrophe and millenarian beliefs receive their fullest exploration in Michael Barkun’s seminal work on the subject, aptly titled *Disaster and the Millennium*. Barkun extensively details the many forms and conditions of disaster that lead to millenarian movements, arguing that the presence of repeated, abrupt, total disaster is the most crucial factor affecting millennial belief (*Disaster* 1). Barkun also contends that “millenarian movements are essentially rural-agrarian rather than urban-industrial,” proposing that cities can neither encourage nor maintain millennial beliefs (6). This assertion, which provides the basis for much of his book, appears to challenge my statement that *Marisol*, set in the most quintessential of urban environments, is essentially a millennial and apocalyptic text. As such, we will return to a discussion of Barkun’s text below, when examining how Rivera uses the characteristics of revolutionary millennialism within his play. For now, it suffices to return to the remaining contextual condition leading to millenarian movements.

Rinehart’s final requirement for the creation of a millennial revolutionary movement is the presence of a specific individual:

A critical third condition is...the emergence of a charismatic leader who exerts a profound influence on a large segment of society by shaping a reaction to recent experiences of catastrophe and social stress. This response takes the form of a call for a total, collective, this-worldly revitalization of society. Tactically, the charismatic leader facilitates this summons by

appealing to the pervasive religious millenarian beliefs that exist in society.

(33)

While the first two conditions, preexisting millennialism and social disorder, are fairly obvious, this third requirement is perhaps less so. However, it is no less crucial than the aforementioned contextual necessities. In fact, scholars of revolutionary millennialism make a widespread and definitive point to emphasize the importance of the leader within a movement. Adas' book *Prophets of Rebellion* deals entirely with exploring five millennial protest movements through the lens of their leaders' backgrounds and beliefs. This leader—whether called a prophet, or the messiah, or a “charismatic authority” as defined by Weber—synthesizes the movement, making it accessible and compelling to the masses, and spearheads the call to revolutionary action (Adas 93).

In large part, the leader capitalizes on preexisting discontent within a society. Lewy remarks that “[a] leader, no matter how gifted, cannot conjure a social movement out of a void, but the charismatic leader may create or increase the expectations and dissatisfactions which lead to a revolutionary situation...[this leader's prophecies create] a revolutionary mass movement where previously there had existed only a demand for the reform of certain concrete grievance[s]” (258-259). Viewed from a certain angle, the question of whether the leader creates the movement or the movement creates the leader becomes a “chicken or the egg” conundrum. Rinehart notes that in many cases the context seems to create the leader, who may emerge as a response to the community's needs and have no other qualifications than a “uniquely appealing personality” (119). Lewy similarly emphasizes that charismatic leaders often have no extraordinary qualities, and, to an extent, have leadership thrust upon them by a community that seeks a prophet to follow (240). Regardless of the initial impetus,

the need for a leader to condense and sanction the movement becomes a critical condition for revolutionary millenarianism.

When all three of these conditions are present, millenarianism works to provide a platform from which to support revolutionary action. The combination of social chaos, preexisting millennial traditions, and a leader who can skillfully use these first two conditions to mobilize the populace creates a strong revolutionary potential. Millennialism waters the ground, so to speak; when discussing his case studies of China, Iran, and Mexico, Rinehart states that “millenarianism performed an important function by paving the way and preparing these societies for potential transformation through revolution” (67). The two concepts mutually support each other, with millennialism providing the promise of perfection and revolution laying down the road by which that perfection can be achieved—or, at least, attempted.

In an involved discussion of any movement that seeks extreme social change the question of success must necessarily arise. As history shows, over the many centuries of human existence individuals and groups of individuals have been driven to the “pursuit of the millennium,” as Cohn so famously and poetically put it. And yet, as Lewy points out, “no society throughout history has been able to provide a life free of hardships and sorrows” (246). How, then, does one evaluate the aftermath of a revolutionary millenarian movement?

Scholarly response differs to the degree in which it sees failure as the inevitable conclusion of millenarian belief. Landes bluntly states that the only thing all millennial movements definitively and predictably have in common is their inherently wrong belief in the possibility of attaining perfection, and thus their inevitable disappointment (xviii). In his estimation, the essentially unachievable goal of perfection can lead only to failure. Others,

however, consider the success of a millenarian movement in more relative terms. Kenelm Burridge sees the process of millenarian revolution as valuable in and of itself. He suggests that “[m]illennialisms that burn themselves out are not, in an objective sense, necessarily failures despite the fact that explicit goals are not achieved. They should rather be seen as experiments in the enactment of which something is learned” (229). Burridge views millennial movements as an important tool for social progress and development, although they ultimately cannot continue on to complete success.

Lewy, in contrast, goes so far as to reject a “pattern of historical inevitability [of millennial failure]. Though millenarian movements have so far always been unsuccessful in their great design—the new world of peace and perfection has eluded them—in many instances these movements have scored impressive victories and achieved many of their goals before they were finally defeated at great cost” (259). Lewy wishes to acknowledge and value the “worldly” successes achieved by millenarian movements, in that they can bring about social change, albeit change that falls short of their all-encompassing goals. Interestingly, though, he appears to entertain the possibility that complete change may eventually be attainable: “millenarian movements have *so far* always been unsuccessful” (emphasis added). This potential hope aside, however, and regardless of the level of success or failure attributed to a movement, the majority of scholars are unanimously agreed that “all revolutionary millenarian movements in history have failed to accomplish their central objective—the attainment of heaven on earth” (Lewy 264). Therefore, no scholarship exists on what might happen to a completely successful millennial movement because, as far as academics and historians are concerned, such an event has never occurred.

In Rivera's *Marisol*, however, we are presented with just such an anomaly: a millennial movement with a demonstrably existing divine component that appears to achieve victory over the archaic institutions it opposes. This anomaly presents two possibilities: either Rivera has imagined an instance of a wholly successful millennial revolution, or, more disquietingly, the angels' "victory" not quite as complete as it appears. In order to answer this question, we must first examine the play within the context of revolutionary millennialism to see how it matches up with the paradigms we have established above. The very first step is to determine what precisely is meant by "millennialism" in *Marisol*.

In the play, the millennial ideology is espoused by the Angel, contextualized by the setting and environment of the play, and experienced by Marisol—and, through her, by the audience. Any discussion of millennial ideology or beliefs, then, mostly concerns the Angel's vision of what the future will hold after an angelic victory (Scene Four, particularly page 16). Examining, within the play, the effects of millennialism in everyday life and the practical development and application of revolutionary millennialism, however, refers to Marisol's experience and journey. The Angel outlines the millennial manifesto, but Marisol lives it. Meanwhile, the dystopian New York that Rivera creates provides the background and underlying tension for both the Angel's vision and Marisol's experience.

Rivera's text very thoroughly provides all of the context and conditions necessary for millennial-inspired revolution. As mentioned, the millennial ideology of the play is most concisely stated on page 16 of the text, after the Angel has revealed to Marisol her intentions of leading an angelic revolution:

Soon we're going to take off our wings of peace, Marisol, and put on our wings of war. Then we're going to spread blood and vigor across the sky and reawaken the dwindling stars!...

And when we do win...when we crown the new God, and begin the new millennium...the earth will be restored. The moon will return. The degradation of the animal kingdom will end. Men and women will be elevated to a higher order. All children will speak Latin. And Creation will finally be perfect.

On the most basic level of millenarian analysis, this vision presented by the Angel neatly fits with Norman Cohn's classic definition of millennial salvation: collective, terrestrial, imminent, total, and miraculous (13). The Angel does not limit her promise of perfection to only certain individuals; all of humanity—men, women, and children—will be affected as a community. The change will be terrestrial; although the Angel mentions that the universe as a whole is suffering, the earth gets particular emphasis in the restorative aftermath of the revolution. In effect, the universal renewal becomes represented in microcosm in the restoration of Earth. In any case, the change is certainly not taking place in a separate, heavenly realm. A sense of imminence pervades this scene and, indeed, much of the first act; the Angel's urgency in having to leave Marisol, combined with her witnessed preparations for war (Rivera 24), underscore the implication that revolution could erupt at any moment. The Angel's final statement, that "Creation will finally be perfect," reflects the total nature of her millennial beliefs, concisely reflecting Cohn's description "that the new dispensation will be no mere improvement on the present but perfection itself" (13). Finally, the miraculous

nature of the Angel's millennium is self-evident; the angels, divine beings, will be directly involved in the war that sparks the world's transformation and rebirth.

Moving from Cohn to Rinehart, the play also meets his three aforementioned characteristics for the formation of revolutionary millennialism. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Angel's vision, as well as the structure of the play as a whole, builds off of the millennialism of Revelation. This doubly fulfills Rinehart's criteria of a "lengthy and durable tradition" of millennial thought and expectation. First, because it uses a preexisting millennial tradition and thus is easier to promulgate. Second, because this particular kind of Revelation-based millennialism has a long history in Western and, especially, American culture (Barkun, *Disaster* 85). Millennialism has, in various iterations, been an integral part of the American religious landscape, ranging from the passive but persistent millennial expectations of the Jehovah's Witnesses (Boyer 4) to the more lurid occurrences when millennial dreams have turned violent, as in the fiery siege of the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas (cf. Wessinger, *Millennium* esp. 91-94). In fact, regarding the play's temporal context, in 2000 one scholar asserted that the years since the 1970s had contained the greatest millennial fervor in American history (Barkun, "Afterword" 352). These millennial movements have tended to be at least broadly based in Christian eschatological tradition, specifically that of Revelation, and as such that genre of millennial imagery is especially resonant to a wide American audience in a way that, for instance, Hindu millennialism would not be, despite its even lengthier history.

