A Study of

The APOCALYPTIC & Post-apocalyptic Interest

in modern Society

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# Abstract

In recent years the interest in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions has increased significantly. With this development in mind, the primary goal for this thesis was to examine how the interest has grown, why it has grown, as well as researching and analysing the similarities and differences between older apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic fictions and modern fictions of these genres. This was done by including the works of select theoreticians, along with conflicting opinions pertaining to the subject of apocalypse, the meaning of apocalypse to humanity, as well as incorporating various fictions from popular culture to see how these fictions differ from each other while sharing the same overall storyline; the apocalypse.

To put the apocalyptic into context, the historical aspects of apocalypse were scrutinized, discovering that apocalypse tends to present itself in cycles, reappearing periodically as a result of war, illness, natural disaster, doomsday theories or similar apocalyptic events. The present cycle of apocalypse seems to have lingered since WWII, which is argued to have been the greatest apocalyptic tragedy of the Western World in modern times. Furthermore, the considerable interest in apocalypse was also found to present itself by crossing both different media and different genres. With regards to media, the genres were found to have developed from being solely communicated through literature to also include the mediums of film, TV-series, comics and PC/online games. Though it can be argued that this is a natural development, occurring as different media become mainstream, it also speaks of an interest on the behalf of consumers. In comparison, the genres have also expanded to include various hybrid genres, often combining horror, romance, adventure and drama. Furthermore, it was found that a distinct number of apocalyptic fictions also incorporate dystopian undertones, consistently implementing dystopia as an apocalyptic side-effect. Moreover, the genres speak to both an adult and a young adult audience and in recent years several apocalyptic fictions have become bestsellers, demonstrating that there is a vast interest in the genres and that they are appealing to diverse audiences.

To exemplify the similarities and differences of fictions of the same genre, but from different historical periods, two literary works were chosen for analysis: *After London* (1885) by Richard Jefferies and *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy. Both analyses have been put into a historical context and the relevance for their contemporary societies has likewise been discussed. It was determined that both fictions had a shared interest in displaying the depravation of humanity, but *The Road* had a more explicit approach to elucidating this. Additionally, it is discussed that the explicitness of *The Road* can arguably be attributed to the historical trauma of WWII, as images present in the novel can be interpreted as direct references to death camps and prisoners of war. *After London* is both a critique of contemporary society as well as an optimistic desire that humanity can better itself. Both novels juxtapose hope and hopelessness, leaving the outcome and interpretation up to the individual reader.

The ongoing and intensified interest in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions has been found to be significant for society, as these fictions often work as outlets for general anxieties. The outcomes of humanity are explored through fictions and they function both as a lesson and a warning. The fictions can, for instance, work as a warning of a current crisis, such as climate change, that could become apocalyptic in nature if proper precautions are not taken. Alternatively, the apocalyptic narratives may also illustrate both the author's and the public's integrated need for a New Jerusalem; a new world order. The expanding popularity and complexity of the genre can be seen as an authentic need for certain traumas to be communicated through worst-case scenarios, so that they may eventually be processed.

Table of Contents

[Introduction 4](#_Toc419277078)

[Problem Statement 5](#_Toc419277079)

[Methodology 5](#_Toc419277080)

[Theory 6](#_Toc419277081)

[The Historical Trauma of the Apocalypse 10](#_Toc419277082)

[The Early Years 11](#_Toc419277083)

[Apocalyptic Events in a Historical Context 12](#_Toc419277084)

[Surviving an Apocalyptic World 13](#_Toc419277085)

[The Post-Apocalyptic Survivor and the Five Stages of Grief 16](#_Toc419277086)

[Apocalypse/Post-Apocalypse and the Importance of Media 20](#_Toc419277087)

[The Power of the Media 22](#_Toc419277088)

[The Genres of the Apocalypse 26](#_Toc419277093)

[Genres and Hybrid Genres in Modern Society 27](#_Toc419277094)

[Dystopia as a Pre-Existing Condition 34](#_Toc419277095)

[The Young Adult Interest in the Apocalypse 36](#_Toc419277096)

[Genre Determining the Post-Apocalyptic 39](#_Toc419277097)

[Apocalyptic Events as a Subgenre 43](#_Toc419277098)

[Analytic Examples 45](#_Toc419277099)

[Analysis of *After London* by Richard Jefferies 46](#_Toc419277100)

[Setting, Plot and Structure 48](#_Toc419277101)

[Narratives and Characters 51](#_Toc419277102)

[Apocalyptic Themes and Conflicts 54](#_Toc419277103)

[Analysis of *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy 57](#_Toc419277104)

[Setting, Plot and Structure 59](#_Toc419277105)

[Narrative and Characters 61](#_Toc419277106)

[Themes and Post-apocalyptic Conflicts 64](#_Toc419277107)

[Discussion of the Apocalyptic and Post-apocalyptic Relevance 70](#_Toc419277108)

[The Preppers and the Survivalists 71](#_Toc419277109)

[The Post-apocalyptic Future 73](#_Toc419277111)

[Conclusion 75](#_Toc419277112)

[List of Reference 78](#_Toc419277113)

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“Everything has to come to an end, sometime.”  - L. Frank Baum, *The Marvellous Land of Oz*

“The more we know about the former world, the better we’ll understand what happened when it fell.”  ― [Emily St. John Mandel](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/2786093.Emily_St_John_Mandel)*,*[*Station Eleven*](http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/28098716)

“A piece of advice: if you want to remain in control of a doomsday cult, don't give a date for the end of the world unless you're really, really sure it's going to happen. Being wrong tends to undermine your authority.” ― [Jennifer Bosworth](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/4687048.Jennifer_Bosworth), [*Struck*](http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/15556620)

"Sitting down at my desk and wiping out the human race was fun." - Stephen King

“The world is always ending for someone.”  ― [Neil Gaiman](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1221698.Neil_Gaiman), [*Signal to Noise*](http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/2837168)

# Introduction

Endings are not ground-breaking, we are familiar with endings. Realistically, we are aware that everything must come to an end at some point. Seasons change, goals are met and life ends. There is a reason that there is an 'endgame' or an 'end of the road'. Everything we know is split into cycles with a beginning and an end; historical periods, literary periods, life, education, projects, food. Everything comes with an expiration date. That is how it has always been, and most likely how it will always be. Therefore, it is also surprising why humans now feel the overwhelming need to focus on the ultimate ending; the end of the world and more importantly, what happens after the end of the world.

Historically, the end of the world has always been a focal point for humanity, yet the interest in it has never seemed as all-consuming as it is now. Several religions speak of the end of the world, or Armageddon, and in Norse mythology Ragnarök is the end of world as we know it and the symbol of the resurfacing of a new and fertile world. For thousands of years, doomsday prophecies have been a part of the world that humans have lived in, yet for the past 50 years an invigorated interest seems to have escalated and become the object of these end of the world scenarios, only to be further intensified in the past decade. So if the end of the world has always been a relevant subject to humans why this revitalized interest in modern society? Is there greater reason for concern with regards to these theories? Are we simply more afraid as a species? Is the answer as simple as opportunity to distribute with regards to books, films and TV? Or have we simply got too much time on our hands to obsess about deathly, but improbable, outcomes to the human race?

Herein these questions will be researched by looking into theories and historical events that might have had an impact on both the apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic interest. Theories by various renowned researchers in this field will be used to assist us in theorizing and possibly determining why human kind have taken such an interest in the impending end of the world. To give us a better understanding of this development we will also be looking into the growth and intensification of post-apocalyptic literature, films and TV in order to research the narratives and themes presents, and to establish what other factors are a part of this genre.

Originally 'apocalypse' comes from the Greek word 'apocálypsis' meaning 'uncovering' or 'revelation'. The post-apocalypse is then the focus on what happens after the revelation. In this thesis there will be a natural interconnection between both apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions, as it seems that these genres have often merged together, creating an overall focus on endings.

# Problem Statement

For this thesis I wish to focus on both the apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic interest in modern society and how it has developed over the years. I want to research where and how it began and how it has continued to transform over the years. Furthermore, I plan to make a connection between the development of society and the developments of the genres. In hopes of fulfilling these purposes, I will to go back to one of the oldest literary works of post-apocalyptic fiction, *After London* (1885)by John Richard Jefferies and analyse the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic tendencies and themes present in the novel. Moreover, I will analyse *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy, to examine similarities and differences displayed in the novels and to relate those to a historical context with regards to the apocalyptic.

# Methodology

To get an overview of the historical importance of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions I chose to implement various theoreticians and works published with regards to the growing interest in the genres. I strove to put the published works, and the arguments presented in those works, into perspective by relating them to other historical events as well as employing other relevant speculations that are applicable in the given context. In addition, I applied theories on genre and further researched and discussed how the concept of genre has expanded to become more fluid and how this is important when relating to the fictions of the apocalypse as well as the growing popularity. I analysed two works of fiction, *After London* (1885) and *The Road* (2006), to gain a perspective of both the shared and differing themes and focuses in the novels and attempted to put these results into a historical context. Throughout the thesis I made an effort to continuously refer back to other fictions of the apocalypse, including literature, film, TV, computer and online games and other mediums that have developed in line with the growing interest in the genres. These references were deliberately chosen so that any given reader is made aware, that even though two novels had been selected as the primary targets for analysis, many more fictions are in existence and could be used to prove the same points, or indeed different points, depending on the work at hand. The works chosen for analysis thereby represent a qualitative take on the fictions of the apocalypse, displaying the distinctive themes often present, while the references to other works within the genres have more of a quantitative function, performing as a tool to highlight shared traits and diversities within the genres and subgenres.

# Theory

As my main theoretician for post-apocalyptic interest in a historical context I have chosen to use James Berger and his book *After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse* (1999). Herein Berger argues that historical traumas are a returning factor in the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic genres and can be closely linked to the existential questions of what humans are actually capable of as well as the end of the world as we know it.

Apocalypse and trauma are congruent ideas, for both refer to shatterings of existing structures of identity and language, and both effect their own erasures from memory and must be reconstructed by means of their traces, remains, survivors and ghosts: their symptoms. Post-apocalyptic representations are simultaneously symptoms of historical traumas and attempts to work through them (Berger, 1999, p. 19)

Berger argues that post-apocalypse is not only a genre in literature and film but something much more comprehensive; something that defines humans and our experiences as well as our ability to cope with events and changing world views. Thereby, "post-apocalyptic simulacra (are) products of a purposeful historical amnesia" (Berger, 1999, p. 20), and a part of humans' way of coping with reality. Throughout history several cataclysmic events have changed the world and everything we thought we knew about the world. Moreover, these events also changed our view of humanity. Doomsday theoreticians and survivalist groups, on very different scales of believable or fanatic, use the abbreviation TEOTWAWKI to describe the post-apocalypse and the effects thereof. It abbreviates "the end of the world as we know it" and it is a term that is recurring through most literature, both fictional and otherwise, when dealing with the post-apocalyptic. This is also the case for Berger's theories of endings and apocalypses, seeing as any apocalyptic event splits our world into two.

An overwhelming catastrophic event like the Holocaust does occupy a central position, dividing history into a "before" and an "after", and radically restructuring our understanding of all events on either sides (Berger, 1999, p. 21)

Through Berger it is argued that the principal apocalypse of modern time has already occurred in the form of World War II and the holocaust. Though war in itself is a part of the world's history, the events during the holocaust created a painful and amputated memory of both the world and humans, thereby presenting the 'before the holocaust' and the 'after the holocaust'. An event that changes everything we thought we knew, that splits history into two, can thereby be argued to be an apocalypse, a historical trauma that is thereby interpreted and coped with by illustrating other scenarios. Phrases such as "never again" and "we shall never forget" underline the importance of such events, further explaining the significance of revisiting painful historical traumas in literature and media. Apocalyptic events, with the Holocaust often cited as the most important event in modern times, are reminders that the world that we live in, and the world that we witness, are such big contrasts that, somehow, we must find a way to cope with realities that are not necessarily our own, but have the potential to become our own. Moreover, in many regards, a great percentage of western people have become an emancipated species, holding down office jobs, going shopping on weekly basis, sitting in front of the computer or TV with no hope, or will, to ever liberate themselves enough to be unconstrained. What the species was born to accomplish, i.e. hunting, gathering and making an effort to survive, has been substituted by the easy alternative. Life is no longer a privilege but an expectation. Therefore we, as a species, have to pour our original driving forces into other aspects of life, which is then expressed via literature, TV or games.

