



“Persistence of Horror”: An Overview of Texts on Post apocalyptic World Order

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Abstract

In simplest terms, an apocalypse is the massive destruction of the world, which leads to the end of life in it. It is the concept of ultimate devastation that has been borrowed from various religious, ancient scriptures. This paper portrays the images of war, famine, or plague that have become the face of apocalypse in human civilization. It looks towards the dystopian texts as an event that could plausibly lead to a revolution and the subsequent birth of a hero who will redeem humankind. The idea is to project apocalypse on two paradigms – one is large-scale destruction leading to the end of the world and joyous anticipation of a new beginning. There is an array of apocalyptic texts in literature and cinema which are graphic and terrorizing.

Keywords: Apocalypse, Order, Destruction, Disaster, Dystopia.

Introduction

In simplest terms, an apocalypse is the massive destruction of the world, which leads to the end of life in it. Susan Sontag (1995), in her essay, labelled it as a “Fantasy of living through one’s death and more, the death of cities, the destruction of humanity itself” (44). The concept can be located in the biblical ‘Book of Revelation,’ the final book in the *New Testament*. Accordingly, it is considered an event that could plausibly lead to a revolution and the subsequent birth of a hero who will redeem humankind. Even we may keep Noah and the Ark at the back of our minds:

And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come. I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between the Earth and me. Whenever I bring clouds over the Earth, and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the Earth.” (Genesis 9: 12-16)

Similarly, every society and race has its literature from where this idea of apocalypse comes from. If we consider Hindu mythology, there is a mention of an apocalypse called ‘Pralay’ in the *Vishnu Purana*. It is stated that the ‘Kali Yuga’ in which we are living in an age characterized by dishonesty, anger, lust, avarice, starvation, plague, etc. All this will lead to alteration in every aspect of human life. It is said that Vishnu will take the ‘Kalki Avatar’ and come to Earth to save it and bring redemption. It is then that a race of morally righteous men

will inhabit the world, and it will see an end to all evil. So, the apocalypse has positive anticipation of a new beginning alongside the discussion of large-scale destruction. Even if we ignore the ecclesiastical or eschatological approaches, we cannot argue that purification through disastrous means is deeply rooted in our consciousness. For example, in *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), M. H. Abrams commented, "...apocalypse...signifies a vision in which old world is replaced by a new better world" (41). Present-day consumers have a ravenous appetite for any form of entertainment, be it literature, games, or cinema, based on this concept of apocalypse and subsequent world order.

Dualistic viewpoint

The setting of most post-apocalyptic texts is exceptionally significant. Sometimes it is characterized by a scientific revolution, an invasion of the evil yet powerful agent, or a zombie attack. The images of plague, warfare, and natural disasters might affect the entire world or be restricted to a particular area. The central theme in these works is fighting adversities and survival at any cost. Here, we can apply Charles Darwin's 'Survival of the Fittest' concept. However, these survival instincts are not like a regular world running on principles of morality where people follow the rules. In this new world order, the rules are reversed. In his "Mein Kampf," Adolf Hitler wrote that one must take positive steps to encourage the flourishing of the fitter because the system itself often works against them. Both the oppressor and the oppressed can relate to this idea. We can also view it from Descartes' Dualism. It may implicate that the new world order, perhaps, residing in our minds, has little to do with the world's physical existence. It is a way of stating that matter does not have an existence of its own, as it exists in the mind itself. We can also relate this identification to Jacques Lacan's theories of the mirror and symbolic stages where there is a recognition and simultaneous misrecognition of their world. The readers experience a world order divorced from real-life experiences, where the norms are subverted. However, the hallmark of the real world and its order does not entirely lose its significance. There is a sense of dual existence.