Rivera amply satisfies the second condition, "social disorder and disaster," with both the natural and socio-political aspects of the play's setting. The level of social distress is undeniable within *Marisol*, stemming from both internal and external causes. As *Marisol*'s

monologue to the Angel makes clear, her New York City is plagued by everything from totalitarian credit card companies to chemical disasters to literal plagues (Rivera 14). Moreover, this distress seems largely beyond the comprehension of the city's residents; Marisol's plaintive cry that "Somebody up there has to tell me why I live the way I do" reflects the uncertainty of the city as a whole (14). Similarly, we see clear indications of social breakdown occurring throughout the play, which is a common underlying cause for millennial unrest and revolution. In fact, the entirety of the play can be seen as Marisol's quest to find significant, meaningful human attachment, in a world where those she meets are more likely to harm than embrace her. This reflects the inadequacy of the current social systems to meet the needs of the individual, and the resulting necessity for new personal connections and belief systems to help survive the changing world.

As noted above, the quintessential discussion of millenarianism and disaster patterns comes from Michael Barkun's work. A central thesis of Barkun's book states that the necessary disastrous conditions that lead to millenarian movements can only happen in "rural-agrarian" societies. In these environments, homogenous culture, isolation from the surrounding world, and vulnerability to widespread disaster all combine, resulting in the demand for new systems of viewing the world and a collective reinforcement of those new beliefs (*Disaster* 91). Urban environments, according to Barkun, cannot support this kind of drastic worldview change because the heterogeneous nature of a city makes it unlikely that any disaster or resulting belief system would equally affect all its areas or inhabitants (68-70). Millenarian movements that appear to grow out of cities are in fact caused by their self-imposed isolation in separate subsections of the city, thus creating, in effect, a village within an urban environment (177).

This would seem to discount *Marisol* as a valid millenarian scenario. Many of Barkun's criteria do not apply to Rivera's text, including not only the agrarian setting, but also the cultural homogeneity of such a setting and the presence of familial traditions of millennialism (93-94). Rivera's millennial apocalypse is decidedly urban, and his protagonist is consciously separated from a homogenous culture that could reinforce her millennial views. Must we, therefore, discount the other indications of millennial ideologies within the play? To the contrary, the given circumstances of the play make it possible for these beliefs, usually found in isolated contexts, to exist in the most quintessential of urban environments: New York City.

One key component lies in the realities at hand in either real-life millenarian movements or Rivera's play. Scholars who examine what leads to millenarian ideologies are often concerned with what could lead a segment of the population to completely reject the accepted social, political, religious, or cultural norms of their society and invest in a new reality. Such a drastic change in worldview requires special cultivation, as most individuals abandon their prior conceptions under only the greatest duress (Barkun, *Disaster* 79). An isolated environment, then, becomes extremely important to first inculcate and then foster this total rejection of the outside world. The isolated and unified community can collectively and mutually reinforce the millenarian beliefs that may be empirically contradicted by external facts (95). The central issue becomes a conflict of two worlds: reality as perceived by the majority of society, and reality as perceived by the millennial group. Isolation is key to maintaining the nonstandard perception of reality in a millenarian community.

In Rivera's world, however, these realities of external and internal environment are one and the same. Rivera neatly sidesteps any number of thorny theological issues by simply

stating God's existence as fact—*Marisol*, and the audience, may need to determine their own beliefs as to God's relevance, but they are not asked to determine the truth of God's existence or lack thereof. The angelic war is another undeniable fact, as are the effects it has on Earth. Because of this, every human being in Rivera's text is thrown into an apocalyptic environment with millenarian overtones, whether they immediately accept that or not. As such, the necessary conditions for cultivating millenarian beliefs as a radical opposition to the status quo are rendered largely irrelevant. *Marisol* does not need an isolated, culturally homogenous environment to support her millennial hopes and anxieties because she is immersed into a real-life and total apocalyptic situation. By acting as a framework, a given part of the setting, the millenarian aspects of the text inherently serve to support and lead to revolutionary action, rather than demanding sustenance and special belief themselves.

And yet, a second and correlative characteristic of the play which incorporates Barkun's research is the fact that the disaster in *Marisol* does, in fact, manage to affect the entirety of not only New York City, but presumably the world as well. In the play, the angelic war serves as the kind of disaster Barkun states is necessary to the creation and sustainment of millenarian beliefs. Its onset is sudden, largely unexpected (despite prophetic warnings and vision), and massively destructive to the infrastructure of the city and, thus, the coping mechanisms of its inhabitants. The entire city is affected, regardless of class, race, or borough. And since the whole city is in ruins, there is no chance of emergency services coming from one sector to rescue another; all of New York is plunged into chaos. In effect, then, the total disaster serves to create a version of the isolation which Barkun requires. *Marisol* does not need this isolation in order to protect her growing millennial beliefs from outside opposing influences, since no such empirical influences exist. However, the isolation

does serve to reinforce the dire circumstances in which she finds herself, thus amplifying her need for a new explanatory worldview.

Barkun also emphasizes that frequent disasters, rather than a single catastrophic instance, increase the likelihood of millenarian movements forming. This, too, finds its parallel in *Marisol*. While the outbreak of the war is the single most destructive instance, causing an abrupt and total change to the landscape, the disastrous effects continue throughout the second act in the form of falling lights, gunfire, and explosions, repeatedly interrupting the action like the aftershocks from a powerful earthquake (Rivera 41, 54, 55, 61, 65, 66). These recurring mini-disasters continually keep Marisol in a state of anxiety and tension, preventing her from achieving stability and pushing her ever farther towards millennial revolution as a solution.

Clearly, both Barkun's disaster hypothesis and my classification of *Marisol* as millenarian can coexist. The inarguable and total reality of the disaster created by the angelic war renders the agrarian/urban distinction irrelevant within this particular context. It seems fair to say that Barkun's research emphasizes rural or quasi-rural environments because the disasters he studied did not contain the sort of all-encompassing destructive power that Rivera envisions with the angelic war.¹⁰ However, the social aftermath of the disaster in *Marisol* closely follows what Barkun describes. He notes that massive social change can lead to "alcoholism, passivity, indolence, dependency relationships, intragroup violence, violation of mores, irresponsibility in public officials, neurotic and psychosomatic disorders, and feelings of guilt and depression" (*Disaster* 53). From the Man with Scar Tissue's alcoholism

¹⁰ It is sobering to note, however, that even Barkun comes to the conclusion that modern technology and the modern tendency for "total war" has brought us ever closer to experiencing the sort of total catastrophe we find in *Marisol* (*Disaster* 202-203).

to Lenny and June's mutual dependence to the violent post-torture reactions of the Woman in Furs, each of these social effects emerges in Marisol's distorted world.

Returning from Barkun's analysis to Rinehart's conditions for millenarian movements, we see that the text meets the third of these requirements with the character of Marisol herself. Marisol fits many of the characteristics of the "charismatic leader" or "prophet figure" required in revolutionary millennial movements. She lives a liminal existence, caught between her Puerto Rican heritage and assimilated Manhattan identity, between her lower-class, Latina, tough Bronx self and the whitewashed, middle-class persona to which she aspires. This means that she can both appeal to a wider demographic and compassionately relate to a greater number of people (Adas 118). She also has a supernatural connection with the Angel, which is at the very least implied to be somehow different or stronger than others' relationships with their guardian angels. Notably, seeing an angel causes both the Man with Golf Club and the Man with Scar Tissue to collapse and retreat into addictive behaviors; Marisol, on the other hand, survives her angelic encounter changed but largely intact. She also constantly spreads the word about the angelic revolution, whether she realizes it or not; she repeatedly brings up the reality of the angels' involvement in the changing world, even when those with whom she speaks adamantly deny and evade the truth. In doing so, she herself builds upon both the demands of the environment and situation and on the Revelation-inspired millennial narrative that she and the others around her share and experience. And, ultimately, in the children's street graveyard Marisol bears witness to injustice and responds with "moral outrage and righteous indignation," which are proven to be important and sufficient catalysts for millennial revolution (Rinehart 21).

Interestingly, however, before this moment in the graveyard Marisol seems largely unaware of her role as prophetic leader. In fact, Rivera spends the majority of the play setting up the millennial context but concentrates the actual transition to revolutionary intent into the penultimate moments in the graveyard. Here, Marisol accepts her role as leader and intends to fight with the angels; almost immediately after, following her death, we hear her report of the war and its aftermath. Perhaps even more significantly, this last point is barely touched upon. Marisol gives an extended and poetic description of the war and its conclusion, but then switches to vague descriptions of the “new” society and world. There are “new ideas,” “new powers,” and “new miracles...signed into law” (Rivera 68), but what do these changes actually mean, in concrete terms, for the future of the Earth?

On paper, this ending could seem anticlimactic, a too-short conclusion after pages of building tension. However, the vagueness of the final language and the ambiguity of the conclusion serves three important purposes within the play: it parallels the natural progression of revolutionary movements, it emotionally affects the audience without getting trapped in deniable details, and, most importantly, it reflects Rivera’s underlying discomfort with the efficacy and value of violent revolution as a utopian solution.

Rivera concerns himself throughout the play with slowly developing characters, building relationships, and creating the dystopian setting that oppresses and limits Marisol’s life. Marisol’s journey to revolutionary action is a lengthy and thoughtful process, deeply intertwined with her various interactions with the people around her. In this way, Marisol’s progression mirrors the “true, slowly emerging character of revolution,” which “does not begin overnight” (Rinehart 63). Rinehart states that millenarian movements serve a “preparatory function” in this process of emerging revolution by spurring mass desire for

change and emphasizing the existing tension between the current situation and the desired outcome (64). In the same way, Marisol's experience of the growing injustice around her, primed by the Angel's millennial vision, prepares her for the eventual leap to revolution. This leap is not to be taken lightly; the shift to a millennial worldview inherently requires a rejection of previous beliefs to a degree which only the truly desperate can even consider (Lewy 239). By emphasizing the process of decision, rather than the actual moment of choice and its aftermath, Rivera replicates the long process required before attempting serious social change.