Additionally, I wish to make use of Brian Graham's theory on taxonomy of types of post-apocalyptic fiction and expand it by further researching what the genre of post-apocalyptic fiction entails and if you can simply call something post-apocalyptic without it automatically incorporating other genres and subgenres. In addition, I wish to investigate if the genre has changed over the years, either to include other subgenres or whether it is now applied to a broader audience.

Graham argues that fictions of the apocalypse can be put into boxes, divided by their level of devastation and thereby the level of apocalypse. Of course, when 'the demise of mankind' is noted it very rarely means the complete demise of mankind, it often means 'the demise of most of the human population, as far as the audience knows', as there must almost always be a human or humanoid narrative to follow, for the audience to relate. The same is applicable for the other categories, animal kingdom and vegetable world, seeing as these are generally needed to continue successful survival in a post-apocalyptic world. Below I have set up the table that Graham uses to define the different apocalypses.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Ever-Greater Decreations** | **Examples** |
| The demise of mankind | *After London* by Richard Jefferies |
| The demise of mankind and the animal kingdom | *The Last Man* by Mary Shelley  *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson |
| The demise of mankind, the animal kingdom and the vegetable world | *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy  *The Death of Grass* by John Christopher  *The Drought* by J.G. Ballard |
| The demise of mankind, the animal kingdom, the vegetable world and mineral life | *The Drowned World* byJ.G. Ballard  *Waterworld* (movie) |
| The demise of mankind, the animal kingdom, the vegetable world, mineral life and the watery world | 'Finis' by Frank L. Pollack |

(Graham & Rix, 2013, p. 25)

Here Graham has provided us with a good starting point in determining the different subgenres of the apocalypse, because surely the level of devastation in a post-apocalyptic world is essential in determining the further storyline, plot and narrative. The two novels that we shall be focusing on later are both featured in the table, in two different categories. This variety in category is expected be of use in the closer examination of the texts.

Graham goes on to argue that another table can be made for the fictions of apocalypse, a table that includes all of the above categories combined with the demise of God. Graham believes that godlessness and the loss of a belief in a higher power, in a heaven and a hell, is crucial for many of these narratives, as they often tell the story, not only of the end of the world as we know it, but also the end of humanity as we know it. The focus on the goals of the human survivors and their doubts and wishes are often expressed by a fixation on God or the opposite; a persistent lack of God and nature. Below is a revised table where the demise of God has been added. The only addition from the previous table is *The Joyful Wisdom* by Friedrich Nietzsche, the proclamation that God is dead, but Graham speculates that the state of godlessness is impossible to circumvent when speaking of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions, which is evidenced by the lack of changes in the rest of the table. Thereby, Graham indirectly argues that godlessness is present in most post-apocalyptic fictions; a theory that will be examined closer later on.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Ever-Greater Decreations** | **Examples** |
| The demise of God | *The Joyful Wisdom* by Friedrich Nietzsche |
| The demise of God and mankind | *After London*  by Richard Jefferies |
| The demise of God, mankind and the animal kingdom | *The Last Man* by Mary Shelley  *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson |
| The demise of God, mankind, the animal kingdom and the vegetable world | *The Road* byCormac McCarthy  *The Death of Grass* by John Christoper  *The Drought* byJ.G. Ballard |
| The demise of God, mankind, the animal kingdom, the vegetable world and mineral life | *The Drowned World* byJ.G. Ballard  *Waterworld* (movie) |
| The demise of God, mankind, the animal kingdom, the vegetable world and mineral life and the watery world | 'Finis' by Frank L. Pollack |

(Graham & Rix, 2013, p. 25)

Perhaps the fact that these worlds are characterized by hierarchy and struggle points to how we might consider the kind of positive vision the literature points back to. To moderns, the Great Chain of Being is an image of hierarchy to rival anything in fictions of the apocalypse. Perhaps, then, it invites us to consider what a world that is not hierarchal would look like. We have, however, lost our ideas about what an 'existence' which is free of hierarchy would look like (Graham & Rix, 2013, p. 29)

Accordingly, the role and importance of hierarchy and loss of belief is central in determining why characters evolve the way they do and why human behaviour in a post-apocalyptic world is nearly always as damaged as the world that surrounds the leftovers of humanity. From this perspective I strive to further research the genres of the post-apocalypse.

I believe that in modern times several subgenres, which are not normally connected to the post-apocalyptic genre, have fused with the post-apocalyptic genre, thereby creating whole new subgenres of the apocalypse and post-apocalypse. These hybrid genres, or cross-genres, are part of modern and postmodern literature and narrative. In his essay *Introduction to Genre Theory* Daniel Chandler relies on Stephen Neale's critical view of genres, saying:

It is difficult to make clear-cut distinctions between one genre and another: genres overlap, and there are 'mixed genres' (such as comedy-thrillers). Specific genres tend to be easy to recognize intuitively but difficult (if not impossible) to define. Particular features which are characteristic of a genre are not normally unique to it; it is their relative prominence, combination and functions which are distinctive (Chandler, 1997)

Despite the improbable possibility to recognize and make clear-cut distinctions with regards to the hybridity of the apocalyptic genres I hope to pinpoint some of them and prove that a variety of pairings, some unusual and some typical, have become a part of the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic genre, thus communicating the need for innovative diversity by marketing previously unheard of genre-pairings.

# The Historical Trauma of the Apocalypse

To understand the modern interest in apocalypse and post-apocalypse I believe that we have to look to the past. We have to research what has shaped us, as a species, and the world that we live in. To understand us now we have to understand us then.

Throughout history several events that can be categorised as apocalyptic stand out. These are the events that we think of as having a 'before' and an 'after'. As Berger states in his trauma theory, one of the newest and most calamitous of events is World War II and the ensuing genocide of millions of Jews and non-Jews. This particular event stands out in history, first of all because it is still a relatively new memory and the scars are still raw and raised, but also because it was entirely unexpected. People, at the time, believed that after World War I the horrors had finally ended; we had learned, we lived in a modern world, we were better. The utter horror that after all of those years, all of those wars and all of those lessons, we still had not learned and humanity had still not done its worst, pushed the Western world to a breaking point. Killing is one thing that humans, throughout time, have been consistently good at. The astonishment towards the human capacity for war and destruction, in this instance, can be seen as surprising in itself. But apocalypse and post-apocalypse are so much more than a single trauma. It is the realisation that 'the end' is an ingrained part of who we are and what we know, and no what matter what we think we know we are always consistently surprised by the extensiveness of our abilities to destroy.

## The Early Years

Most people are familiar with the doomsday prophecies of old, that have been a part of our world for centuries. Nostradamus, Rasputin and the Mayans have all given different accounts as to how or when the world will end and most religions have their own end of the world prophecies. In this section we will have a closer look at various prophecies and discuss how these have had an impact on the world today and the ever-growing interest in the post-apocalyptic genre. Furthermore, this will be related to several historical traumas of various origins that may have given merit to the belief in the prophecies over the ages.

We shall start at the beginning. From the time that civilizations rose, one thing became abundantly clear; civilizations also fall, some quicker than others. The Egyptians, the Romans, the Turks, the Mongol Empire, Ancient Greece and the Mayans all had a time of greatness and all, at some point, fell. This surely proves that greatness is possible, but moreover it proves that achieved greatness is never immortal. Every society projects its own cultural fears and fantasies on to visions of the end.

The end is seldom finality. Rather, by invoking a sense of the end, we invigorate our awareness of the present, as well as raise our hopes for the future (Graham & Rix, 2013, p. 7)

Throughout history the mortality of men and their achievements has been a returning factor, giving credence to our own fears of endings. Some of the greatest and most memorable civilizations were faced with their own mortality, despite their seeming superiority, further fuelling the possibility of modern civilizations coming to an end. The ends of these empires gave statement to the fact that, at some point, they all had to go through a personal apocalypse. In that sense, we return to the theory that apocalypse is not necessarily the end of the world, but more an ending of the world that once was and the beginning of a new world. It is reasonable to say that we learn from history, and if there is one thing that history has taught us it is that no-one is safe. War, natural disaster, epidemics and terror can strike anywhere at any given time and the human race is often wholly unprepared, because it has not acknowledged its own mortality and possible expiration date. Apocalypse in this sense of the word can then be both global and regional. A global apocalypse clearly affects a vast majority of the world, while a regional apocalypse might simply affect one specific area and cause massive change in that particular area or civilization. Below I have gathered some of the historical events that might be considered apocalyptic and traumatic seeing as all of these events, in one way or another, split the world, mostly globally, into a 'before' and an 'after'. It is important to note that the relevance of these examples can be discussed seeing as the meaning of historical traumas can differ from an individual point of view.

## Apocalyptic events in a Historical Context

Pompeii Natural Disaster 79 AD

The Black Death Illness 1346–53

The Titanic Accident 1912

World War I War 1914-1918

World War II War 1939-1945

Hiroshima & Nagasaki Atomic Bombs 1945

The Cold War Political Tension 1947-1991

Vietnam War War 1955-1975

HIV/AIDS Illness 1981-now

The Gulf War War 1990-1991

Rwandan Genocide Genocide 1994

9/11 Terrorist Attack 2001

2004 Earthquake/Tsunami Natural Disaster 2004

Haiti Earthquake Natural Disaster 2010

2011 Norway Attacks Terrorist Attack 2011

Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 Terror 2014

## Surviving an Apocalyptic World

The above mentioned events are propositions of what can be considered apocalyptic and historically traumatic, but apocalypse is not by any means limited to these events. The propositions were chosen on the basis that the world, or at least some of the world, and maybe even humanity, changed because of them. No matter what we choose to believe, these events are grounds for interest when speaking of apocalypse and post-apocalypse. It is historical events like these that remind humans of their mortality and that therefore strike fear and grief. Though the sinking of the Titanic may not have been as destructive as the 2004 tsunami, the reminder that something human made, that humans had thought of as 'unsinkable', proved highly sinkable, emphasizes how easily perishable our entire existence is. Though we can be lulled for many years, absorbed with mechanical and medicinal progress, convincing ourselves that everything will truly be alright, we are eventually reminded. When life-changing events occur, repressed traumas from history are once again brought forth, quietly reminding us that we will never know, we will never be safe and guarantees are only words.

A post-apocalyptic theory of trauma discovers that events happen and, to borrow Yeat's apocalyptic rhetoric, "things fall apart" and "change utterly" - but that remainders and reminders, signs and symptoms, survive. For trauma is not simply another word for disaster. The idea of catastrophe as trauma provides a method of interpretation and posits that the effects of any event may be dispersed and manifested in many forms not obviously associated with the event. Moreover, this dispersal occurs over time, so that an event experienced as shattering may actually produce its full impact only years later (Berger, 1999, p. 26)

As Berger argues, there will always be reminders of major apocalyptic events and because it might not be fully digested and worked through at the time of occurrence the full magnitude and effects of the event might not surface until many years later, when the wound finally begins to heal and a scar starts to settle in its place. When events such as WWII occur, the go to emergency response will be to fix what has been broken. If it can be fixed, which I will argue that largely the world after WWII was, the harsh memories of reality are repressed or denied only to resurface at a different time, because eventually they have to be worked through. There are other, more regional, apocalypses, such as the 2011 Norway attacks. Though Norway was previously known as one of the countries with the lowest average murder rate, the 2011 attacks changed this drastically. This, then, forced the entire country, as well as surrounding countries, to reconsider their previous rank as relatively safe countries, as well as acknowledge that a trauma, which would last for many years, had occurred. Moreover, I have also listed HIV/AIDS as a historical trauma, taking the considerable panic of the 80s and 90s into account, seeing as the virus caused not only panic but also fear and grief and as a side-effect of these, entire societies had to come to terms with the fact that a single blood transfusion or sexual encounter could be the beginning of the end for them.

Of course we also have to consider the other apocalyptic alternative, the coming apocalypse, the big one. Scientists and theoreticians across the globe argue that it is not impossible, thereby making it a very real possibility. Unlikely, but possible. The theories and answers vary from "maybe tomorrow" to "probably never" and "by the time I have an answer for you it'd be too late anyway", yet again immersing society as a whole into a big hole full of uncertainty and fear.