The Impacts of the Great War

World War I came with themes of terrorism, fascism, and violence. It seems like a post-apocalyptic mood almost infects this period. While the daily scenario consisted of degeneration and hopelessness of redemption, this was also assisting the writers to shape their thoughts and develop new narratives surrounding this. H. G. Wells' 1914 book *The World Set Free* was written under the immediate shadow of these circumstances. It was also the time when atomic energy was on the verge of submission to the intelligence of human beings. Wells precisely predicted: "Before the last war began, it was a matter of common knowledge that a man could carry about in a handbag an amount of latent energy sufficient to wreck half a city" (53). Winston Churchill commented while reflecting upon Wells' words, 'might a bomb, no bigger than an average orange be found to possess a secret power to destroy a whole block of buildings – nay to concentrate the force of a thousand tons of cordite and blast a township at a stroke?' This chain of events gave birth to the genre of nuclear apocalypse. Another novel by H. G. Wells called *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) deals with a post-war world set in 2106. Wells is using war, economic slump, and a long-lasting plague here and trying to establish a peaceful world order. He imagines a utopia that advocates scientific advancement, prohibition of religion, and enforcement of the English language. He is creating a world inhabited by a scientifically advanced race in this book. This novel exemplifies the post-apocalyptic world order the current generation might be striving for its manifestation, a world driven by logic and sensibility. Another essential factor, already mentioned before, is the city's role. It is often shown as a place of chaos where confusion ignites. If we hold T. S. Eliot's *Wasteland* beside this argument, a pattern can be seen taking shape. Cornelia Cook beautifully summarised the similarities between the *Old Testament* and Eliot's *Wasteland*. She wrote, "And the inhabited cities shall be laid waste, and the land become a desolation, and you shall know that I am the

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Lord” (Ezekiel 12:20). Such devastation is a punishment for forgetfulness, infidelity, or abominations. The language of lines 19-30 of the poem (*Wasteland*) raises echoes of such an effect:

“What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this story rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot stay or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief...
...And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.” (70-71)

Post-war repercussions

A new form of apocalyptic fiction started to shape after the post-World War incidents. This form was free from politics or religion. Since this form of fiction was away from the traditional strains of war, they were much more constructive, creative, and imaginative concerning its content. The framework remained the same in this latter type, but new themes like innovative inventions, new versions of diseases, time travel, etc., were included as themes in novels and plays. Besides, themes associated with dystopian societies were also given importance. One of such novels is *Lucifer’s Hammer* (1977) by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle. It is a science fiction post-apocalypse-survival novel dealing with The story details a commentary impact on Earth that causes the end of civilization as we know it, as well as the struggle to survive in the face of tsunamis, starvation, disease, a new ice age, and an army of cannibals in order to rebuild society. M. P. Shiel’s *The Purple Cloud* (1901) is an apocalyptic “last man” novel. This novel deals with the story of a man, Adam Jefferson, on a polar expedition who discovers a mysterious and deathly Purple Cloud. In the wake of the massive global deaths wrought by the Purple Cloud, Jefferson becomes ruler of the world and builds a massive palace to his glory. Another American post-apocalyptic science fiction novel is *Earth Abides*, written by George R. Stewart in 1949. The novel deals with the story of the fall of civilization from deadly diseases and the emergence of a new culture with more straightforward tools. Set in the 1940s in Berkeley, California, the story is told by Isherwood Williams, who emerges from isolation in the mountains to find almost everyone dead. The novel throws light on a disease of unparalleled destructive force that has sprung up almost simultaneously in every corner of the globe, destroying the human race. One survivor, strangely immune to the epidemic’s effects, ventures forward to experience a world without man. What he ultimately discovers will prove far more astonishing than anything he had either dreaded or hoped for. *The Stand* (1978), another remarkable post-apocalyptic dark fantasy novel, was written by American author Stephen King. The plot centres on a deadly pandemic of weaponized influenza and its aftermath. Stephen King’s apocalyptic vision of a world blasted by viruses and tangled in an elemental struggle between good and evil remains as riveting and eerily plausible in this novel. In this list of post-apocalyptic novels, some notable works are Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* (1993), José Saramago’s *Blindness* (1995; English publication 1997), Sandra Newman’s *The Country of Ice Cream Star* (2014), Lauren Beukes’ *Afterland* (2020), etc. All these novels, as mentioned above, seek inspiration in real-life calamities and disasters, leading towards the setting up of a new order of the world.