The vagueness of that final decision also helps create an emotionally compelling moment without detailing an impossible level of perfection. In order to keep the ending plausible and maximally affective, Rivera must walk a fine line between implying the results of a new society and actually laying out detail that could detract from the overall message. As mentioned previously, scholarship has largely agreed that genuine millennial success is, at the very least, absent from the historical record, if not inherently impossible. Thus, with *Marisol's* conclusion Rivera has no precedent on which to draw, nothing to indicate what a successful millennial plan would entail. In order to maintain the suspension of disbelief, Rivera must deliberately omit detail so as to not trap himself within a clearly impossible solution.

In a similar vein, by not specifying the new policies or laws, Rivera avoids entering a political discussion about what shape the New Earth should take; he emphasizes the need for justice and human compassion but refrains from prescribing a specific set of social or political actions that would achieve those goals. This is not to say that Rivera's work is definitively apolitical; its emphasis on humanizing the homeless and demonizing the credit

card companies certainly suggests a critique of modern materially-driven culture. However, the ultimate solution to these political problems is couched within vague terms, thus preventing any application of political ideology. Because of this, an audience of disparate social and political views could watch a production of *Marisol* and be similarly affected by the need for social change without necessarily agreeing on how to accomplish it. A diverse audience would likely have diverse interpretations of what the “new millennium” demands; reflecting this, the play does not provide a definitive, step-by-step plan for achieving earthly perfection. This matches our aforementioned expectations of millennial or apocalyptic views; as an apocalyptic text, the play is not concerned with laying out a detailed manifesto of how to transform the world. Instead, it strives to awaken and encourage the desire for change within its audience.

This emphasis on the *need* for change rather than the *method* of change, along with the ending’s ambiguity, reflects a broader theme of the entire play: Rivera’s discomfort with the idea of violent revolution as a successful and acceptable utopian solution. Throughout the play, and particularly in the final moments, Rivera is decidedly ambivalent towards the possible success of violent revolution. This ambivalence appears with the very first suggestion of an armed uprising, when Marisol rejects the Angel’s vision of violent millennialism. It then continues throughout the play as Marisol vacillates between her longstanding loyalties to God and her growing support of the angels. As discussed in the previous chapter, this vacillation creates a distance for the audience from which they may objectively reflect upon the options presented to them. Moreover, though, this ambiguity also reflects an intrinsic uncertainty within the text towards the idea of violent revolution, which

stems from Rivera's struggle with the obvious injustice of the world and the possibly futile hope of ever achieving perfection.

On the one hand, the oppressive institutions within the world that Rivera creates—which mirror those in reality—are so completely and violently inequitable that a similarly violent response seems justified, even necessary. Marisol certainly comes to agree with this position; the Angel successfully persuades her that God's death is necessary for the survival of the species and the universe as a whole. This strongly reflects a wide strain of millennial thought, which holds that in order for perfection to grow, evil must first be uprooted, at any cost. As a result, these millenarians believe that “if the goal is perfection...even catastrophe or violent revolution is not too high a price” (Rinehart 166). Ultimately, Marisol does choose to revolt, which in her mind is a wholly positive decision; at the play's conclusion she stands by the Angel, zealously convinced of the glory and promise of revolution and ready to greet the utopian Millennium. The protagonist of the work undoubtedly supports violent revolution as a way of securing justice and social perfection.

The text itself, however, never fully supports Marisol's certainty. The final moments of the play clearly indicate this through the symbols and descriptions contained therein. Three images are of particular interest: the Angel's winglessness, the use of the crown, and the “wild light” at the play's close.

According to the stage directions, the Angel enters “wingless” (68). Prior to this moment she has always appeared with wings in some way; either with her “crude silver” wings of peace on her back (5) or bloodied in her arms (39), or with her “huge magnificent” wings of war (67). The absence of wings in this final moment, then, becomes hugely significant. The Angel wears neither her wings of peace nor of war, suggesting that, although

victory has been won, the earth is not yet at peace. At best, it is in a neutral state, in limbo facing the aftermath of war and awaiting the changes instituted by the new ruling system. When peace has been broken by revolutionary war, and then that war has been won, what happens next? Neither peace, nor war, but potentiality: the potential to either bring great good or commit further evil.

The symbolism of the crown in these final moments also emphasizes this uncertain potentiality of the end. In the text, the crown is present from the beginning of the show, suspended over the stage in a glass box. While the crown is never directly referenced in the play's dialogue, the stage directions state that Marisol refers to it when she addresses God (55). The image of a golden crown has several biblical parallels, both in Revelation and elsewhere, referring to God's sovereignty and the reward of the faithful (cf. Rev. 14:14, 2:10, 2 Tim. 4:8). In the play, it can be seen to symbolize the hierarchical power of current religious institutions and the dominating presence they exert. A crown is a symbol of political rule, and its use here links patriarchal religion and God to the oppressive political structures present in Marisol's world. The crown represents religious authority independent of its wearer, however; the Angel speaks of crowning a "new God" once the war has been won, implying the crown's significance during a transition of power (Rivera 16).

In these final moments, then, the crown carries great significance. In the stage directions, the Angel comes out carrying the crown and "holds the crown out to the audience;" she then kisses Marisol and lights come up into the audience's eyes (Rivera 68). The text does not specify upon whose head the Angel intends to place the crown. In fact, the directions maintain a very definite ambiguity on this point. Holding the crown out to the audience could signify three things: the Angel passing the crown, and thus divine authority,

to the audience itself; the Angel presenting the crown before placing it on Marisol's head; the Angel presenting the crown before placing it on her own head. So which does Rivera intend? Who becomes the "new God," responsible for ensuring the peace of the New Millennium?

The absence of the Angel's wings can help to inform this question, as it suggests a transfer of power. While her lack of wings indicates the tenuous neutrality of the post-war earth, their absence also emphasizes a downplaying of the Angel's divinity; she is no longer differentiated from the other, human, characters onstage. This implies a decrease in the Angel's agency and power following the victory of the revolution. Consequently, it diminishes the possibility that the Angel will crown herself. If the Angel intended to assume the role of divine supremacy, it seem reasonable that she would appear with more pomp and circumstance, and with a more glorious and emphasized distinction between her and the humans, i.e., her wings.

Ruling out the possibility of the Angel's self-coronation, the remaining options imply that divine authority and responsibility is being placed in the hands of humanity, whether via Marisol or the audience as a whole. This connects more strongly with Rivera's emphasis on human agency and responsibility throughout the play. The symbolism of the crown at the end thus suggests a new situation in which religious authority rests entirely with humans, who have asserted their independence and now bear the brunt of the responsibility for change.

However, this transfer of power does not guarantee that the problems of the past era have been solved. The gaining of power and agency is both a victory and a responsibility; the future now depends on human actions, without the security or scapegoat of a divinely imposed structure. The very final moment of the play underlines this balance: "Bright, bright light begins to shine directly into the eyes of the audience—for several seconds—and

Marisol, the Angel, June, Lenny, and the homeless people seem to be turned into light. Then, all seem to disappear in the wild light of the new millennium—blackout” (Rivera 68). The language used here is very intriguing, particularly the “wild” light. Rivera’s vision of the new millennium is not peaceful, perfect, or calm; it is *wild*. What is more, the light envelopes the characters onstage, subsuming them into itself in an uncontrollable and even unsettling burst of glory. This language does not indicate a thousand-year kingdom of universal peace and bliss. Rather, the combination of what is said and unsaid, i.e. left ambiguous, definitively implicates that the new millennium which the war has ushered in is not one of perfection, but one of potential: the unconstrained potential for either good or evil.

This potentiality is, ultimately, Rivera’s central message. The violent revolution has created a new world, certainly, but it remains to be seen if that world can live up to its perfect and millennial expectations or if it will instead return to the cycles of violence and oppression that it sought to destroy. Studies of historical revolutionary movements, whether millenarian or not, have indicated a strong tendency for successful revolutions to replicate, at least in part, the oppressive systems they oppose. For instance, Crane Brinton argues that the inevitable result of a classical revolution is an at least partial reversion to former norms; these reversions happen in order to maintain the stability and create the structure of the new system (Barkun, *Disaster* 23). A new government may revert to the violent tactics of its predecessor, or to the more mundane but equally overpowering inevitability of bureaucracy. Once in power, a radical movement often loses the drive and energy that fueled its beginnings (Lewy 267).¹¹ Barkun, referencing Brinton, posits that victorious movements may return to

¹¹ In making this point, Lewy draws upon Niebuhr’s well-known church/sect theory, in which Niebuhr asserts that a sect, characterized by voluntary conversion and intense ideological commitment, must inevitably become

oppressive or violent tactics in order to prevent this slide into institutionalization, by recreating the intense feelings of community and urgency that manifest during a disaster. According to Barkun, “[t]error begins in the unsettled, precarious atmosphere of revolutionary victory... Postrevolutionary terror does seem to emerge out of the logic of the situation” (*Disaster* 209). The historical record, then, seems to work against the possibility that Marisol and her angel can create and sustain a perfect millennial reality. The final moments of the play suggest, as always, that human action will become the deciding factor; through their actions, the victors will either secure peace or become consumed by the uncontrollable and unsustainable power of their perfect vision.