Apocalyptic representation stands in the midst of crisis and between two catastrophes: one historical (remembered and suffered), and one imagined (desired and feared) (Berger, 1999, p. 35)

To deal with this uncertainty and fear that emasculates us as a species, and leaves very few of us without any impact on an oncoming apocalypse, we have to confront it by a different approach - and what better way to confront something life-altering and possibly earth-shattering than from our couch, preferably in front of the TV or in the form of literature, which seems to further correspond with the level of helplessness that we have reached. Additionally, the possibilities our impending doom appear to be escalating. Now we have to deal with not only war, illness and natural disaster, but nuclear war, climate changes and exhausting the earth's resources, the latter ones being wholly and undeniably the fault of the human race. Berger goes on to theorize that not only are we frightened by the possibility of the end of the world we also long for it, and the heightened interest can therefore be viewed as a critique of the society and world that we live in.

Apocalyptic desire coincides with a total critique of the world, a critique that annuls any chance of reform. But apocalyptic desire is a longing also for the aftermath, for the New Jerusalem and for the frustrated humanist-anarchist visions... (Berger, 1999, p. 34

Thereby the fictions of the apocalypse can be seen as a secret desire to completely rethink and rearrange our existence. In other words, apocalypse can be a response to the consumerist and capitalist world that has become a seemingly irreversible part of western culture. Irreversible in the sense that capitalism can be reversed, but humankind seems determined not the make the changes necessary for a world rid of nuclear weapons, scientifically provoked illnesses and climate changes. Unable to make these changes ourselves, but still longing for a New Jerusalem, we speculate and dream up scenarios where the future of the species and the world is out of our hands. We cannot take charge of our own fates so we long for something else, something more powerful, to take charge for us and change the course of destiny. Here we can turn to Walter Benjamin's contention in "Paralipomena to *On the Concept of History"* where he states that:

Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But this perhaps is quite otherwise. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train - namely, the human race - to activate the emergency brake (Benjamin, 1999, p. 402)

As mentioned earlier, wars and revolutions are a part of world history, but in the modern world war is seemingly omnipresent and nearly impossible to escape, both mentally and physically. When we turn on the TV, radio or computer we are bombarded with images and stories of war. Most western countries are presently engaged in war in various stages of involvement. We hear the tales of horrific events, some of us survive them and we're all scarred by them. Protests and counterattacks are the daily realities for some people, and the people that are not directly engaged are indirectly drawn in some other way. As a result of this it seems reasonable that the emergency brake must, at some point, be pulled. When it becomes clear that the train (society as a whole) is out of control and there is no possible way that that specific train wreck is going to be left with many survivors, how do we proceed? Various outlets of this frustration (TV, literature and games) may, in some cases, be the emergency brake in question; a cry that something is wrong with the world, with the people in it and at some point it will be too late to pull the emergency brake and we must simply prepare for the inevitable.

## The Post-Apocalyptic Survivor and the Five Stages of Grief

In Berger's account of apocalypse as a historical trauma he further researches the overwhelming need of always having a survivor in apocalyptic narratives, someone to cheer on, someone to identify with, someone that does the impossible; survives the end of the world, or at the very least survives the end of their world. Berger argues that this incessant need has been a part of both literature and film since the late 1970s where "the fascination with and authority vested in the figure of the survivor has been one of the defining features of the American post-apocalyptic sensibility" (Berger, 1999, p. 47). It is seen in various testimonies of war or natural disaster, in talk shows and even on the news. The survivor is paramount for the audience, so that the narrative becomes relatable.

In all these settings, paramount value is placed on the figure and the testimony of the one who has experienced, who has passed through and emerged from an event seen as both catastrophic and revelatory. What the survivor has survived is some trauma endowed with cultural significance - some apocalypse" (Berger, 1999, p. 47)

In essence we all want to believe that we are special, we all want to believe that we will survive. We want to relate ourselves to the survivor, not the ones that are already dead. Furthermore, we all want to find the secret to surviving, and in the hopes that the survivors have some sort of knowledge that we do not already possess we seek it out. What can we actively do to survive when disaster strikes? Here I wish to draw upon Sophie Fuggle's essay "To Have Done with the End-Times: Turning the Apocalypse into a Nonevent" in *Apocalyptic Discourse in Contemporary Culture* (2014) and her use of the five stages of grief in context to apocalypse and post-apocalypse. She keeps closely to psychiatrist and theoretician Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief that are described thus:

the five stages that follow knowledge of a tragic or terrible event, whether occurred or impending, as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. (Germana & Mousoutzanis, 2014, p. 32)

Slavoj Žižek, philosopher and cultural critic, having also used these ideas in an apocalyptic context, estimates humankind to be somewhere between denial and anger on the grief scale in an apocalyptic perspective (Žižek, 2010), which can best be interpreted as: humankind has a very long way to go. I would argue otherwise and claim that the stages of grief are more dependent upon culture, knowledge and social groups and would categorize most of the western world as having entered stage three: bargaining. The following section will debate the five stages of grief in a westernized context and how this is relevant to the apocalypse.

The first stage, denial, seems unproblematic to pinpoint. It is the refusal to acknowledge that something is clearly wrong with the world or a specific event. This can be pinpointed in all historical apocalypses and oncoming possible apocalypses, both minor and major. Events such as climate change and global warming are ideal examples. The first scientists that claimed that the climate was changing and that it was, at least partly, the fault of humans were considered insane by the vast majority. Afterwards, when climate change had finally been acknowledged as an actual occurring event, anger followed. Protests we organized to decrease the amount of CO2 released, to recycle more and to use less electricity etc. Anger in this particular context is difficult to define because the recipient of the anger was humanity itself, but as the protestors could not simply blame themselves, they had to go after larger corporations, who then had to endeavour to lessen the struggle of the common man. After a fairly long cycle of anger, that finally turned into bargaining, many people still argue to themselves that "surely one light bulb thrown in the wrong bin will not make a difference" or "it won't really matter if I take the car, even if I could just walk", attempting to bargain and justify with their own conscience, while downplaying the side-effects of reality, because it would mean that they would have to change their way of life radically to make a difference, a difference that many people want but that they are not prepared to pay the price for. Many Western governments have put restrictions on farmers, more governments and shops have started to advertise and even make laws about recycling and various campaigns on how to conserve energy have been put into motion. Though several years have passed, the Western world continues to add to CO2 emission, and is thereby still clinging to the stage of bargaining. It can be argued that this continued emission occurs because people have convinced themselves that if they make some small changes (sorting through their garbage, turning off the lights at night or eating organic foods) nothing more will happen on the climate front, neglecting to acknowledge the fact that additional people are put on this earth every day, and with more and more people comes a much larger toll on earth's resources. This example can be directly transferred onto other subjects and future struggles such as apocalypse, in any sense of the word. Of course, it is also imperative to be mindful of the individual speed with which people go through the stages, and indeed some people seem to be permanently tied to stage one. Though most people acknowledge the scientific evidence of climate change, there is a staunch portion of climate change deniers still in existence. With this example in mind, there must always be a distinction between the general state of the five stages of grief and the minorities that are also present, that might not correspond with the views of the general public.

To fully understand the five stages of grief I also wish to reintroduce an apocalyptic event that can essentially be argued to have gone through all five stages. World War II brought with it the denial that another world war could actually be happening so shortly after the first one, in an era where most of the Western world believed themselves to be too sophisticated and knowledgeable to engage in war yet again. The denial presented itself in its most debilitating form; a lack of or delayed form of action, in effect prolonging the war and costing more lives. Žižek describes the stage of denial and moving into anger thus:

moving from a state of fetishistic disavowal that something is fundamentally wrong with the status quo to a call to arms against the social injustices being perpetuated in our name (Germana & Mousoutzanis, 2014, p. 32)

The "call to arms" that Žižek mentions is the actual state of war in this case. At some point most of the strongest disbelievers had to surrender and irrefutably agree that something was indeed fundamentally wrong, after which the only realistic response was calculated anger. After the anger had manifested, a certain amount of bargaining seemed to take place. For example, by trying to send weapons to other nations so that they might fight, or simply remain placid during the war, certain countries were trying to bargain with their consciences that the best alternative was to let others take care of the problem at hand, so that they might be spared the consequences of a resisting nation. For some, the bargaining might even have extended to persuading themselves that surely if Jews were being targeted yet again, then the fault might even fall upon the Jews. The fourth stage, depression, is most visible at the end of and right after the war. After the death toll became clearer, the experiments performed on Jewish children were published, the stories from the death camps became common knowledge and the economic after-effects continued to resonate, the stage of bargaining largely crumbled. The stage of depression, mixed with disbelief, is widely covered in post-war literature, where the distinct feeling of hopelessness often prevails. Of course, this is often fuelled by the reality that whole cities had been annihilated by bombs. Millions of lives were lost and millions more had nothing to return to. The stage of 'depression' is categorised by the words "where we will withdraw from debates and action altogether" (Germana & Mousoutzanis, 2014, p. 33). In the case of WWII this statement can argued both for and against in various ways. On one hand it could be argued that after the war many people were stunned as a result of what had taken place, and shifted focus from what had actually happened to simply surviving, as well as trying to forget and repress memories. This might not be true for everyone, but as mentioned earlier severe historical trauma like that of WWII cannot easily be worked through, and certainly not in a number of days, weeks or even months. Taking this into account, it would be fair to suggest that the depression stage could potentially have spanned over years and even decades.

In modern times it can be argued that the world has reached a certain level of acceptance with regards to this particular trauma. It has been thoroughly researched and reinterpreted, documentaries of the events and survivors have had great publicity and it is something that, for most people, is acknowledged and talked about. Yet again, it is important to note that there are still those who deny the reality of the Holocaust altogether, placing them firmly, and perhaps permanently, in the stage of denial, demonstrating that the processing of trauma does not happen synchronously. Though it can be argued that a certain level of acceptance has been reached by the general public in modern times it is viable so say that this acceptance is still mixed with depression, which is a reasonable response to one of the greatest historical traumas in modern times. It can be contended that the mixture of depression and acceptance is portrayed in apocalyptic fictions. Acceptance; because we accept that it has occurred and that similar events can transpire again. Depression; because we are aware that if they do transpire it will be because of human shortcomings.

The five stages of grief link back to the obsession with the survivor, seeing as the ones that need to work through the five stages of grief are the survivors. As Berger was quoted for earlier: "What the survivor has survived is some trauma endowed with cultural significance - some apocalypse" (Berger, 1999, p. 47) and, according to Kübler-Ross and Žižek, every single victim of trauma has to work through these stages, no matter the origin of the trauma. In the words of political science professor, Jean-Pierre Dupuy:

it is only by fully recognizing future widespread disaster and tragedy as a foregone conclusion that we can act effectively to prevent the event from ever occurring (Germana & Mousoutzanis, 2014, p. 37)

Thereby, we have to have reached the stage of acceptance that an event can truly occur for us to prevent it from actually happening, which in turn can be challenging as the synchronous levels with which we process have a direct impact on the overall acceptance. For instance; though several nations might want to ban all nuclear activity because they have accepted that this might eventually cause another world war, or in the worst case global annihilation, it is not all nations who have reached this same acceptance, thereby making the prevention of nuclear annihilation virtually impossible by default. Though we can, for a time, choose to ignore the pressing reality of certain matters, it will not make it any less real in the long run, seeing as we are quite literally sitting on ticking bombs. Thereby, the fear that follows can often be seated in the inevitability that at some point something will go wrong.