Representation in popular culture

One of the significant features that mark the foundation of post-apocalyptic fiction is the element of violence and savagery. Usually, enlightenment is achieved after the successful diagnosis and segregation of the evil. One such noteworthy milestone of this sub-genre is Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and its film adaptation, entitled “Apocalypse Now”

(1979). This novel and the movie take the reader and the audience into a dark and gloomy world devoid of any future hope to flourish, which later transforms a developed civilization. A similar theme also occupies its room in Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). The imaginative post-apocalyptic world aims to establish a world similar to the colonized world. This world represents the characteristics of human cannibalism and barbarism. A race that was immune to bloodshed and disorder was before us. Then this world was replaced by a superior and well-equipped race possessing the qualities to alter this. They aim to establish a world order running on disciplines and rules. Thus over the years, the reader witnessed several works dealing with the theme of British colonialism. Even there are prevalent works from the time of Shakespeare's *Tempest* (1611) to that of E.M. Foster's *A Passage to India* (1924) dealing with the themes that serve as inspiration for post-apocalyptic literature.

The glimpses of the post-apocalyptic world order have been dominant in different movies and the BBC series. One such example is shown in the movie *Mad Max: Fury Road*. It is about letting the man drive the vehicle when the disaster is in close proximity to them. Nevertheless, we find a shift in the patriarchal paradigm in a post-apocalyptic world by letting the woman drive the car. Besides, in this movie, the audience gets an idea about a city or township in a pandemonium state. Even the city is represented as hyper-patriarchal, where women are depicted as mere tools of reproduction. In the movie, the problem begins when Imperator Furiosa begins her journey to rescue the wives of Immortan Joe. The group of Furiosa, Max, and the wives were journeying towards a place named "The Green Place." This can be noted from their journey that the only option left with them is to move forward since ceasing to move any further would mean being captured by Immortan, who is chasing them. Martin Walter thought that the partial "...nomadic existence is symbolic of historical phases of mobility and displacement, most prominently in the protagonists' adherence to a hunter-gatherer lifestyle and the fact that meeting strangers are usually not devoid of violence."

Apart from this, glimpses of the power structure's domineering influence in the movie's post-apocalyptic scenario are also evident in the movie. When the movie opens, the audience is introduced to Immortan Joe's power through a somewhat iconic scene in which he is found to be standing on top of a hill. Down the hill, there are starving people of his tribe. All of them are found to be thirsty and dusty. Joe addresses them, "I am your redeemer. It is by my hands you will raise from the ashes of this world." The people of his tribe are found to be waiting with bowls and trays. No sooner does he finish speaking, the people slowly get closer to the hill. Joe pushes two levers for opening two gates on the hill from where the water starts flooding out. However, much before the people are able to collect their share of water, he immediately pulls back the lever and says, "Do not, my friends, become addicted to water. It will take, and you will resent its absence."

Another significant feature of the post-apocalyptic movie is capitalism. This feature demonstrates its adaptability through the comment of Mark Fisher, "Capitalism is an abstract parasite, an insatiable vampire and zombie maker." At the same time, echoes of Joe's statement can be heard in Fisher's conclusion, "Do not, my friends, become addicted to water." Both of these comments bear the shadow of the nature of capitalism. While most of the post-apocalyptic narratives highlight the presence of a group dynamics, at the same time the absence of familiar sights and sounds does not develop the feeling of unease alone. But the addition of a new space throws challenge upon the possible natural conventions of everyday, which incorporates communication between individuals. A significant example of this can be traced in the *A Quiet Place* (2018). The movie depicts that a nuclear family grows and becomes closer as a result of crisis, instead of being driven further apart. But, one of the key debates about the movie *A Quiet Place* is whether the movie is a "real" horror film or more properly a family drama. It