Rivera creates this uncertain future to emphasize the care that must be taken in any movement seeking social change. The slow developmental progression of Marisol’s revolutionary journey naturally and accurately follows real histories of millennial revolutionary movements, underlining the often lengthy and difficult decision-making process prior to social or political upheaval; however, Rivera still remains unconvinced of the efficacy of Marisol’s eventual choice. The imagery in the final moments reflects this ambivalence, creating an emotionally powerful moment without explicitly endorsing violent revolution. The true impact of the play, then, comes from the development preceding its conclusion. By spending the majority of the play setting up the dystopian environment and exploring Marisol’s journey, rather than examining the revolution itself, Rivera prioritizes the *need* for change over the actual methods of achieving such change. Rivera works to convince his audience that the systems in their life are not working, that they must be changed, and that humans are responsible for creating this change on their own. He leaves

a church, characterized by more numerous members born into the church who lack the initial intense fervor, in order to sustain itself and survive past the first generation (Lewy 267-268).

them to decide, individually or collectively, how they wish to be a part of making that change a reality.

This balance between the events narrated in the script and the space provided for independent audience thought is crucial to a complete understanding of Rivera's text. This becomes even more important when producing a live performance of the play. In the next chapter, I will discuss how I, in my capacity as dramaturg, sought to maintain Rivera's intention while making necessary changes to the script in the William and Mary Theatre production of *Marisol*. I will also review how the practical incorporation of my research on the Nineties, Revelation, and revolutionary millennialism contributed to the audience's understanding and engagement.

Wings of War, Crowns of Victory: Research Applications through Dramaturgy

With any production of a play comes the balance between adhering to the specifics of the text and creating a realized, embodied vision. Often, the explicit demands of a script cannot be met by the space or resources available to a producing company; on a more creative level, the artistic team must find their own way to interpret and articulate the underlying themes and narrative of a play without feeling overly bound to the original vision of the playwright or previous productions. To transform the words of a script into a living, breathing theatrical production, the artistic team must be able to effectively and faithfully realize the world and story created by the text in a way best suited to the performance space, actors, audience, and unique creative vision of the given production.

Sometimes this means making changes to a text, whether to the dialogue or to the stage directions (referring to setting, staging, costuming, character traits, technical effects, etc.). Changes of the latter kind were required in the William and Mary Theatre's Second Season production of *Marisol*, for which I acted as dramaturg. The discussion of these changes here speaks to a fundamental difference in analyzing a live performance versus analyzing the text on which the performance is based. As is clearly evident, much of my analysis in the previous chapters has depended on Rivera's stage directions and the world he specifically envisions in the text of the play. However, the William and Mary production could not and did not precisely recreate this exact world or those exact directions. This raises the question of authorial intent, and the extent to which it may be divorced from the play as a self-contained entity. We could not perfectly replicate Rivera's intended world as presented by the text. However, we could try to ensure that the changes we made stayed true to the ultimate meaning and narrative of the play. Far from weakening or distracting from the

central themes, our changes were intended to strengthen the core message and adapt the play to the specific environment of the Studio Theater in which it was performed.

In the process of researching and then rehearsing the play with the director Kevin Place, he and I realized that certain aspects dictated by the text would hinder or distract from the way we wanted to tell the story. As dramaturg, my role was to synthesize the underlying meaning of a given symbol, setting, or description so that the changes we made would stay true to that meaning. This process can be most clearly seen in three examples: the Angel's wings, the golden crown, and the staging of the final moments of the play after Marisol's death. In each of these examples, my research helped to clarify the intention of the text, which could then be expressed in ways more suitable to this production than the methods Rivera specifies. The final decisions were made by the director and the design team, with my consultation. An extended discussion of these decisions and the degree to which they successfully maintained the underlying intent of the play lies beyond the purview of this research. Instead, I shall simply state the changes made in our production, why they were chosen, and their intended effect with regards to communicating the essential meaning of each moment.

As previously mentioned, the script calls for the Angel to appear visibly winged until her final entrance with the crown. Rivera describes her wings of peace as "crude, silver wings hang[ing] limply" (Rivera 5). Later, the Angel appears with her wings bloodily torn off; she "holds the bloody wings out to the audience, like an offering," then drops them to the street, where they "dissolve in Marisol's hands" (39). It is important to note that this change is explicitly referenced in the dialogue, both before and after it occurs. The Angel tells Marisol that she and her fellow celestial beings will "take off our wings of peace...and put on

our wings of war” (16); later Marisol remembers and repeats these words (42). In the Angel’s next appearance, towards the end of Act Two, the Angel has “huge, magnificent wings: her wings of war” (67); finally, in the last moments of the play, the Angel enters “wingless” (68).

We quickly determined that placing physical wings as a costume element on the actor playing the Angel in our production would be impractical and even distracting, given the small performance space and the limits of our resources. Instead, we intended to convey the meaning of the wings—in all their various manifestations—through alternative means. To do so, the wings’ significance had to be determined.

The importance of the Angel’s wings can be condensed to four points: the signification of a nonhuman, otherworldly being; the dramatic transition from peace to war; the reinforcement of the Angel’s military role in the angelic revolution; and the decrease of her alienation and superiority during the final moments of the play. These four connotations accompany the four variations of wingedness noted above. The presence of wings from the very beginning of the play singles the Angel out as a different kind of character; while the audience may not immediately identify her as a guardian angel, given her “urban warrior” aesthetic (6), they will recognize that she is non-human. This anticipates her entrance and identification in Marisol’s apartment in Scene Four. The tearing off of her wings underscores the abrupt and dramatic transition between peace and war, foreshadowing the changes that occur in the second act. It is a definitive and powerful break, violently realizing the comparatively innocuous language of “dropping” her wings. The wings of peace are not merely discarded; they are destroyed, just as Marisol’s New York will be completely transformed. The appearance of the wings of war, featured only briefly as Marisol recounts her vision of the celestial battle, reinforces the Angel’s new identity as a military leader and

reflects the widespread violence occurring in both Heaven and Earth. The significance of the Angel's winglessness at the play's conclusion was discussed in Chapter Three; suffice to say that it implies the new Earth is in a state of limbo, suspended uneasily between war and peace. It also removes the Angel's defining and differentiating feature, making her no more or less splendid than the human characters we see on stage.

To maintain the essence of the narrative and symbolism attached to the Angel's wings, any changes made to them in our production would have to convey the four aforementioned significations. This was achieved through a variety of means. The first three instances involved the Angel's appearance, physicality, and movements; the fourth change was largely implemented through the staging of the end of the play, and as such will be discussed below in an examination of the final moments as a whole.

In lieu of costumed wings, our production relied on specific staging, physicality, and technical effects to delineate the Angel as a different, otherworldly being from the first moments of the show. Whereas in the script the Angel watches the train scene from atop a ladder (5), in our production a balcony level was employed to create a spatial distinction between the Angel's realm and the Earth below. This distinction was emphasized through lighting choices that further isolated the Angel from the action on the stage. In addition, the moments where the Angel directly intervenes in Marisol's life—when she stops the subway train to enable Marisol's escape from the Man with Golf Club and when she turns Sandy into salt—were accompanied by increased lighting on and a deliberate gesture by the actor playing the Angel. Through her physical location and her apparent supernatural powers, the Angel was established as a non-human being even before her explicit identification in Scene

Four, thus supporting the same underlying intent created within the text by the Angel's wings.

To replicate the dramatic and violent effect of the Angel carrying her bloody, torn-off wings of peace, our production utilized a projected effect. The Angel "unfolded" great white wings, which then burst into flame as she clenched her fists. The intended effect was to signify the Angel's conscious unfolding of the white wings of peace, followed by her deliberate rejection of peace through the violent transformation of fire. The wings' abrupt shift prefigured the sudden changes in the second act, when New York is completely altered. In addition, the use of flames in this moment contributed to a recurring motif of fire as purification. The Angel recommends "fire on a massive scale" in the city so that life may begin anew (12); the burning of her wings thus recalled her statement and suggested the possibility of renewal through cleansing fire. However, in the second act this motif becomes much more menacing; June's Nazi persona burns homeless people in the name of racial purification, and she actually repeats the Angel's phrasing about widespread fire (64). The use of fiery wings at the end of Act One acted as a bridge between these two sides of cleansing flames; it evoked the Angel's hopes of rebirth through destruction while anticipating the purely violent use of fire in the second act.

Rather than through wings of war, our production chose to communicate the Angel's military identity during Marisol's account of the angelic war through costume choices. The Angel was dressed in camouflage, her face streaked with blood and military face paint, wearing the dog tags of her fallen comrades. The basis for these costume choices was broadly suggested by the text, creating the clear image of a militant leader.

The second major change which required close dramaturgical analysis was the golden crown. According to the opening stage directions, “floating in the sky is a small gold crown inside a clear glass box” (6). The crown remains there until the final moments of the play; the script states that it is still present at the beginning of Act Two (41) and Marisol directs a monologue at it about halfway through the act (55). Finally, it appears in the Angel’s hand when she enters in the play’s last moments (68). Crowns in general are explicitly mentioned at various points in the play, most notably when the Angel speaks of crowning a new God (16). The crown has both biblical and secular significance and so carries a number of notable connotations.

As stated in the previous chapter, the crown represents the total political authority of a king over his subjects. It instantly sets up a system of hierarchical power. In *Marisol*, the crown quickly becomes associated with God and the existing religious regime, both through the Angel’s explicit connection of the two and through pre-existing symbolic traditions. Crowns are often used in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments. They are especially common in Revelation: the faithful are promised the “crown of life” (2:10), in Heaven the twenty-four elders cast their golden crowns worshipfully before God (4:4, 10), and the Messiah wears his own golden crown (14:14). In Revelation, the crown carries an inherent religious as well as political connotation, placing God in a position above all earthly authority. The use of the crown in *Marisol* similarly merges the political and religious meanings, but with the definite implication of a hierarchical and oppressive religious regime.