# Apocalypse/Post-Apocalypse and the Importance of Media

There is nothing exceptionally contemporary about apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions; they have been in existence for decades. Historically, there is a wide selection of literature, and later films, that have covered the potential end to mankind and the world as we know it, spanning almost two centuries. As these fictions have existed for quite some time, we then have to take into account what has changed in recent years, for these types of fictions to have become even more popularized. How has the world changed and how might this change have affected the popularity of the genres? The apocalyptic fictions of the 19th century were not often bestsellers at the time of publishing. In contrast they experienced a revived and intensified interest in the middle of the 20th century, directly after WWII and during the Cold War, thereby becoming classics as a result of being ahead of the times in which they were written. In addition they were seen as being relevant in a historical context, seeing as the end of world was now a real possibility with the emergence of atomic bombs, weapons of mass destruction and world wars. The 50s, 60s and 70s are filled with apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions covering many possible causes of human and earthly demise, but the main apocalyptic interest in these periods seems to be predominantly represented by war/nuclear war, disease and human decline, mirroring the societal concerns of a world that had gone through two world wars and were under the constant threat of nuclear war. In this sense media was, and still is, a reflection of society, displaying real concerns in an exaggerated form. Consequently, it is not only important to analyse content when speaking of a specific genre, but also to analyse the development of the means of distribution, as this may have had an effect on the overall popularity of the genre. To understand content we must understand the channels through which it passes. Apocalypse and post-apocalypse are still represented during the 80s and 90s, however, the genuine modern boom seems to have occurred around the cusp of the 21st century, at the time of the millennium where an apocalypse was both predicted and prepared for. Here the genres, and various hybrid genres which we will return to later, are massively overrepresented and the focal points and apocalyptic events are no longer limited to be centred on war, disease and human decline (though these do still exist). Instead the events behind the fictions can now be attributed to the demise of technology, environmental and natural disasters or simply the breakdown of society or economy as a standalone event, thereby making the causes behind an apocalypse more varied in the 21st century. As the catalysts of the apocalypse become more diverse and wide-ranging they also mirror the growing number of threats and anxieties that the world has had to acknowledge in modern day, representing and transferring the general fears and unease of societies onto the genres. Although the genres have changed and evolved over the years, gaining popularity as more end of the world scenarios appear, their popularity has possibly also been affected by the evolution within media. This could be credited to the increasing number of channels that the genres pass through, and if this is the case then the developments in hybridity, social fears and distribution have a direct correlation.

Below is a schedule of some of the often cited apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions that can be credited with shaping and enhancing the generic interest, spanning from the 19th century, from where the modern genre originates, to the 21st century where it has experienced a boom.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **19th Century Literature**  *The Last Man* (1826) by Mary Shelley  *After London* (1885) by Richard Jefferies  *The War of the Worlds* (1898) by H.G. Wells | **20th Century Literature/Film/Games**  *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) by Jack London  *The day the Earth Caught Fire* (1964)  *Mad Max* (1979)  *Galapagos* (1985) by Kurt Vonnegut  *Gamma World* (1978-2010)  *Wasteland* (1987) | **21st Century Literature/Films/TV/Games**  *28 Days Later* (2002)  *The Road* (2006)  *Children of Men* (1992/2005)  *I am Legend* (2007)  *2012* (2009)  *The Book of Eli* (2010)  *The Walking Dead* (2010-)  *The 100* (2014-)  *Impact Event* (2014) |

By examining these fictions closer, a pattern with regards to media emerges. During the 19th century all of the fictions produced were written works in the form of novels. This, of course, seems logical seeing as there were not many other options of distribution of fictions in the 19th century. As TV and cinema became an integrated part of modern Western society in the 20th century, the apocalyptic fictions automatically became a part of these mediums as well, furthering the possibilities for distribution and becoming more accessible to a wider audience. At this point in time various adaptations of literary works were also being reinterpreted and distributed. Richard Matheson's *I am Legend* (1954) has currently been theatrically reinterpreted and released three times (1964, 1971 and 2007). Literary adaptations within the apocalyptic genre have continued to gain popularity, and in the 21st century many films, games and TV-series are based on literary works. In the late 20th century, especially the 80s and 90s, computer- and video games also started to incorporate the apocalyptic genre, another medium that has only grown in the 21st century, now consisting of numerous apocalyptic plots.

In the 21st century the means of distribution have developed to include literature, film, television, video- and online games, internet forums/blogs and comic books, furthering the argument that a development in distribution and accessibility is quite possibly a part of the success of the genre, as it is now available to a greater number of people and the audience can choose whichever medium they prefer.

## The Power of the Media

In determining the increased interest in genres such as apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions it has been identified that it is important to establish not only the content, and reasoning behind the content, but also the distribution and mediums that are used to communicate the genres. Though most of the Western world has largely been spared the fears of nuclear war in recent years, other worries, such as dependency on technology or climate changes, have replaced them. The last century has been host not only to an increased accessibility in the form of the internet but also to increased forms of communication. This increase includes the development of social media, with which much of the Western world engages. Information with regards to interest, or indeed disinterest, is omnipresent and pieces of information, both relevant and irrelevant, find their way into our conscious and subconscious minds. Mere decades ago individuals often had to specifically seek out whatever information that they might want, yet modern mass media manipulates and controls the information that we are given and thereby our very consciousness is affected. This effect on our consciousness, and our level of awareness, does not have to be viewed as negative, but we do have to take a critical standpoint with the types of information that we are being fed in mind. If we follow the previous line of thought, then literature, news and radio are all primary sources and outlets of information for general societal worries. No matter what societal worries might be the prime concern at a particular moment in time, they are mirrored in the aforementioned outlets, where-after they logically spread to other instances of the media, as these became a natural part of everyday lives.

In Asa Brigg's and Peter Burke's *Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*,the importance of the history of the media in any modern context is made evident, arguing that:

whatever the starting-point, it is necessary for people working in communication and cultural studies - a still growing number - to take history seriously, as well as for historians - whatever their period and preoccupations - to take serious account of communication, including both communication theory and communications technology (Briggs & Burke, 2009, p. 2)

Here we can draw on an earlier point made: to understand our present and our future we have to understand our past. It is a part of reality that the status and development of media in modern society makes accessibility easier and information more widespread. This also means that information that might not have been a part of society earlier in history is now a part of everyday life, providing at least part of a puzzle in understanding certain aspects of the developing interest in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic genres. Thereby, distribution in a historical perspective, as well as present means of distribution, become important facets that need to be put into context. World news has become a part of many people's lives and when we turn on the radio or TV or open online media sites, we are bombarded not only by news and disasters geographically close to ourselves, but from across the world. War in Afghanistan, tsunamis and earthquakes in Asia, gang wars in South America or depraved human behaviour in outback Australia become a part of both the conscious and the subconscious. As a result, become hyperaware of everything that goes on in the world, uncovering horrible scenarios of death and disaster that might not previously have been a part of our reality, our discourse or our world.

It could be argued that this hyperawareness is directly relatable to the fears and longings that are prevalent in the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic texts. With the emergence of the internet this new reality brought with it a new era. A technological era, that had previously only been speculated of, and which has continued to affect humans and human fears for decades, as evidenced by the subgenre as an apocalyptic event, which we shall return to shortly. Though advanced technology has been the substantial success of the late 20th century and all of the 21st century, it, like the nuclear bomb, has also forced new fears to become ubiquitous in our lives. While technology has propelled much of the world into a new era, with a new sense of awareness, it has also brought with it several challenges that have caused societal unrest. While the manifestation of new jobs and the saving of lives can, of course, be attributed to new technology, the opposite is also true. In many ways people have been replaced by machines and technology due to the industrial revolution of the 19th century, a revolution that is still ongoing. In some instances, technology itself can in fact be connected to the loss of life. Accidents including machines or vehicles being the most predominant examples, but drones used in modern day warfare have also claimed numerous victims. All of which forces sceptics to question whether we are becoming too dependent upon technology and even more to speculate what should happen if one day we can no longer rely on technology. This also includes the dreaded scenario that intelligent technology could at some point turn against humanity, which is exemplified in the Terminator series, where artificially intelligent robots go to war against humankind. These speculations are not supposed to evaluate whether a new technological era is superior or inferior to what once was, they are supposed to illustrate how the world has drastically changed in a very short time and how these changes might have been cause for new qualms, which often appear to follow ground-breaking inventions that somehow seem to threaten or emasculate humankind.

Of course, there are still debates on whether technology is actually affecting culture or not and whether the previously unprecedented spreading of knowledge and information affects the human population:

For historians and specialists in social studies, there is a continuing division between those who emphasize structure and those who emphasize agency. On one side, there are those who claim that there are no consequences of computers as such, any more than there are consequences of literacy. There are only consequences for individuals using these tools. On the other, there are those... who suggest that using a new medium of communication inevitably changes people's views of the world, in the long term if not earlier. (Briggs & Burke, 2009, p. 12)

Though there might be conflicting opinions upon whether media is affected by society or, conversely, whether society is affected by media, most seem to agree upon the fact that the world has undeniably and dramatically changed in the last six decades. It can be argued that the developments in technology are a major part of the dramatic change. In this context, with the last 3-4 years in mind, I specifically refer to official online streaming sites, such as Netflix and HBO, where people can gain a wide access to countless TV-shows, films and documentaries for a small sum every month. Additionally, there are also the illegal online downloading sites, such as The Pirate Bay, where the same films/series can be accessed for free. This newfound freedom in choosing what to watch, where to watch and when to watch it, gives not only the independence and diversity of choice but it provides the viewer with a source of a constant and automatically updating database. Moreover, many gaming consoles, such as PlayStation and Xbox, as well as online gaming sites, have also had an important role to play in advertising apocalypse and post-apocalypse, where the player gets to experience a post-apocalyptic world firsthand by controlling the gaming narrative. Many of these games have their own storylines where the character's fate, embodied by the gamer, depends on decisions made. In *Metro 2033* a nuclear war has decimated Russia and both man and animals are turned into zombie-like existences known as "dark ones". The massively popular *Fallout* is described as game that "deviates from most role-playing video games in that it often allows for the player to complete tasks in multiple ways, often choosing solutions that are unconventional or even contrary to the original task, in which case the player may still be rewarded. The player's actions may ultimately dictate the ending of the game, or what future story or game-play opportunities are available"[[1]](#footnote-1). Thereby, the players are given opportunities of very real and diverse simulations of end of the world scenarios that are always changeable and correspond with actions and consequence, simulating the state of life in a given context as closely as possible.

Finally, though one might continue to wonder why media is important to a particular genre, the fact of the matter is that media, and the progress of media in a modern world, is important not to a particular genre but to all genres. To comprehend how and why the genres spread to different media, and thereby gain more popularity, we have to look at the overall history. For example, where the post-apocalyptic genre started in literature it logically spread to films when these started to become a part of society and thereafter expanded to include games, comics and TV-series. The fact that the genre has managed to continually spread to various mediums, and still remains the subject of an intensified interest, speaks of its popularity. Furthermore, this popularity could also attest that a large number of people in the modern world may not have been drawn to the original source of the genre, literature, and instead their interest is focused more on TV or games as their main source. Additionally, as the genre initially gained popularity in its original source material, there was always a strong possibility that this popularity would likewise expand to other mediums, engaging consumers that might not have been previously interested, simply because of the primary medium of the genre. Lastly, the general consciousness of the consumer has changed, making TV, especially, an easily accessible source. The TV can easily be turned on and off and a vast amount of information that would usually take up 300 pages in a book, effectively taking hours or perhaps days to read, can be turned into a 45 minute episode or a one and a half hour film. Furthermore, there is the undeniable advantage to films and TV-series that they can be viewed and enjoyed in the company of others, potentially making it a social activity, while sticking to literature and comics is more of a solitary pastime.

# The Genres of the Apocalypse

When reading literature or watching a film or TV-series one of the first things we do as reader or audience, is to put the source of our interest into a category, to see what genre it belongs to. Sometimes that is a simple task, other times we have to put a lot of thought and effort behind it. The genre is important in the sense that oftentimes we choose the source of our interest on the basis of a genre, making the genre an essential part of our interest.