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goes without saying, it has monsters, jump scares and a plot built around the kind of life-endangering, creature-caused apocalyptic threat, forming the backbone of many a classic and widely popular horror movies. But, at the same time the movie also creates the kind of moving family conflict at its center, rendering a feeling more at home in a family drama or heartwarming adventure. In fact, *A Quiet Place* represents more than just a respite from an endless stream of superhero movies and cinematic noise. A close and similar type of world order can be perceived in another movie *Bird Box* (2018). *Bird Box* is an American post-apocalyptic horror thriller film. It was directed by Susanne Bier and written by Eric Heisserer, based on the 2014 novel under the same title, written by Josh Malerman. The film follows the character Malorie Hayes, played by Sandra Bullock. She to protect herself and two children from entities which cause people who look at them to die by suicide. There is a frightening intensity and sense of helplessness in the apocalyptic new sci-fi/horror film *Bird Box*. This movie is as much a character study as it is a post-apocalyptic thriller. It examines the different ways in which people cope with the apparent end of the world. In the earlier part of the movie, Malorie is deliberately paired up with Olympia so that audiences can see the contrast between the two pregnant women. Olympia is seen to express frankly and openly that she is very soft, having been spoiled by her parents. Later she has been taken care of by her husband, without ever having really had to fend for herself. In contrast to Olympia's sweetness, compassion, gentle-mindedness and trusting nature, Malorie is portrayed as much more harsh. She having been raised by a bad father is forced to look out for herself from an early age. This harshness is only gathered by her experiences in the apocalypse. She experiences how Olympia's trusting nature gets herself and almost everyone else killed, and taking into consideration Douglas' pearls of wisdom about how there are only two kinds of people. Another movie under the post-apocalyptic scenario is *10 Cloverfield Lane* (2016). It is an American science fiction psychological thriller film directed by Dan Trachtenberg in his directorial debut, produced by J. J. Abrams and Lindsey Weber and written by Josh Campbell, Matthew Stuecken, and Damien Chazelle. The story follows a young woman who, after a car crash, wakes up in an underground bunker with two men who insist that an event has left the surface of Earth uninhabitable. This psychological post-apocalyptic thriller contains some genuine shocks and manages to keep audiences guessing while posing questions about who the real monsters can turn out to be. *10 Cloverfield Lane* is an amazingly suspenseful film that skillfully manages to make the audience feel claustrophobic by taking place in a small, confined bunker. The BBC series, *Survivors*, represents consumerist places in a post-apocalyptic world. In a world where food is scarce due to the means of production being on the way of getting slowing down, this is quite natural that people will engage in scavenging for food. In this crisis stage, supermarkets and shopping malls are immediate places that come to anyone's mind. So naturally, the resource being limited, people rush to secure their consumerist needs in the now-vacant supermarkets.

Consequently, the person who gets the largest share of resources automatically becomes the richest. When the protagonists in *Survivors* enter the supermarket, they encounter a corpse hanging from the ceiling with a sign around his neck with the word “looter.” At the time of departure, they are obstructed by a gang who are the current owners of the supermarket. Dexter, the gang leader, is the first to claim ownership of the place by threatening the group. He says, “People have to know this place belongs to us. They need to respect our property. You need to give that back now!” Saying this, he takes away the food and drinks from the protagonists.

Conclusion

The post-apocalyptic scenario can also be traced to occur in the layers of the human mind. The apocalypse of the human mind may be reflected in the form of depression, disappointment, anxiety, etc. Suddenly one can find oneself in the labyrinth of a known city, unaware of what to do. In most cases, post-apocalyptic narratives are found to consist of a tale of hopefulness, struggle, and fulfillment. In most narratives, the readers find a turning point to start everything

afresh. It is like the phoenix being reborn out of the ashes, building a newer world from the old debris. Hence, the rise of a better, newer world starts processing slowly, overcoming the hurdles of capitalism, corruption, and fascism. Here is the evolution of consciousness.

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Bio-note

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