The glass box encasing the crown is reminiscent of the “sea of glass” surrounding God’s throne in the heavenly court in Revelation 4:6. Throughout the Bible, the sea is a symbol of chaos (Carey 31); the image of the sea of glass in God’s throne room thus

communicates God's power over that chaos, turning treacherous ocean waters into perfectly still glass (Blount, *Themes*). In *Marisol*, this same imagery can be seen to reflect God's *apparent* control: the world's chaos is repressed into stillness through authoritarian regimes and blind faith in the old systems, but underneath the glassy surface, revolutionary intent surges. The glass box also creates a distinct sense of separation, a barrier between God's power and the subjects below. The crown's overall effect is one of remote and unreachable majesty, supporting the concept of a senile God turning a blind eye to his suffering creation.

Finally, the Angel's use of the crown at the end of the play denotes a transfer of power with the additional hint that the remnants of the past system are not completely gone. To paraphrase the famous aphorism, the final moments proclaim: "God is dead; long live God." Over the course of the play, the crown symbolizes a distant, rigid, and obsolete religious hierarchy existing in the world, concentrated in the figure of a "right-wing, white male, corporate God" (Fricker), and then becomes a tool in the transfer of power.

For a variety of technical reasons, suspending a crown for the duration of the play was deemed impractical and undesirable. Instead, a crown was placed center stage on a stool draped with black satin and set in a tight spotlight prior to the start of the production; it was then removed for the duration of the show until the Angel brought it out for the final moment.

This change may seem drastically different from the course of action provided by the text, but the underlying intent was the same. In our production, an ornate gold crown was chosen to communicate the appropriate sense of richness, political control, and excess. Its isolated space at the start of the show highlighted its presence, as suspension does in the text, while maintaining its containment and separation from the action. Furthermore, the gendered

nature of the crown, suggestive of a male king rather than a female queen, served to reinforce the patriarchal structure against which the Angel and, ultimately, Marisol rebel. The absence of the crown for the duration of the play did not significantly affect the action or intent of the piece; Marisol explicitly addresses God where, according to the text, she looks at the crown, so no explicit symbolism was lost. In fact, its absence was intended to reflect God's abandonment of humanity and the world. The crown became an especially charged symbol of exclusive male religio-political rule.

The third and perhaps most substantial change to the directions in the text occurred in the final moments of the play. These events and their significance were extensively discussed in the previous chapter within the context of their revolutionary implication, so we will simply review the pertinent details here. According to the text, the final moments of the play are as follows: a homeless person, June, and Lenny throw rocks at the sky; the moon returns; the war climaxes; and the Angel enters, carrying the crown. She holds the crown out to the audience and kisses Marisol, and "the wild light of the new millennium" comes up into the eyes of the audience, followed by a blackout (68).

As noted previously, a persistent ambiguity pervades these last moments, especially with regards to who will be crowned the "new God." The strongest implication is that humankind—whether represented by the audience or by Marisol—will bear the authority and the responsibility in the new millennium. The central theme to communicate here, then, is the transfer of power from lofty, distant hierarchies to immediate and collective human agency. However, the ambiguity cannot completely be dismissed, as it creates an objective distance for the audience from which they may evaluate their own role in creating change or enabling oppression.

The staging in our production differed fairly substantially from the text. In our version, the actor playing Marisol reappeared on the balcony level after being shot by the Woman in Furs. From there, events progressed much as the script suggests until after the climax of the heavenly war. At this point, the Angel appeared next to Marisol, carrying the crown in her hands. She held the crown out to Marisol, who took it; then the two kissed, after which Marisol turned and presented the crown to the circle of homeless characters, including June and Lenny, on the ground below. Lights came up onto the audience, followed by a blackout.

This significant change, especially transferring the crown to Marisol's hands, was intended to accomplish two things. The first refers back to our discussion of the Angel's wings. As noted above, the Angel's lack of wings in this moment in the text removes her differentiating feature and establishes an uncertain state on Earth between war and peace. This winglessness also reduces the possibility that the Angel might intend to crown herself God. Because physical wings were entirely absent in our production, however, these implications had to appear in a different way. By handing the crown to Marisol, the Angel concedes power, relinquishing her formerly exceptional status. However, she is still clothed in her military camouflage, reminding the audience that the hands now holding a crown held a submachine gun only moments before. The Angel's transfer of the crown diminishes her power, but her presence also reminds us of just how this crown was won: through violence and death on a massive scale.

Secondly, placing the crown directly in Marisol's hands reinforces the emphasis on human agency that is so crucial to Rivera's text without losing the necessary ambiguity. The new staging still left the question of who would be crowned undecided: Marisol or the rest of

humankind? This ambiguity encouraged the same necessary questions demanded by the text's conclusion: who bears responsibility for justice? Can we rectify mistakes of the past? How are we meant to bring about much-needed change? While these questions remained unresolved, Marisol's handling of the crown erased its former, privileged status and literally put power into the hands of the people. By having Marisol hold the crown out instead of the Angel, the importance of human involvement and responsibility was crystallized and concentrated.

These examples show how my research supported and informed the practical changes made in our production during the rehearsal process. The research, along with my understanding and analysis of the text, was an open and integral part of the production process with the director, designers, and actors. The director and I both agreed that we wanted to communicate these same ideas to the audience through the use of dramaturgical materials separate from the performance itself. To do this, however, a different method from the exclusively research-based approach used during the production process would be necessary. With relation to the audience, any explicit discussion of themes, imagery, and structure would at best seem purely academic and distanced from the production, and at worst patronize the audience and limit them to one particular interpretation of the play.

Instead, I wanted to facilitate the audience's own discovery of these themes, as I had come to discover them during my research and experience of the play. To use a metaphor, the aim was to illuminate the journey of the production, rather than to grab the audience's hand and pull them headlong down one particular path. I set out to accomplish this using three dramaturgical tools: a note in the program; talkbacks with the audience, cast, and production team following each performance; and a dramaturgical installation adjacent to the

performance space.¹² The combined intent for these three tools was to connect the audience with the text and with my research in a non-discursive and engaging manner by reinforcing the themes of the play and providing some context without simply lecturing the audience on Revelation imagery or apocalyptic anxiety.

The program notes were predominantly designed to provide cultural context for the creation of the show and its original production. They referenced the social, political, and religious tension in the U.S. at the close of the twentieth century, and touched on Rivera's apocalyptic landscape and its connection to Revelation. Overall, the notes were intended to reference certain of the themes and images present in the play without providing too much definitive analysis. The talkbacks after each performance were similarly structured to emphasize audience response rather than communicate any explicit interpretation of the text. Likewise, the installation sought to avoid unambiguous analysis. However, in contrast to the more detached quality of the notes and the talkbacks, the installation was designed to actively, yet indirectly, mirror, recreate, and amplify the world and themes present in the production and extend them beyond the performance itself.

The installation featured a combination of images and text and had three distinct stages: pre-show, intermission, and post-show. These stages of the installation reflected different thematic elements pertinent to what the audience was about to see or had seen. Each phase had a particular guiding theme or motif, designed to augment and enhance the audience's reactions to each part of the show. The stages built off of each other, creating a cumulative effect encompassing the broad themes of the play and its relevance to contemporary society and existence. In many ways, the three stages can be seen as reflections

¹² The program notes and the images and text used in the installation can be found in the Appendix.

of the three major sections of this research: apocalyptic anxieties in everyday life, both secular and religious; archetypal representations of the Apocalypse (including those of Revelation); and revolutionary reactions and millennial hopes for the future.

The pre-show installment was, in a practical sense, designed to introduce the audience to the general tone and themes of the show. Before entering the hallway in which the bulk of the installation was located, audience members saw a quote from Charles Strozier's foreword to *The Year 2000*, in which he describes the inevitability of apocalyptic thought in contemporary society, given the increasing possibilities of collective death in the modern age (5). Once in the hallway, an audience member found photographs depicting modern-day atrocities and catastrophes: fire, earthquakes, brutality, plagues. Opposite from these photos, scrawled onto a wall of glass, were written quotes from both the play itself and various essays, all focusing on the impending threat of mass destruction on earth and the dangerous times in which we live. Banners hung around the space containing additionally relevant text; one of these, hung above the final doorway before the ticket table, displayed one of June's lines from Scene Five: "The Dark Ages are here" (Rivera 20). The intent with the first phase was to prime the audience to connect the events in the play to their own lives; the Strozier quote created an apocalyptic frame of reference with which to view the photos of real-life catastrophe and decay. This frame, and the images, introduced the audience to the major conceit of the show, priming them to understand Marisol's world as in apocalyptic decline, and to recognize that decline in their own lives and environments.

The second stage of the installation served both as a reflection on the events of the first act and a precursor to the thematic and stylistic shift of the second act. At intermission, additional photographs, words, and banners were added to the original set. The new images

were art prints, all representing the artists' varied interpretations of their apocalyptic anxieties. These images were thematically paired, broadly, with the original images, so that an image of sick newborns led to Keith Haring's famous painting of the irradiated baby, and a polluted river preceded a mural of a fountain spilling forth skeletons and colorful chaos. Much of the artwork contained archetypal images of the Apocalypse, from the general chaos of flames and death to the specific symbol of a rider on a pale horse. The images thus reinforced the dystopian setting of the first act. Beyond that, though, the images also primed the audience in a key way for the themes and environment they would encounter in the second act of the play. Act Two of *Marisol* features a dramatic shift from the strange but largely relatable world of the first act to a surreal, distorted, fully apocalyptic landscape. The events of the second act are equally bizarre, from the Woman in Furs' account of her torture to Lenny's pregnancy and labor. The artwork presented during intermission reflected the more surreal and abstracted qualities of the second act. Similarly, the new quotes on the windows and walls contained poetic and metaphoric descriptions of the apocalyptic or millennial experience. For instance, excerpts were posted from Ernesto Cardenal's 1965 poem "Apocalypse," a vivid and violent retelling of Revelation through a contemporaneous, technological lens. Adding artistic and highly symbolic representations of the Apocalypse, whether verbal or pictorial, shifted the emphasis from real-world relevance to more imaginative and heightened experiences, which were intended to prepare the audience for their confrontation with the angelic war in Act Two and the millennial conclusion of the play. The final banner leading back to the performance space summed up this shift with an echo of the Angel's warning to Marisol: "Soon you won't recognize the world" (17).