The post-apocalyptic genre asks us to consider several important questions. First: what could have been done to prevent the total destruction, second: what will it take for humans beings to regroup and to reconstitute their society, and third: what do we learn about human nature in a state of extreme distress and deprivation and what do we also learn about the human values we care about most. The genre has a moral vision and seeks to awaken in its readers and viewers a renewed commitment to avoid the circumstances that might lead to our destruction. (Harvard Extension Hub, 2013)

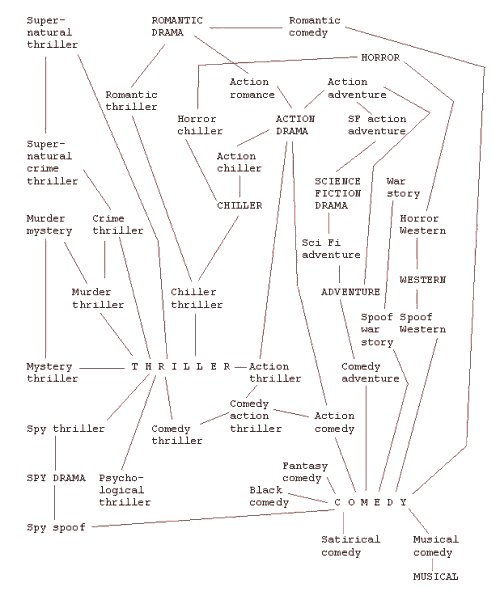
In this section we shall have a closer look at some of the genres of the apocalypse to see what genres are often paired together and what genres are less frequent in the given context. Furthermore, we will be looking into how the apocalyptic genres have changed over the years and how hybrid genres are now common for apocalyptic fictions. This will be done by drawing on examples of relevant literature, films and TV-series spanning from the 19th century to the 21st century and attempting to determine and define the genres at hand.

## Genres and Hybrid Genres in Modern Society

The first object that needs to be addressed in genre theory is the great debate and disagreements with regards to genres and genre theory. While some theoreticians believe that genres always live up to certain archetypal myths and can always be connected to these myths there are many theoreticians that are critical of this approach, acknowledging that as time passes, genres, like everything else, must evolve.

By structuralist critics a genre is conceived as a set of constitutive conventions and codes, altering from age to age, but shared by kind of implicit contract between reader and writer. These codes make possible the writing of a particular literary text, although the writer may play against, as well as with, the prevailing generic conventions (Abrams, 2009, p. 135)

By following the mind-set of structuralist critics, it seems plausible that in a modern age a modern take on genre is required to reach a new satisfactory level of generic conventions that do not correspond with previous generic conventions. Below is an example of a table of genres used in the British television listings, created by Daniel Chandler, visual semiotician. In his essay *An Introduction to Genre Theory* he stresses that though there are some conventions to follow with regards to genre, genre is also an individual assessment, and what might seem like one genre to one person, might seem like a different genre to another person.



(Chandler, Daniel, p. 12)

As can be seen above there are certain genres (in this case TV listings) that are popular or recurring enough that they become a part of the table in question, which means that all of these genres were, at the time of Chandler's research, being distributed to the public. This does not mean that these are the only genres or variations of genres that exist, but it does provide us with a sense of the immense amount of genres that do exist and also presents us with the proof that hybrid genres do indeed occur and in more variations than we can possible give a firm conclusion to. In the above table there is no genre classified as 'apocalyptic' or 'post-apocalyptic', the closest category to these genres being science fiction, where post-apocalyptic or apocalyptic would feature as a subgenre of science fiction. For our intents and purposes we need to expand the genres and subgenres in which the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic feature to thereby have a closer look at the many genre-varieties in which these are the focal point or simply an additional component.

literary genres are dynamic rather than static entities - they change or 'evolve' across time - it is the single most important factor separating modern from earlier genre theory (Duff, 2014, p. 232)

Therefore we will now scrutinize some of the literature, films and TV that are normally classified, or could/should be classified, as apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic and why it has or has not been classified as such. For this we will be using IMDB.com along goodreads.com and their databases of *Most Popular "Post Apocalypse" Feature Films With At Least 5,000 Votes* and *Best Post-Apocalyptic Fiction* respectively, as these cover both apocalyptic as well as post-apocalyptic scenarios. Oftentimes literature and TV/films overlap because of the many adaptations that have come out in recent years, yet here it is also interesting to see if the genre might have changed slightly from one medium to another.

Interestingly, some of the most popular books/films that have found their way onto both of the lists are the particularly successful "The Hunger Games" series by Suzanne Collins. The series, mostly classified as science fiction/adventure, does feature post-apocalyptic and apocalyptic characteristics as well as a persistent dystopian streak, which most of the series revolves around. So even though it can be heavily argued that the series is indeed science fiction and adventure it is also post-apocalyptic, apocalyptic and dystopian as well as featuring certain romantic traits. Post-apocalyptic in the sense, that it is highly implied that a war/nuclear war has taken place many ages ago, and apocalyptic in the sense that, as of the third book, a revolution/war is occurring to change the world as they know it. At the same time, a dystopia has been formed as a side-effect to the post-apocalyptic world that the remainders of civilization have had to adapt to, in order to control the residual population. While all of these subgenres are in play, the romantic subplot of the series cannot be ignored either, as it is both a recurring theme and definitive focus for the characters of the series. Furthermore, the romantic undertones of the series are substantial, as the main character struggles with choosing her romantic interest. Thereby, if we follow all the facts of the series, one could argue that The Hunger Games is indeed a "dystopian/post-apocalyptic/SF/adventure/romance", as there are elements from all of these genres present, and a willing mind could probably argue energetically for the presence of more subgenres. So while the post-apocalyptic undertones may not be the actual focal point of the series they are still persistent enough to be meaningful when looking from a genre point of view.

Another post-apocalyptic fiction that cannot be ignored in a modern context is AMC's "The Walking Dead", where a deadly virus has infected most of the population of North America and thereafter turned them into zombies. Though zombies are an important part of the plot the deterioration of humanity and civilization are also focal points. Throughout the 5 seasons currently in existence the capabilities of humans are explored through murder, cowardice, cannibalism and to some extent bravery and sacrifice. In Season 3 the audience is introduced to an unexpected utopia, Woodbury, in the middle of all of the post-apocalyptic chaos. Quickly it is revealed that this seemingly tranquil utopia is nothing but a fantasy, and the utopia is swiftly turned into a dystopia, as individuals learn that they are more pawns than people. Though the presence of a utopia might have seemed unexpected at the time, when reflecting further upon it, it does make sense that societies and miniature aspirant utopias should flourish in a world where chaos is supreme, seeing as creating a utopia, other than simple survival, has nearly always been the primary goal of the main characters. Earlier in the series the main group of survivors had attempted to secure a safe haven for themselves, working towards the security of the simple life, so technically it would make sense that other survivors would have the same aspirations, even if the result of these aspirations became somewhat distorted along the way. Though the dystopian streak is not a main element to the entire series the survivors repeatedly attempt to settle down and start a new life, but every time they think that they have found a new and secure home, humanity, interestingly, proves to be the sole decimator of the safe haven. Disagreements over leadership and what kind of people they ultimately want to be causes rifts and splits up both group and the remote chance at utopia. Zombies are often attributed with the ruin of the safe haven that humans have created, but when taking a closer look it becomes evident that the attention of the zombies is only drawn toward the main characters because of careless human behaviour, such as firing multiple gunshots when the characters are already aware that zombies are drawn in by noise. In the fifth season the moral deterioration of the good guys are explored, giving the audience an opportunity to understand how even the good guys turn bad, and how people may react when everything they thought they knew disappears. Overall, "The Walking Dead" is generally categorised as "post-apocalyptic/horror/drama", which does seem to cover the overall plot of the series. It is classified as post-apocalyptic because of the setting, horror because of the zombies and drama to cover the emotional and relational development of the characters. Nonetheless, in addition to the overall genres, with a TV-series spanning more than 5 years, is does seem plausible that supplementary subplots or subgenres are included in some, if not all, of the seasons. In a case such as this a genre determination of each season could be relevant, for example dubbing season 3 "post-apocalyptic/dystopian/horror/drama" or adding the romance subgenre in other seasons where romance or secret romances are prevalent elements for the season.

One of the newer genre pairings that has become increasingly popular recent years is the "horror/comedy" or "zombie/comedy", combining two genres that are normally thought to be on complete opposite sides of the genre spectrum. *Zombieland* (2009) temporarily became the top-grossing zombie film in the United States[[2]](#footnote-2), verifying the interest in not only zombie films but also the comedic aspects of the end of the world scenarios. Taking place two months after a zombie apocalypse, a group of survivors are looking for other surviving family members and trying to find a safe haven where they can rebuild their lives. The highest level of absurdity is reached in the zombie stand-off at a theme park, highlighting the contrast between the zombie apocalypse and comedic aspects. *Warm Bodies* (2013) gave an unprecedented narrative function by presenting the story from the zombie's point of view and offering up the possibility that zombies could regain their humanity. Furthermore, *Warm Bodies* is an example of the strange hybrid genre of "romance/zombie/comedy", with the romantic plot being the point of convergence for the storyline, not only displaying that previously bizarre genre hybridity is possible, but can also be successful, demonstrating that there is both an interest and an audience willing to seek out such hybrids. *Shaun of the Dead*  (2004) is yet another example of the uncanny zombie apocalypse and the inclusion of dark comedy as a way of dealing with and lightening otherwise horrific ends to the world. Though there are examples of older horror comedies these modern additions to the genre have numerous common denominators that will assist us in determining overall elements in apocalypse and post-apocalypse as well as often used sub-genres and sub-plots. For example, though none of the films in the "zombie/horror" or "horror/comedy" genre are categorized as post-apocalyptic, they all take place in post-apocalyptic settings. It could be argued that the zombie genre itself points toward a post-apocalyptic setting, thereby making the post-apocalyptic a given. Though this could provide us with a way to categorize the zombie aspects of the genres it could also be the kind of stereotyping that can halt genre determining in the future, by automatically assuming that the zombie genre is automatically post-apocalyptic. This, though, must make us question other fictions of the apocalypse and their appointed genres. Why are some fictions dubbed apocalyptic, or post-apocalyptic, when others are not?

The film*World War Z* (2013), an adaptation of the 2006 novel of the same name, was a commercial success, producing yet another take on zombie apocalypse, this time with the 'zoombie', the fast zombie, as the foe. Though the zoombie is an interesting aspect in itself, argued to be an image of consumer culture, for now we shall focus on the genre of *World War Z*. Generally categorized as an "apocalyptic/adventure/horror/drama", a prime example of a hybrid genre, it seems to cover most of the basics. As a whole, the world as the characters know it is ending, representing the apocalyptic, while the main character travels across the world to find the source of the zombie epidemic, giving the adventure aspect. The frighteningly fast zombies are the horror of the film while the drama is represented by the moral dilemmas that tend to emerge during an end of the world scenario. This hybridity, though interesting, also poses questions about the genres in general. What makes one film fit in the horror genre instead of the zombie genre? Why are some fictions categorized as apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic genre-wise while others are not, even though they all share the same or similar end of the world traits? Are some fictions simply more apocalyptic than others or is it a part of an overall advertising scheme?

Common for all of the above mentioned fictions is the presence of apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic settings. Though the importance of these may vary depending upon the fiction it is plain that they all largely belong to the same genre and represent the end of the world as we know it and/or the beginning of a new world and how the remnants of humanity deal with these events. From this we can conclude that there seems to be hidden, or masked, examples of apocalypse and post-apocalypse, and were we to apply James Berger's theory of apocalypse as historical events/traumas, we would uncover thousands more fictions implementing apocalypse and the human managing of these apocalypses. The fictions concerning World War II could represent a genre of historical apocalypse all by themselves and other fictions concerning the technological meltdown of society could possibly be a standalone genre. Playwright, journalist and children's book author Manjula Padmanabhan writes:

What I like about science fiction is that it offers a writer the opportunity to go directly to the heart of an ironical or thought-provoking situation by setting up a theoretical world. It's a bit like writing a problem in mathematics, reducing reality to a tangle of pipes and cisterns or a group of three people travelling at varying speeds up a mountain, in order to reveal the relationships between matter, time and space (Germana & Mousoutzanis, 2014, p. 113)

The difference with fiction and genre determination as opposed to a mathematical problem is that we have no precise equations and no answer sheets, we only have propositions and speculations, and to presume or rule out in the world of fiction would be to close doors that might need to be left open for future purposes. The positive aspect of the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic genres, with regard to popularity, is also the reality that when the world crumbles at least the problem is out there. It becomes obvious and you can finally face it and deal with it. The problem can be confronted and this confrontation offers some kind of catharsis for the audience. If climate change leaves our world in ruins then climate change is no longer an invisible enemy, but something more substantial. The same can be said for nuclear war, illness and zombies. The genres speak to our deepest fears, but there is also willpower, ambition and a hope that after the world has seemingly irreversibly ended, rebirth and an end to old fears becomes possible. Finally, the hybridity of the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic genres, and the actual need for hybridity in itself, tells us that there is a deep-seated need with readers and audiences for various explorations of end of the world scenarios. This want, need and interest for hybrid genres, such as the existence of zombie/horror/comedy, reflect the audience's need for serious scenarios to be communicated lightly.

“We’re living in very uncertain times,” says Max Brooks, who wrote the book on which the World War Z film is based. “People have a lot of anxiety about the future. They’re constantly being battered with these very scary, very global catastrophes. I think a lot of people think the system is breaking down and just like the 1970s, people need a ‘safe place’ to explore their apocalyptic worries. They can’t read stories about real plagues or nuclear war. That’s too scary. That’ll make them turn away. Zombie stories give people the opportunity to witness the end of the world they’ve been secretly wondering about while, at the same time, allowing themselves to sleep at night because the catalyst of that end is fictional.” (Barber, 2013)

While Brooks makes a valid point, that stories of real plagues and nuclear war might be too much for some, it is important to note that these are also standalone genres and that some people are interested in the gory and brutal. In this sense, we can transfer the interest in zombies onto the popularity of the horror/comedy hybrid genre, which indicates that there is a broad audience that prefers the lighter comedic aspects of the genre, allowing them to explore the end of the world scenarios, some of them including zombies, but infusing them with a sense of humour that does not seem quite as scary as isolated post-apocalyptic horror. This strategy invites the interest of people that might not previously have been tempted by the standalone horror and so validating the need for the existence of such hybrids.

## Dystopia as a Pre-Existing Condition

As covered earlier, though apocalypse and post-apocalypse can be stand-alone genres, I feel it necessary to further explore their connection to dystopias and the dystopian genre as a whole. Though devastation and survival are obvious themes in end of the world fictions, the destruction and following rebuilding of civilization also seems to be a recurring theme. When focusing on apocalypse there are wider concerns than simply the world ending to take into account. Seeing as fictions of the apocalypse often focus on survivors it also has to focus on how these survivors deal with the new world they inhabit. When people have been used to a certain way of life for an extended period of time, it follows that a shift in their practical and moral reactions will ensue, when the life that they knew is taken away from them. Furthermore, if people have been accustomed to following certain regulations, and society has depended upon these regulations for order to prevail, then it becomes an interesting human experiment to explore how people would react to a world without regulations and order. Would they simply throw in the towel and live in utter chaos? Would taking another's life still matter or would it simply be passé? Or would people return to an imitation of what they once knew - a world where there were rules, so individuals knew what to live up to, as to maintain a certain standard of living and be, to some extent, guaranteed safety?

Though we have to discern that there is a difference between dystopian fictions and apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic fictions we also have to acknowledge that they share many of the same traits and oftentimes the genres overlap. Dystopian fictions often take place in a world where civilization and society has broken down and a new civilization and way of life has been formed. This breakdown of civilization can be interpreted as an apocalypse in itself. On the other hand, the development of a dystopian society, or smaller isolated dystopias, is often a reaction to an apocalypse or surviving in a post-apocalyptic world. The novel and film *The Children of Men/Children of Men* (1992/2005) is an example of a dystopian society that has been formed, in this case because the whole world has been rendered infertile, and people have lost all hope and will to fight because they are aware that the human race is becoming extinct. In this example, infertility itself is the apocalypse. It has already occurred as no babies have been born for 18 years, and the remaining people are essentially living in a post-apocalyptic world. The response to this apocalypse is a totalitarian dystopian society in the United Kingdom, where other people are trying to seek refuge, as it is the most controlled and safest place left on earth. The British government deals with the sheer number of refugees by forcing them into refugee camps - never really intending to let any more people into the UK. Though rarely dubbed post-apocalyptic, (*The*) *Children of Men* represents many of the frequent traits that dystopian and apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic fictions share, first by portraying the slow and permanent death of human life and second by focusing on the global and cultural consequences brought with it. In addition, while desperation and human depravation are central themes in both book and novel, hope is also present in the form of the first pregnant woman for two decades. The juxtaposition of hope and hopelessness can be argued to be common for most post-apocalyptic fictions.

In *Babylon AD* (2008) the chilled relationship between Russia and the United States has reached unprecedented levels, bringing with it another cold war. The United States has developed into a controlled, technological utopia, while Russia has reverted back to chaotic communism in a dystopian state. Displaying the faults of both societies, neither dystopia nor utopia is portrayed as a solution to the problem. Common for many of the fictions (apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic and dystopian alike) is the scary possibility that they are all set in the future, our future, and many of them draw on present fears of society. The possibility that eventually humankind will be infertile confronts deep-seated fears of survival, because if we cannot reproduce and put new life on this earth then we, as a species, have already failed. Furthermore, the possibility of the end of human life, not only as we know it, but eternally, stands in stark contrast to the present question of overpopulation and worries with regards to the depletion of earth's resources. Thereby the fictions are not only an attempt to share a story with the audience, but more of an attempt to teach us a free lesson - we can prevent these events from ever happening if we only listen and learn.

The historian writes about the past to tell a truth with warning: this is what happened and may it never happen again. The novelist of the apocalypse and of the end of humankind foretells the future but with the voice of a Cassandra: no one will believe her until it is too late (Germana & Mousoutzani, p. 114)

Examples of this can yet again be found in history, where apocalypses have already occurred. The Second World War, which stands out as the greatest failure of humankind in the modern world, has been told and retold from different perspectives and narratives. Historians, authors and survivors tell their stories and give us, the people of the future, the opportunity to not obliterate and devastate humanity, as was done, not too long ago, by our fellow humans. Even in the modern world we witness the existence of isolated dystopias, most prominently North Korea, where the value of a human life can be determined by one single being and denying its citizens the possibility of ever leaving the country is considered a standard. Though plenty of Western comedies exist regarding this bizarre country and its dictator it is not all amusing. No matter how many funny blog entries or memes poking fun of both country and dictator are made, the reality remains that an almost fully dystopian country exists now, in the modern world. So what makes people believe that this inclination could not possibly spread in the future, especially in the midst of the end of the world? Thereby, history teaches us not just that which has transpired, but also what can occur in the future if we are not aware and alert. The possibility of future annihilation is therefore important not only in history but also in fictions. We need to be aware, not only of what has happened but what can happen, oftentimes by warning us about what we are capable of. Man's capabilities, motivations and lessons do not disappear by simply forgetting, only by remembering and taking heed can a utopia be a realistic, constructive possibility.

## The Young Adult Interest in the Apocalypse

Though the interest in apocalypse and post-apocalypse has clearly intensified over the last decades, the widening audience of the genres is also remarkable. Though it might seem logical that by expanding the genres of the apocalypse an expanded audience will also follow, the sheer amount of young readers, and fictions specifically aimed at younger readers, is surprising. Some of the most popular films and books at present time are indeed in the young adult and post-apocalyptic categories, and those are just some of the well-known fictions. Presently the young adult genre is teeming with apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic/dystopian fantasy and fiction, mixing many different genres and narratives and tackling how the young adult audience would handle a possible end of the world scenario. Below is a table of some of the post-apocalyptic fictions that are aimed at the young adult audience. Also included are the genres they generally belong to and the mediums they are represented in.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Title** | **Genre** | **Medium** |
| "The Hunger Games" Series (2008-2015) | Young Adult/Science Fiction/Adventure/Post-apocalyptic/Dystopian/Romance | Books  Films |
| The 100 (2013-) | Young Adult/Science Fiction/Post-apocalyptic/Drama/ | Books  TV series |
| "Divergent" Series (2011-) | Young Adult/Science Fiction/Adventure/Post-apocalyptic/Dystopian/Romance | Books  Films |
| "City of Ember" Series (2003-2008) | Young Adult/Science Fiction/Post-apocalyptic/Dystopian | Books  Film |
| The Arcana Chronicles (2011-) | Young Adult/Post-apocalyptic/Fantasy/Romance/Drama | Books |
| "The Maze Runner" Series (2009-) | Young Adult/Science Fiction/Post-Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Action | Books  Films |

Common for all of these fictions is their diversity with regards to genre, creating a multitude of previously unknown hybrid genres along with their ability to catch young readers. The fact that the awareness of a future apocalypse, and the world after the apocalypse, interests not only adult readers but an adolescent audience as young as 12, also means that evidently there is a need to explore a new world and a new way of living. Though this need for exploration is interesting there might also be reasons behind the interest that could differ depending on the audience. While adults might seek, as James Berger theorizes, a new and simpler world, a fresh start or simply explore common fears manifested in society (apocalyptic desire is a longing also for the aftermath, for the New Jerusalem (Berger, 1999, p. 34), young adult readers may possibly be searching or wishing for a free environment where they are no longer merely considered children, but important entities in their own right, able to create their own way of life and not to be ruled by parents or society.

The wish to end the world, or to represent the end of the world, arises in each case from more particular social and political discomforts and aspirations (Berger, 1999, p. 34)

Following Berger's theory, social and political discomforts and aspirations are an imperative part of apocalyptic fictions and it follows that these discomforts and aspirations will vary depending on the subject, or audience, at hand. Of course it is also important to bear in mind that young adult fictions do not exclude an adult audience, the same as fictions aimed at an older audience does not exclude an adolescent audience. Indeed, some of the most popular young adult fictions in the apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic genre have a large following of older fans, which could be interpreted as a need, in the older audience, to feel the hopefulness of youth once more, or maybe the older audience simply did never grew up. In 2014

 "[The Times film critic, AO Scott,](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/14/magazine/the-death-of-adulthood-in-american-culture.html?_r=0) took the same argument a step further.... by proclaiming the death of adulthood itself, with young adult fiction the leading symptom of a culture collapsing into permanent adolescence" (Walter, Damien)

So if the Western world has collapsed into a state of permanent adolescence, how is that portrayed in everyday society? Is there any evidence that there is no such thing as adulthood anymore? Of course, there is no denying that a longing for youth and beauty has become an essential part of the Western world. The fact that people are having operations to attain, or maintain, a certain outwards age corresponds with the fact that certainly part of youth is craved. We want the wisdom of age but the appearance of a teenager. Fundamentally; we crave immortality, something wholly unattainable, and must therefore cast our deepest desires elsewhere. Does this then reflect itself in our choice of films and literature? If the fictions that we popularize are indeed a depiction of us, as a species in a certain context, then it would be plausible to connect the interest in YA fictions to a cultural collapse and inner need for adolescence. This, of course, does not mean that all individuals long for youth or YA fictions, it simply means that there is a clear need and want for it in the modern world. Though material on the actual interest in young adult fictions is yet to be thoroughly discussed, Damien Walter suggests a fascinating answer to the interest.

Young adult novels externalise evil as an enemy that can be seen and understood. They give teenagers a [Lord Voldemort](http://harrypotter.wikia.com/wiki/Tom_Riddle), a monster that can be defeated, an evil that can be vanquished. But increasingly the evil in young adult fiction is the adult world itself. In the Hunger Games it’s an adult world of political and economic repression. In Divergent it’s an adult world that demands conformity, at the expense of the individual. In The Maze Runner it’s an adult world that has escalated to such technological complexity that we are all lost within it. And increasingly, it’s not just teenagers that need allegorical warnings against adult reality, but adults themselves. (Walter, Damien)

If we follow the reasoning of Damien Walter then everyone, young and adult alike, needs reinterpretations of evil, either in the form of particular evil sources, like Lord Voldemort from the Harry Potter series, or in form of societies gone wrong, which is often the case of post-apocalypse and dystopia. As previously mentioned, these fictions are often warnings of possible futures, futures that adults have had important roles in shaping, leaving the children and youths wholly affected by the lax decisions of adults. Thereby, these fictions are also a way to both learn and prevent, while at the same time they represent a youthful innocence that the adult audience longs for. In the words of G.K. Chesterton: "Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed”. In this, children may not be the only ones longing for the possibility of slaying the dragon, of ending evil or simply surviving evil. Adults may have the same sense of longing, as their younger counterparts. Here it is important to insert that there are still blatant differences between the young adult post-apocalyptic fictions and the adult post-apocalyptic fictions. Most prominently, the main characters are often young and playing the part of the saviour in the young adult fictions. The adult genre is often more focused on the survivors rather than the saviours, or the saviours that are present often have to sacrifice their own life for someone else. As such, there is a distinct difference between saviour and survivor. Conclusively, the common goal for both young and adult fictions is still the longing for a better world, and the reflected fears of society are mirrored in both genres.