After the performance, the audience exited through the hall, now in its final stage. The third phase of the installation focused on the marked contrast of hope and risk in the play's conclusion; the added images and text spoke to the paradoxical nature of victory and the fragile promise of millennial perfection. As before, the new images continued to build off of the previous sets, implying a narrative of destruction, emotional reaction, and active response. For instance, the polluted river/apocalyptic fountain now included a poster from the radical environmental protection group Earth First. Many of the images conveyed a sense of action, revolution, or hope; others, such as a photo of protests in Egypt, reminded the audience that revolution rarely has so neat a resolution as the play may seem to imply. Similarly, the new texts consisted of quotes that both called for action and cautioned against blind faith in utopian solutions, highlighting the close relationship between utopia and dystopia. Finally, more excerpts from Cardenal's poem were posted; these new lines spoke about the tendency for revolutionary leaders to become dictators in their turn, but concluded with the potential for worldly salvation based on love and communal union. The final image before leaving the space was a banner which carried a rewriting of Marisol's last words: WHAT HOPE [?]. Rewriting the final words of the play synthesized the central thesis of the unsettling potential for either glory or horror following a drastic social change. Together, the images and words of the installation's final phase supported the central theme of the production: changing our broke and oppressive systems is necessary and reliant on human action, but revolution carries the risk of recreating the injustice it opposes.

The installation was intended to reflect the major themes and motifs of the play so that the audience would encounter these themes even when not actively watching the performance. By replicating the themes of the play, the installation reflected non-discursively

on the text, allowing for the audience's own connection with both the performance and the installation. In addition to mirroring the themes, the actual structure and design of the installation extended the world of the play outside of the performance space, building an environment that recreated the stress and change of Marisol's experience. The installation was both the first and last impression of the audience, as the majority of the audience members entered and exited through the installation hallway. Thus, this installation constantly maintained the audience in the world of the play from their arrival at the theatre until their departure. This prevented the audience from completely disengaging from the performance at any time, even during the intermission, which traditionally serves as a break from a theatrical production. Instead, the installation's design created the same sense of confinement and change found throughout the play itself.

First, the practical structure of the installation necessitated a degree of enclosure and personal interaction that paralleled themes in the play. The space was intentionally designed so as to heavily direct audience movement through the installation: other entrances to the performance space were at least partially blocked off, encouraging the audience to travel through the hallway housing the installation any time they wished to enter or exit the space. In addition to this recommended traffic pattern, the hallway with the installation was not particularly large, comfortably holding only thirty to forty people. The Studio Theatre sat eighty-six audience members, and on the night with lowest attendance the audience contained around seventy people. Obviously the hallway could not contain the entirety of the audience at any given time. This became especially relevant at intermission, when the whole audience was asked to leave the performance space to facilitate a scene change.

This ratio of individuals to available space within the installation had two major effects: it invited movement through the installation, rather than static contemplation; and it increased the possibility of human interaction. The press of people, especially at the start of intermission, necessitated a fairly constant flow through the hallway into the larger room beyond it. Audience members still expressed an interest in the installation materials and took the time to examine them, but in a fairly dynamic way. In the process, individuals were forced to interact, either in discussion of the installation elements or through the simple event of bumping into someone in the close quarters. Other audience members consciously sought out relative isolation, apparently as a response to the close proximity of people in the main gathering spaces.

This interplay between necessitated movement and unplanned but unavoidable interaction paralleled and recreated aspects of the world in *Marisol*. The play is characterized by movement and stagnation. In the first act, the action moves constantly from setting to setting all across New York; of the nine scenes in Act One only one scene repeats the setting of the scene it follows (Scenes Three and Four, which both take place in Marisol's apartment).¹³ The transitions between these scenes additionally suggest movement and transit; a majority of the scenes begin or end with Marisol's emphatic entrance or exit from one location to the next. The first act, then, stresses the rapid pace of life characteristic of a New York narrative.

The second act, in contradistinction to the first, revolves around Marisol's stasis, both physical and mental. Throughout the act she attempts to reach Brooklyn and find June, but

¹³ Scene Seven may appear as a possible exception to this, in that the tri-part setting includes June's apartment (where Scene Six takes place) and Marisol's apartment (the location for Scene Eight). However, the majority of the action in this scene takes place with Lenny in an undisclosed location "one the street;" as such, a new setting is still introduced, which mitigates the repetition of the other two locations.

initially she cannot orient herself sufficiently to attempt successful travel. Her mental state reflects this physical limbo; over the course of the act Marisol tries to revolutionize her thinking but falls back again and again onto the comfort and stability of her pre-assumed, unchanging beliefs. Not until the final few pages of the act can Marisol finally allow herself to move away from her archaic and engrained worldview; appropriately and significantly, this mental shift occurs after she has successfully navigated the physical journey to Brooklyn, changing her geographic location.

Marisol's personal interactions are crucial to both her physical and emotional journey. These interactions, whether helpful or hostile, define her experiences and directly influence her development. The repeated attacks in the first act strengthen Marisol's will to survive, while her more interpersonal encounters in the second act allow her to orient herself in the new, uncharted world, no matter how fragile the connection or how short a time it lasts. In a literal sense, even, other people's actions directly help Marisol physically move; Scar Tissue points her southwards and Lenny takes her the final steps into Brooklyn (Rivera 53, 60-61). Marisol's sense of movement drives much of the play, but it relies on her personal interactions.

In a sense, then, the structure of the dramaturgical installation mirrored this combination of movement and human interaction. Sometimes the audience members were able to walk freely; at other points, the press of the crowd necessitated movement that perhaps challenged the individual's sense of space. To an extent, the personal interactions created by the space also reflected Marisol's range of human interaction; to be sure, no acts of aggression emerged in the hallway, but the act of companionably reflecting on an image with a friend differs significantly from the discomfort of being jostled about in a crowd. By

recreating to a degree the sense of confinement, movement, and collision that the play engenders, the installation extended the world of the play beyond the theatre.

The continually varying nature of the installation further paralleled the world and atmosphere of the production. The unusual feature of change in the installation created a counterpoint to the changes Marisol both experiences and undergoes. Change defines Marisol's life; she can never fully relax into the world around, for it constantly shifts, often in startling and threatening ways. Uncertainty plays a key role in Marisol's characterization, and, through her, in the audience's experience of the play. The stylistic and narrative shift from Act One to Act Two especially demonstrates this, as the audience feels the same sentiments of confusion, uncertainty, and anxiety that Marisol experiences. The installation sought to correspond to and amplify these notions of change, uncertainty, and anticipation. In particular, the shift in style of the second phase (photographs to artwork) paralleled the drastic scenic change occurring during the intermission; the audience left one environment (the theatre) to encounter a changed space (the second phase of the installation), and then returned to the first environment only to find it wholly changed in the interim. The unusual move of requesting that the audience leave the theatre during intermission further amplified the feelings of change and uncertainty, as it created a rift in the audience's expectations of being able to free move about during the act break, as is common for many theatrical performances.

It must be noted that these changes were not wholly unanticipated; in fact, the audience was repeatedly encouraged to take note of the changing installation, both vocally and in the written program. Significantly, however, the audience could merely expect the presence of change; they did not know what the change would entail. Thus, the feeling

created was one of anticipated but uncertain change. This, too, finds its parallel in the play. The Angel warns Marisol of the changes to come, which Lenny (and, to an extent, June) repeat and elaborate. In keeping with the spirit of prophecy, these warnings tend to be vague and imprecise, merely warning that “big changes are coming” (29) and “soon you’re not going to recognize the world” (17). Marisol, then, feels vaguely unsettled by these prophetic alarms, but not enough to take concrete action to prepare for them. In the same way, the audience was informed of impending changes without having access to further details; the rather unorthodox practice of evolving the installation was intended to maintain a certain level of anticipation paralleling the constant change of Marisol’s environment.¹⁴

The emphasis throughout this chapter on my “intent” with the installation necessarily begs the question of success: did the installation affect the audience in the way we had intended? Without wishing to introduce this question and then immediately abandon it, it must be said that a qualitative analysis of the perceived success of the dramaturgical installations lies beyond the scope of this research. However, it may be safe to proffer some broad conclusions. It is certainly realistic to conclude that not everyone left the theatre a passionate revolutionary; local newspapers in the weeks following the production reported a definite lack of uprisings in the area. However, this does not mean the installation and the production necessarily failed.