## Genre Determining the Post-Apocalyptic

Drawing on Brian Graham's theory of fictions of the apocalypse, and the theory that these fictions can be put into boxes divided by their level of devastation, and subsequently the level of apocalypse, we shall now to take a closer look at these particular subgenres. Though Graham has set up a respectable preliminary table for this type of genre determination, there are points which can be expanded upon to include other theoretical subgenres. Where Graham's table includes the demise of God, mankind, animal kingdom, the vegetable world, mineral life and the watery world, he has not clearly enhanced the table to include odd pairings of the previously mentioned and other, less likely, apocalyptic scenarios. I will now endeavour to create a table that includes the subgenres that I believe have been overlooked in Graham's table, and make an effort to argue the importance of the inclusion of these particular subgenres as they become more popular and pertinent in modern society. I have chosen to include the demise of technology, the demise of society, the demise of new life and the demise of gender as essential parts of the apocalyptic genres in modern society, as it can be argued that they reflect sincere societal concerns. Furthermore, I believe it is essential that all subgenres can be mixed and matched as seen fit, eliminating a structured and definite table and instead leaning towards flexibility and open-mindedness, thereby taking conscious steps to prevent one rigid conclusion and opening the prospect of various possibilities. Below is a table with the subgenres that I have chosen to expand upon as well as examples of these.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Ever-Greater Decreations** | **Examples** |
| The demise of technology | *The Emberverse Series* (2004-2014) by S.M. Sterling  Revolution (2012-2014) |
| The demise of society | Goodbye World (2013)  *Into the Forest* (1998) by Jean Hegland |
| The demise of new life | *The Children of Men*/Children of Men (1992/2005) |
| The demise of gender | Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women (2003)  *Escape* (2008) by Manjula Padmanabhan |

I have chosen to include the demise of technology as a subgenre in its own right, seeing as technology in itself is a vital part of the world as we know it today. Should an event that destroyed all technological progress and knowledge occur, the world as we know it would change drastically and in the worst case scenario civilization could potentially relapse into a pre-technological era akin to the dark ages. With no possibilities of recreating technology humanity would have to adapt to a new world, a new era where ways of communication would be severely crippled, thereby affecting society and social order as a whole. The scenarios of a world without radio, TV, computers, airplanes, frozen dinners, fully functioning hospitals and so on, could certainly be considered a post-apocalyptic world in the eyes of many modernists. In the TV-series "Revolution" (2012-2014) the after-effects of the demise of technology are explored. Set in the US 15 years after a technological blackout, society and civilization have also been utterly changed, due to the collapse of the government after technology suddenly vanished. In place of the government several militias have taken over territories in North America, and slavery has become an integrated part of this new world. The following opening introduction to every episode incorporates many concerns for modern society, should we ever have to manage without technology.

We lived in an electric world. We relied on it for everything. And then the power went out. Everything stopped working. We weren't prepared. Fear and confusion led to panic. The lucky ones made it out of the cities. The government collapsed. Militias took over, controlling the food supply and stockpiling weapons.

It ensnares the audience by actualizing very real dilemmas, seeing as we presently live in a technological world where most of us wholly depend on technology in nearly every aspect of our lives. Modern civilization without technology would no longer be modern civilization, and we are largely unprepared to deal with such a scenario. Exploring the human reactions if one day we woke up, none of the electronic devices working and caught completely unawares, is fascinating and grounds for a societal breakdown in its own right. Furthermore, the introduction also delves into our greatest fears; the following panic of such a breakdown and how we, as a species, would respond to it.

The demise of society, I believe, can also be considered a standalone subgenre. In this particular subgenre the ramifications of human actions or lack thereof are explored, as the human race is put on the spot, because for a demise of society to occur, with no other apocalyptic factors to consider, humanity in a given context must have failed. Of course, the demise of society could also be a side-effect of another apocalyptic event, such as war, disease or the breakdown of technology, as seen in Revolution where the government and society breaks down as a side-effect of the breakdown of technology. The 2013 film "Goodbye World" examines the human responses to the breakdown of society as the result of a single text message saying "goodbye, world", being sent to every phone across the world, creating fear, confusion and panic as most people are sure that the message is a prelude to some form of attack. The film follows a small group of friends randomly gathered in a secluded forest area off the grid in the US, safe from the riots and upheavals plaguing the general public as a response to the anxiety spreading across the United States and the rest of the world. Though the friends are initially unconvinced about the state of the world, and the speed with which it is crumbling, they are soon faced with the complications themselves as other people, who are less prepared for an apocalypse, seek them out in need of medicine and food. Less than inclined to share the hard-earned apocalypse preparations, the owner of the residence declines the other group's offer to team up and help each other, instead tempting their wrath and desperation. Though eventually a happy ending, with a self-sufficient teamwork between the groups, transpires, there are no resolutions to the ending of society and the open ending clearly highlights the amount of devastation even a minute of worldwide panic can cause, further displaying the fragility of the world that we have built and the prospect of it crumbling if caution is not exercised.

The demise of new life as a subgenre can arguably be covered by Graham's category of the demise of humankind. In contrast, I will argue that while the demise of humankind covers the destruction of humans in general, thereby focusing on the aftermath of the demise, the demise of new life functions both as an apocalypse and a post-apocalypse, as it deals with the gradual extinction of humankind as well as a new world with no babies or parturition. As with most subgenres, this particular demise also stands in strong contrast to the world that we inhabit today. In a world where resources are slowly running out and the earth is becoming more overpopulated by the day, we are frequently exposed to the aftermath of hunger and famine as well as the stark distinction between the struggles of third world countries and the overabundance of wealth in most of the western world. Indeed, we are overexposed to images of starving children while many westerners have the luxury of waging a war against their BMI and their overindulgence. While some experts are warning us of both overindulgence and overpopulation other experts are advising Westerners to have children at an earlier age, as well as reminding us that in some places we are giving birth to the lowest number of children ever. Contradicting statements bring contradicting fears; the earth is becoming overpopulated yet people are still being advised to bring more people into the world. Therefore, it is also interesting to speculate how the direct opposite scenario would turn out; an under-populated world where the concern is no longer a lack of resources but a lack of contributors and consumers. Of course, infertility in itself is also an important subject in the Western world, where the topic also reflects fears of the spreading infertility in Western society as a side-effect of various medications, contraception and even what we consume. The very possibility of the human race being the cause of its own extermination goes against the core of our existence, our human need to preserve ourselves and our race in the future. Following Stephen Cave's theory on immortality "all living things seek to perpetuate themselves into the future, but humans seek to perpetuate themselves forever" (Cave, 2013, p. 2) and when the prospect of our preservation becomes remote or unlikely, our entire existence will eventually lose all meaning. When we can no longer perpetuate ourselves, our need for civilization, for meaning, dies with us - or, in the case of Children of Men (2005), it dies without new life.

With regards to the subgenre of the demise of gender, I find it imperative not only to note the importance of these single-gender worlds, and their distinction from the world that we are familiar with, but also the many traits that they share with our current world. Though it is widely agreed that there are differences in gender, the complications with regards to the gender equality debate have boomed in recent decades. Should women work on the same terms as men, should they get paid the same amount, should men be able to stay at home with children while the woman works, etc. Though the debate has been lively and has unreservedly changed the way in which many of us regard gender, compared to how gender and the associated obligations of a certain gender used to be viewed, it has also blurred lines between genders and with the assistance of science it has also begged another question; can gender become irrelevant? In Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women (2003) the lack of females, caused by aggressive and continuous infanticide and femicide, is shown to cause unrest and village riots, as the men fight over the rights to the final female in town, eventually blaming her and the female gender in general for the unrest. Set in India around 2050 AD it focuses on the extreme aftermath of infanticide and favouring one gender over the other. In Manjula Padmanabhan's *Escape* (2008), also set in what appears to be India, it is not only post-female but post-human, the world now consisting chiefly of clones, with all of the clones being male. Because of the advancements in the technology of cloning, women have become inconsequential, their former importance and necessary status to bring forth new life is no longer needed. The leftover human males and clones are encouraged to participate in sexual acts with each other, homosexuality now being the norm, and even the thought of being heterosexual, or the mere mention of females, is considered taboo. This corresponds with the current fear in several countries on the Asian continent, where femicide and infanticide is practiced and a legitimate concern, seeing as this could eventually tip the gender balance, leaving a greater percentage of one gender, in these cases male, thereby causing the previous speculations of unrest, rivalry and riots. In both of these fictions dystopian societies are prevalent, further connecting apocalypse, post-apocalypse and dystopia.

## Apocalyptic Events as a Subgenre

Though we have expanded upon Brian Graham's original table, I also believe that another table might be convenient when speaking of the apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic. The aftermath and the repercussions of an apocalyptic event seem significant in determining the genre and subgenres that we might be dealing with, but the actual reason behind the end of the world as we know it seems just as imperative to incorporate. For instance, whether the world has ended due to disease or due to nuclear war might be an important point, as some people might specifically seek a particular subgenre out, on account of the actual end of the world event. The table below includes events that are most commonly regarded as apocalyptic scenarios. One fiction is not necessarily limited to one category, seeing as both genres and subgenres are flexible entities that can work across both genres and subgenres. Furthermore, some of these subgenres are often in close proximity to each other, seeing as one event might lead to the occurrence of another apocalyptic event.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Apocalyptic Event** | **Examples** |
| War/Nuclear war | Jericho (2006-2008)  How I Live Now (2013) |
| Natural disaster/eco-centred | 2012 (2009) |
| Disease/Pandemic | *Goslings: A World of Women* (1913) by [J.D. Beresford](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._D._Beresford)  The Tribe (1999-2003) |
| Infertility/human decline | Children of Men (1992/2005) |
| Economic/societal collapse | *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) by Ayn Rand |
| Technological collapse/technological takeover | Battlestar Galactica (2003-2009)  Revolution (2012-2014) |
| Supernatural | *Demons* (2000) by John Shirley |

For example; The Tribe (1999-2003), a New Zealand/British post-apocalyptic young adult TV-series, focuses on the lives of a group of youths left behind after all adults have perished, after a pandemic has swept over the world. Desperate for survival, after "the virus" has started spreading to the younger population as well, a group of teenagers search for "the cure", which they are sure the adults have left behind somewhere. Throughout the five seasons, the series explores the aftermath of a world without adults, as well as the youths' attempt to rebuild the world they once knew, creating a new economy (by trading goods) and redeeming some sort of judicial system, by punishing theft and violence. Therefore, The Tribe could be an example of a post-apocalyptic young adult drama, focusing on the **demise of** mankind to some extent, as well as God and society as a side-effect of the demise of a great portion of mankind, **caused by** disease/pandemic.

In contrast, Jericho (2006-2008) focuses on the inhabitants of a small town in Kansas, leading up to and following the events of the nuclear attacks on 23 major cities in Northern America. Centralizing themes such as dealing with limited resources, internal and external threats as well as group dynamics in a collapsed society and the following semi-dystopia as militias rise to the fore, Jericho is more a post-apocalyptic drama focusing on the **demise of** society/humankind **caused by** nuclear war. As the series primarily focuses on the events in and around Jericho, the audience never knows how much of the world and mankind was truly wiped out. It is, nonetheless, made clear that the government in place at the time of the apocalyptic event dissolved soon after the event took place, making way for the opportunistic militias.

The science fiction/adventure/disaster film 2012 (2009) explores the chain reactions after a solar flare has caused the temperature of earth's core to increase exponentially, provoking worldwide earthquakes that are all above the Richter scale. As a side-effect of the numerous earthquakes, various mega-tsunamis start to consume the world, eventually engulfing the highest point in the world, Mount Everest. All of the G8 governments are aware of the looming end of the world and have built arks to save the richest 100.000 people from each nation, most of the world's animal species to breed in the future, as well as the most important works of art and literature from across the world. In this case, the film could be said to be apocalyptic focusing on **the demise of** mankind, the animal kingdom and the vegetable world **caused by** natural disaster.