The goal of the production was to plant a spark of revolutionary impulse within the audience members; the successive goal of the dramaturgical materials was to fan that spark in those individuals who felt it more keenly. The talkbacks can, to a degree, be seen as an

¹⁴ The equally unorthodox move to request that the audience leave the theatre during intermission also contributed to this effect; the enforced evacuation begged the question of what could be going on in the performance space that required secrecy.

indication of those audience members who felt especially affected by the play's content. The questions asked during the talkbacks reflected this impact; every night there were individuals who inquired as to the meaning of the play, the ambiguity of the conclusion, and the degree to which Rivera wanted them to act. The director and I avoided any concrete answers to these questions, turning instead to the individual's own experience of the play and his or her own interpretation. The crucial factor, to us, was to encourage those intrigued by the play to continue reflecting on its message, rather than to give them a neatly packaged meaning. The installation similarly sought to provide a foundation from which the audience members could make their own decisions. We intended to encourage the audience to connect the play with their daily lives, recognize the essential challenges of striving for perfection, and feel the need to enact change in their lives and world regardless of these difficulties. Again, a comprehensive analysis of our success in encouraging this reflection would require a complete study of each individual audience member's response. But given the continued reflection and introspection expressed by those who attended the talkbacks and commented on the installation, we can perhaps hope that somewhere in the audience sat a Marisol with whom the call for revolutionary action resonated in truth.

Conclusion

The preceding chapters have demonstrated how Rivera draws from traditional apocalyptic and millennial characteristics to create his own unique version of revolutionary millenarianism in *Marisol*, encouraging audience members to look critically at the world and take responsibility for the changes it so desperately needs. The first chapter examined *Marisol* within its cultural and historical context at the end of the twentieth century. Rivera uses the apocalyptic and pre-year 2000 setting of the play to create a social critique of American society at the time; in doing so he also reflects and reacts to the premillennial anxieties that affected large sections of the U.S. populace, whether consciously or subconsciously.¹⁵

The second chapter explored another way in which Rivera addresses the expectations and previously held beliefs of his audience: through allusions to the structure and imagery of the book of Revelation. Rivera adopts and adapts the widely familiar themes from the biblical Apocalypse, from the plagues and devastations to the very concept of a celestial war, and with them creates a framework highly reminiscent of John's visions. Once this frame of reference has been established, however, he promptly subverts it, upending the traditional source of divine authority and creating an inverted narrative where the angelic rebels are fighting to save the universe, not destroy it. The constant interplay between these opposing perspectives creates a dynamic space for the audience members wherein they may evaluate each side and come to their own conclusions.

¹⁵ Interestingly, in this capacity Rivera once again mirrors Revelation; John's visions are a scathing social critique of the Roman Empire and, it has been argued, served an important cathartic role for its readers in redirecting their feelings of anger and helplessness (c.f. A.Y. Collins).

The third chapter expanded on this idea of independent audience thought through an analysis of the specific kind of revolutionary millenarianism Rivera creates within the play. For a movement to be millennial it must expect a salvation that is collective, terrestrial, imminent, total, and miraculous. For it to be revolutionary it must desire a complete and radical change of the system it opposes, rather than any attempt to reform from within. Revolutionary millenarian movements, then, must seek a total and immediate transformation of the current world order into a New Age of ultimate and transcendent perfection. Crucially, in revolutionary millenarianism this change must be brought about by human agency; in this way it differs from more passive forms of millennial expectation that rely on divine intervention.

Rivera's *Marisol* meets all these aforementioned requirements, as well as other characteristics common to millenarian revolutions, such as the presence of widespread disaster and social chaos and the emergence of a divinely inspired charismatic leader (in the figure of Marisol). The objective apocalyptic reality of the play's setting, as opposed to the more subjective dangers perceived by actual millenarian groups, removes the need for a supportive and isolated community to reinforce Marisol's emerging millennial beliefs. It thus enables the growth of a revolutionary millenarian movement in an urban environment, which would otherwise be unlikely. The play traces Marisol's long journey to revolutionary ideology, and provides only a brief glimpse of the revolution itself and its aftermath. This reflects Rivera's ambivalence about the success of violent movements; he presents a revolutionary narrative so as to emphasize the urgent need for change in a society run by broken and oppressive institutions, but does not wholeheartedly endorse the methods used by Marisol and her Angel. Instead, he encourages the audience to come to their own

conclusions, to feel the impetus to create change and then decide how they, individually or collectively, wish to make that change a reality.

The fourth chapter discussed the practical application of all these factors in the William and Mary Theatre production of *Marisol* in February of 2014. Due to the nature of the performance space and the available resources, certain changes had to be adopted in the production; our ability to effectively make these changes relied on maintaining the underlying significance and intent of the original text. Ultimately, the changes were designed so as to preserve the essential themes and narrative of the play. In addition, I designed dramaturgical materials to enhance the audience's experience and understanding of the performance in a non-discursive manner, without dictating a specific interpretation. In particular, the installation created an accompanying framework which introduced and contextualized themes of the play and then supported and amplified the audience's reactions those themes. This was accomplished through the evolving content of the installation as well as through its design and structure. Dramaturgical notes and audience talkbacks also contributed to the supportive materials.

The research presented here inherently raises a question which frequently arose during audience talkbacks; namely, is Rivera inherently against religion, and is *Marisol* an anti-religious play? The question is certainly reasonable; after all, the play revolves around an angelic plot to kill God, which seems fairly damning of religious belief. However, I submit that the answer is no; Rivera is not against religion *per se*. Rather, he opposes the current religious structures that he sees as reinforcing oppressive systems and holding back human growth. The God of *Marisol* is a "right-wing, white male, corporate God," one who must be replaced with a source of divine inspiration that more fully supports the diverse and

humanized society we should strive to create (Fricker). It would possibly be fair to say that Rivera sees religion more as a tool for social development than as something intrinsically true, but that does not equate with wanting to abolish the concept of religion as a whole. Rivera instead wishes for us to evaluate the subject of our worship and decide if it is actively enabling us, as a society and as a species, to move towards a more just and equitable society. If not, Rivera suggests that we create “new mythologies” that will fulfill such a need (Fricker). We need mythologies that speak to human compassion, integrity, and agency; mythologies like those presented in *Marisol*. Only then can we hope to create the radical—but ultimately peaceful—change required to bring about our own, irreducibly human Millennium.

Appendix: Dramaturgical Materials

Reproduced here are some of the dramaturgical materials I created for the William and Mary Theatre production of *Marisol*. An extensive discussion of these materials constitutes the fourth chapter of this work. This appendix contains the program notes and the text and images used in the accompanying dramaturgical installation.

Recreating a three dimensional installation on paper presented something of a challenge, especially in communicating the sense of change that played such a key role in connecting the installation to the performance. I have attempted to resolve this issue by providing examples of both the content and the practical structure in which it was presented.

The images are arranged into eight sets; each contains an image from the pre-show, intermission, and post-show phases of the installation, respectively, when viewed from top to bottom. This arrangement, by necessity, differs somewhat from that of the installation; it most closely parallels the installation's final stage, in which all the images were simultaneously on display, using the same groupings presented here.

Following the images is a rendering of the wall of windows on which text was written during each section of the installation. Again, it mirrors the final, comprehensive phase. The different colors correspond to each stage: blue for pre-show, green for intermission, and red for post-show. This image is included as an approximate example of the installation's use of the architectural space in which it was located. A full list of the texts used and their sources follows the rendering. To preserve their cohesive impact, excerpts from Ernesto Cardenal's poem *Apocalypse* appear on a separate page; in the installation the audience saw up to "vapor" during intermission, with the rest of the selection added during the final phase.

Notes from the Dramaturg

At the end of the twentieth century, Americans faced a time of great uncertainty. With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the nation turned introspective, no longer united against an omnipresent enemy. The post-war materialist culture started to lose its glamour, while the environmental consequences of human consumption could no longer be ignored. Americans restlessly cast about for a new external focus and found it in the approaching millennium.

Religious and secular individuals alike held up the year 2000 as a portentous date. Optimistic futurists exclaimed about social progress and utopian ideals while evangelist Christians published best-selling books prophesying the End of Days. Americans at all levels of society saw the close of the century as nothing less than the end of an age, but reached no consensus about what the new age would hold.

Marisol first appeared on stage in 1992, towards the height of all these “pre-millennium jitters.” Responding to his audience’s conscious and subconscious anxieties, Rivera conceives a setting in which the impending millennium is all too significant: *Marisol*’s world teeters on the edge of chaos, poised for unimaginable change.

In Act One, *Marisol* speaks of war in heaven and angels fighting a dragon. The quote comes from the Book of Revelation, the most well-known apocalyptic work in Western literature. Rivera pulls from Revelation’s vivid imagery to establish *Marisol*’s dystopian New York: plagues, darkness, fire raining from the sky. But Rivera does not simply rely on these symbols, which are etched into our cultural consciousness whether we realize it or not. Instead, throughout the play he upends our expectations of the apocalypse, ultimately asking us to reconsider where our loyalties lie.

We invite you to explore the changing art installation in the Andrews hallway during intermission and after the show as you reflect on the performance. How can *you* contribute to the New Millennium?



Figure 1.1



Figure 1.2



Figure 1.3



Figure 2.1



Figure 2.2



Figure 2.3

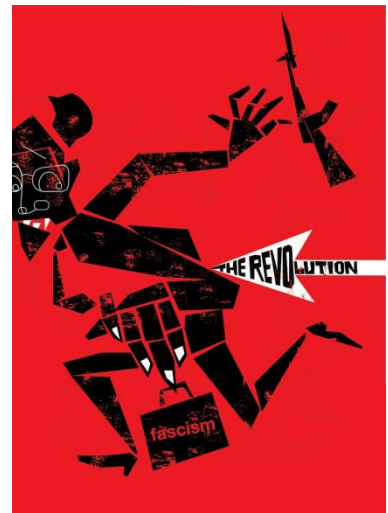


Figure 2.4



Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2



Figure 3.3



Figure 4.1



Figure 4.2



Figure 4.3



Figure 5.1

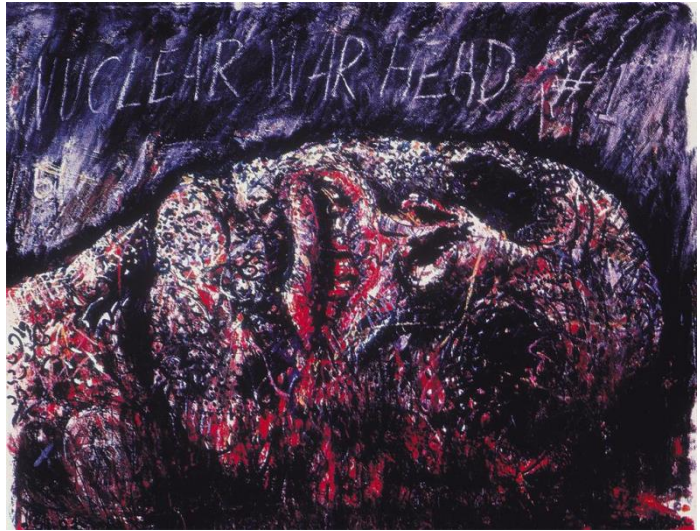


Figure 5.2



Figure 5.3



Figure 6.1



Figure 6.2



Figure 6.3



Figure 7.1

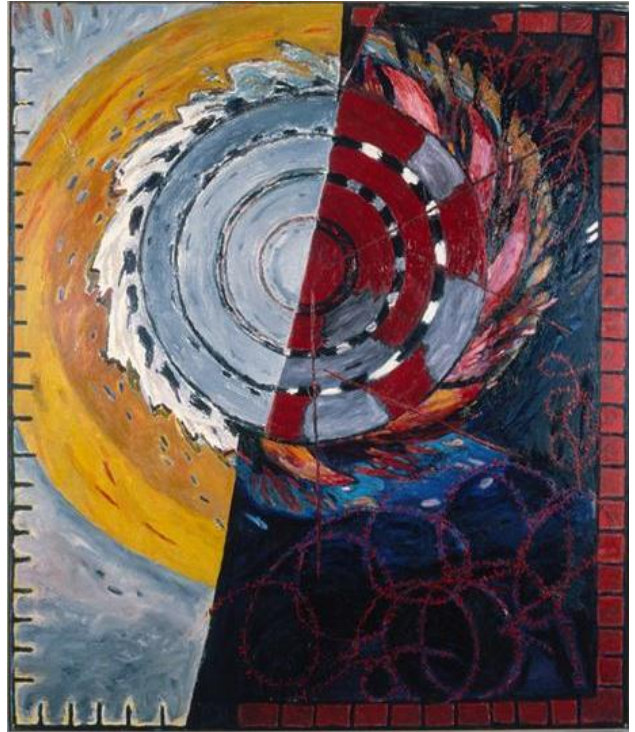


Figure 7.2



Figure 7.3



Figure 8.1



Figure 8.2



Figure 8.3

Get yourself some power!

WAKE UP

and not be part of it.

○

You still think you can glide through the world

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.
(Revelation 12:7-8)

We are not saved alone, nor are we damned alone

CAN YOU SMELL THE DISASTER?

...UNLESS YOU WANT TO JOIN US

Dystopian outcomes result from "successful" utopian projects...

Capitalism unleashed is seen to threaten the life-support systems of the planet. Left unchecked it bids fair to turn the world into a moral and material wasteland.

The idea of the apocalypse has accompanied utopian thought since its first beginnings, pursuing it like a shadow, like a reverse side that cannot be left behind: without catastrophe, no millennium, without apocalypse, no paradise.

Mundus Senescit (the world grows old)

Installation Text

Pre-Show:

- Can you smell the disaster? (from Rivera 12).
- “Capitalism unleashed is seen to threaten the life-support systems of the planet. Left unchecked it bids fair to turn the world into a moral and material wasteland” (Kumar 209).
- “*Mundus senescit*” (Kumar 201).
- WAKE UP (from Rivera 5).
- “Welcome to the new world order” (Rivera 45).
- “[T]he Dark Ages are here” (Rivera 20).
- “The nuclear age, however, brought about a qualitative shift in that process of altering human consciousness of collective death. It is now quite obvious and real that the human experiment could end. It is fatuous to pretend otherwise. We no longer need poets to tell us it could end with a bang, or a whimper, or in the agony of AIDS. Consciousness of human ending haunt the psyches of quite ordinary people. The psychological consequences are enormous. If once it took an act of imagination to think about the end time, now it takes an act of imagination, or a numbing, *not* to think about it. In such a world we all become end timers” (Strozier, *Year 2000 5*, original emphasis, in-text references removed).

Intermission:

- “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven” (*King James Version*, Rev. 12:7-8)
- “The idea of the apocalypse has accompanied utopian thought since its first beginnings, pursuing it like a shadow, like a reverse side that cannot be left behind: without catastrophe, no millennium, without apocalypse, no paradise” (Enzenberger, Hans Magnus, quoted in Kumar 205).
- “*Mundus senescit*—‘the world grows old’” (Kumar 201).
- “[B]ig changes are coming” (Rivera 29).
- “[G]et yourself some *power*” (Rivera 17)

Post-show

- “You still think you can glide through the world and not be part of it” (Rivera 50).
- “We are not saved alone, nor are we damned alone” (McGinn 77).
- Dystopian outcomes result from “successful” utopian projects (from Kumar).
- “...Unless you want to join us” (Rivera 66).
- WHAT HOPE [?] (from Rivera 68).

APOCALYPSE

AND BEHOLD

I saw an Angel

(all his cells were electronic eyes)

and I heard a supersonic voice

saying: Open up thy typewriter and type

and I beheld a silver projectile in flight

which went from Europe to America in twenty minutes

and the name of the projectile was the H-Bomb

(and hell flew with it)

.....
and the third Angel set off the warning siren

and I beheld a mushroom cloud above New York

and a mushroom cloud above Moscow

and a mushroom cloud above London

and a mushroom cloud above Peking

(and Hiroshima's fate was envied)

And all the stores and all the museums and all the libraries

and all the beauties of the earth

were turned to vapor

.....
and the Angel said unto me: the which thou dost see on

the Beast are dictators,

and their horns are revolutionary leaders who are not dictators yet

but they will be later

.....
And in the Earth's biology I saw a new Evolution

It was as though a New Planet had appeared in space

For death and hell were cast into the sea of nuclear fire

and neither were there peoples as before

but I saw rather a new species freshly evolved

a species not made up of individuals

but rather one sole organism

made up of men in place of cells

.....
And there was a New Canticle

and all other inhabited planets heard the Earth singing

and it was a love-song

(Cardenal 33-34, 37).

Image Sources

Reclaiming the Streets

Figure 1.1: *Major earthquake hits Los Angeles*. 1994. University of California, San Diego. ARTstor Collections.

Figure 1.2: Kokoschka, Oskar. *Triptych – Apocalypse*. 1950. The Courtauld Gallery, London. ARTstor Collections.

Figure 1.3: Coleman, Matthew Benjamin. *G20 Protest Graffiti - Bank of England*. 2 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.flickrriver.com/photos/suburbanslice/3409166800/>>.

Fire and Protest

Figure 2.1: McCurry, Steve. *KUWAIT. 1991. Gulf War. Rescue team during clean-up operation*. 1991. Magnum Photos. ARTstor Collections.

Figure 2.2: Bramson, Phyllis. *State of War, Seige 1*. 1985. The Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago. Photograph taken by Tom Van Eynde. ARTstor Collections.

Figure 2.3: Abd El Ghany, Mohamed/Reuters. *Protesters against President Mohamed Mursi in Tahrir Square in Cairo July 3, 2013*. 2013. Reuters <<http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2013/07/09/egypt-protests-built-on-a-computer-format/>>.

Figure 2.4: Thompson, Michael. *The Tunisian Revolution*. 22 Jan. 2011 <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/freestylee/5378711868/in/photostream/>>. (Modified slightly within licensing permissions: “Viva the Tunisian Revolution” omitted from top left corner: artist identification removed from bottom right corner.)

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Figure 3.3: Schlegel, Rene. *No more ares no more*. 20 Sept. 2013 <http://flickrriver.com/photos/rene_schlegel/9890402565/>.

Cleansing the Water:

Figure 4.1: Fusaro, Jorge. *River in Port of Prince, Haiti*. From Carlos Maysonet. “Water Pollution due to Solid Wastes in the Greater Caribbean Region.” *Encyclopedia of Puerto Rico*. 26 Dec. 2011 <<http://www.encyclopediapr.org/ing/article.cfm?ref=11112016>>.

Figure 4.2: McCloskey, Jesse. *Apocalypse Fountain*. 2009. Christopher Henry Gallery, New York. ARTstor Collections.

Figure 4.3: Earth First! logo. <<http://www.earthfirst.org/about.htm>>.

AIDS: Fighting the Silence

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From Abandonment to Love

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Figure 6.3: Mapplethorpe, Robert. *Two Men Dancing*. 1984. Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

Home is Where the Heart Is

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Figure 7.3: Fusco, Paul. *AIDS at the Ambassador Hotel. Toni is greeted by Joey at their room. Joey also has AIDS*. 1993. Magnum Photos. ARTstor Collections.

Fight the Power

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Figure 8.3: Court, Carl/AFP/Getty Images. *Protest graffiti is seen on the base of Nelson's Column in London's Trafalgar Square during a demonstration against government plans to triple university tuition. More than a thousand students took to the streets of the British capital on the third day of protests this month*. Nov. 2010. From "Pictures in the News: Nov. 20, 2010." *Los Angeles Times* 30 Nov. 2010 <framework.latimes.com/2010/11/30/pictures-in-the-news-71/#/3>.

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