As a result of the many different categories, genres and subgenres, and the sheer amount of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions present in modern society, I believe that creating tables, in which to categorize the different fictions, can be helpful to audiences and readers across the world, not only for the sake of categorizing but also to make the choice of fictions present more manageable. The presence of so many vastly different fictions in the same genre is grounds for a reinterpretation of the genres and the categorizing. Such a reform would lead to a system where the search and research process to find a specified fiction of post-apocalypse, along with its cause and effect, would be simplified.

# Analytic Examples

I have chosen to include analyses of two examples of post-apocalyptic fiction, one written prior to World War II (as of result of the postulated effect that the war has had on post-apocalyptic fictions, which I plan to explore further in the second analysis), *After London* (1885), and one written after World War II, *The Road* (2006). The reasoning behind the inclusion of these analyses is the hope that they will reflect both the historical and the theoretical speculations included earlier in the thesis and further explore the similarities in post-apocalyptic fictions and genres across the ages.

## Analysis of *After London* by Richard Jefferies

*After London* or *After London; Or* *Wild England*, as it is sometimes referred to, was written by Richard Jefferies (1848-1887) and published in 1885. It has been widely regarded as one of the first examples of post-apocalyptic literature, focusing on how man adapts to a new post-apocalyptic world after the human population suddenly declined and the world reverted back to a wild, naturalistic state. The book contains two different narratives, not only focusing on survival but also the simple circumstances of life in a changed world. Genre-wise the novel is mainly a post-apocalyptic/romance/adventure, but it also consists of many naturalistic components, which is analogous with Jefferies' role as a naturalistic writer. Simultaneously, the novel reflects Jefferies' concerns on life in Victorian England, where science and the general way of life was undergoing a rapid development and many people moved from the countryside to the bigger cities. In Caroline Sumpter's essay "Machiavelli Writes the Future: History and Progress in Richard Jefferies's After London" it is claimed that:

*After London*'s return to a “woodland feudal society” was a sign of Jefferies's “physical hatred of the noise and rush of the city” and “the ‘rural’ (Sumpter, 2011)

Though this cannot be confirmed, it directly corresponds with James Berger's theory of a longing for a New Jerusalem, a new world and a chance to reconstruct and better the world in which we live. In a time where hasty progress and change is the focus of a civilization, where new ways overlap with old ways, this longing for simplicity, for tranquillity, becomes a focal point of fictions. The fictions then become mirrors of the longings of parts of society and it could be argued that Jefferies has been influenced by [Henry David Thoreau](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/h/henry_david_thoreau.html) and his reflections on simple living in correspondence with nature in his 1854 work *Walden* (or *Walden: or, Life in the Woods)*. The often referenced quote

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

can be linked to *After London* and the essential facts of life and human behaviour, when everything else is stripped away, and there is nothing left but to live. Thereby, *After London* becomes more than purely a post-apocalyptic fiction it becomes the exploration of the base of humanity, what drives humanity and what it is capable of. Thoreau's quote continues with his reasoning behind the withdrawal from modern civilization.

  to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms, and, if it proved to be mean, why then to get the whole and genuine meanness of it, and publish its meanness to the world; or if it were sublime, to know it by experience, and be able to give a true account of it in my next excursion.

This rawness and genuineness is also present in *After London*, where Jefferies does not set out to portray a post-apocalyptic world as either good or bad or mean or sublime. Instead it includes the different facets of a new world and all the glorious and horrifying effects that come with it, making it real, human and deliberate.

Moreover, Jefferies can also be said to have a strong connection to the British pastoral tradition, by detailing rural life and scenery and destroying the major cities of England, thereby depicting the urban life as something to be met with a certain amount of scepticism. The Free Dictionary describes the pastoral as "a literary work or picture portraying rural life, especially the lives of shepherds in an idealizing way"[[3]](#footnote-3). Though Jefferies definitely focuses on the rural and nature it is not necessarily an idealized focus but more of an honest focus. In *After London* Jefferies openly narrates the splendour of a wild England while contrasting the beauty of nature to the vile actions of man. Whereas most of the varying tribes of humans are depicted as being arrogant of bloodthirsty, the idyllic lives of the shepherds featured in the novel are the more charismatic alternative to humanity. The portrayed depravation of even the most civilized tribes clarifies for the reader that this is certainly not the existence to strive for, while the relaxed and accepting ways of the shepherds become the most idealized existence.

For Jefferies, the relationship between man and the natural world was not wholly dependent upon biologically determined impulses or inclinations, but upon a deeper, more soulful exchange between the mind of man and the cadence of natural surroundings. (Welshman, 2011)

Though *After London* on the whole is not considered to be among the greatest written works in existence (the first part of the novel often being the most praised part, for its keen focus on the natural aspects of a wild England) it is evidence of an early post-apocalyptic interest, not dissimilar from the blooming interest in various subgenres today. Jefferies himself is commonly regarded as a celebrated naturalistic writer and essayist, his texts primarily focusing on rural life, agriculture and natural history in late Victorian England, but

Jefferies’ novel embodies a brutal vision of human and animal struggle. The England of the future is prey to an unpredictable nature that has reclaimed the cities, but is also the product of a wolfish human nature, compelled to repeat the mistakes of the past. (Sumpter, 2011)

The wolfish nature that Sumpter speaks of is depicted differently in the diverse peoples that inhabit this contemporary England and how each of them have evolved, or more correctly devolved, exploring dissimilar outcomes of a looming apocalypse. The shared background for all of these peoples is that Jefferies has been inspired by earlier civilizations, cementing that fact that we are destined to return to something instinctual, something animalistic. As a result of this, Jefferies implements sociological, psychological and historical angles into his novel and underlines their importance as well as the human apathy.

### Setting, Plot and Structure

The novel is split into two parts, with the first part of the novel set many years into the post-apocalypse and with the latter part of the novel focusing on earlier parts of the post-apocalypse. In the first part, aptly named "The Relapse into Barbarism", Jefferies spends nearly 39 pages describing the surroundings of this new world, the actual relapse into a primitive culture and how it differs from the world in which 'the ancients' lived. Here Jefferies strength in naturalistic writing is at the fore and many detailed descriptions of bushes, weather and crops are the focal points. Nature and animals have been allowed to run wild after the human population has been severely limited and several species have either disappeared or evolved. Wild cats and wild dogs are now a part of the landscape and herds of wild horses and pigs roam freely. The same can be said to be the case of the human population, where some castes have become akin to tribal and even feral to the more established of humankind. For reasons unknown, many ancients, especially the more educated citizens, had abruptly left the world that they knew, leaving behind the less educated individuals, who were thus unable to maintain electricity, roads and other practical necessities of the world they inhabited.

All that seems certain is, that when the event took place, the immense crowds of collected in cities were most affected, and the richer and upper class made use of their money to escape. Those left behind were mainly the lower and most ignorant (Jefferies, 1885, p. 20)

Is it unclear whether the reasons behind "the event" were never known or have simply been forgotten over time, as illiteracy eventually became more widespread and the people left became more and more dependent upon word of mouth. Moreover, it is never directly stated how much time has passed, but is clear that is has been more than 50 years and it is strongly indicated that generations have come and gone.

As, for the most part, those who were left behind were ignorant, rude and unlettered, it consequently happened that many of the marvellous things which the ancients did, and the secrets of their science, are known to us only by name, and, indeed, hardly by name. (Jefferies, 1885, p. 21)

The richer individuals that left were never heard from again, causing the historian, who narrates the first part of the novel, to speculate that they either went West or South. Every once in a while ships from other countries will stop in England, and from what can be understood, the population there has suffered the same fate. As a result of the migration, the bigger cities, particularly London, fell as a side-effect of neglect and inability to maintain, and instead they became deathly swamps, emanating poisonous gasses and overflowing with sulphuric acid and other hazardous leftovers of the ancients.

Thus the low-lying parts of the mighty city of London became swamps, and the higher grounds were clad with bushes. The very largest of buildings fell in, and there was nothing visible but trees and hawthorns on the upper lands and willows, flags, reeds and rushes on the lower. These crumbling ruins still more choked the stream, and almost, if not quite, turned it back. (Jefferies, 1885, p. 38)

For inexplicable reasons, the water also started to rise throughout the country, creating a massive lake covering most of the Western parts of England, driving the people closer to the newly created shores and further into the realm. As a consequence, England became immersed in something akin to the dark ages, with small villages popping up across the country, ruled by a small portion of kings, princes and barons, while most common people (as many as 9/10) were made into workers or slaves (or servants, as they prefer to be called), that harbour no real rights or privileges.

Indeed, Jefferies seems less concerned about the cause and effect, and more interested in the implications of ailing social and political structures on the mind and soul (Welshman, 2013, p. 303)

The second part of the book is called Wild England and consists of a quest structure, focusing on the story of Felix Aquila, who is the first son of a minor baron who has little to no respect from his equals, as a result of his disregard for high society and titles. Felix has slim odds of ever rising in society and winning the hand of the woman he loves, even though the love is reciprocated, because of his father's low standing. Because of the new societal order and decrees executed by the royals in charge, individuals, even titled ones, have little hope of ever bettering their stations. As a result of his locked position, Felix decides to brave the world in his homemade canoe, to see if he can somehow amass a higher position elsewhere. It is never stated how long after the apocalyptic event Felix's tale takes place, though it is clear that Felix's tale comes before the historian’s recount of England in the first part of the novel, but at this time even previously common amenities had run out.

"Of tea itself there was none; there had been no tea to be had for love or money these past fifty years, and indeed, its use would have been forgotten, and the name only survived, had not some small quantities been yet preserved and brought out on rare occasions at the palaces" (Jefferies, 1885, p. 97).

Tea, tobacco, jewellery and glass, particularly glassed windows, are all rarities at this point of time, the leftovers reserved for the kings and princes, giving the reader the sense that quite some time has already passed since the apocalyptic event, and the 50 years is more an indication of the intensified lack of pre-apocalyptic amenities than the actual time passed since the apocalypse.

Through Felix, the reader experiences the world and the peoples of this new world and witnesses how many have become destitute and desperate, putting themselves first and everyone else second. Ridicule and murder has become a fundamental part of the new world. Felix seeks out the king of the town of Aisi to sign on for his service during a looming war, but after having witnessed several assaults on servants and lower castes by the hands of the noblemen, as well as the king's unorganized and impractical warfare, Felix's own inherited nobleman's pride causes him to insult the king and after a severe beating he is thrown out of camp, fortunate to escape with his life.

Continuing his journey, Felix unknowingly happens upon London. In his search for fresh water he goes ashore and is further affected by the sulphuric acid vapours, dulling his senses and his resolve. Walking around London in a daze, he discovers ancient coins and jewellery, as well as several skeletons, and eventually realizes the nature of his location.

During his advance into this region in the canoe he had in fact become slowly stupefied by the poisonous vapour he had inhaled. His mind was partly in abeyance; it acted, but only after some time had elapsed (Jefferies, 1885, p. 184)

Yet again Felix has the luck to escape certain death, as no-one has heard of survivors escaping London for many ages. Deciding to get far away from the deserted and treacherous London, he travels south only to run headlong into yet another obstacle; a direct collision with a reef that destroys the canoe. Burying his valuables Felix makes a decision to continue on foot in the hopes of finding civilized people before running into Bushmen or Gipsies. Eventually Felix happens upon a tribe of illiterate shepherds, whom he wins over with his bravery in killing an attacking band of Gipsies by using his archery skills. This causes the tribe of the shepherds, as well as their fellow tribes, to offer Felix a position of power as their acting king, which Felix declines, instead accepting a position as "leader during war-time". The Shepherds were never introduced in the first part of the novel, narrated by the historian, but it is clear that they are neither Bushmen, Romany or town dwellers, whereby they can better be categorized as country folk who do not interact with the town dwellers, most likely because the distance is too vast. Felix stays with the Shepherds for a time, assisting them to evolve into a more developed civilization and sharing knowledge of herbs, construction and weapons; ideas that had earlier been dismissed by royal town dwellers. Eventually, months after leaving home, Felix begins to desperately miss his love interest, and decides to embark on the long journey home, so that he might bring her back to the shepherds as well. Felix's quest concludes with an open ending, never revealing if Felix make it back alive.

### Narratives and Characters

Throughout the novel there are two overall narratives, the first person historian of the first part of the novel (The Relapse into Barbarism), that gives the reader an account of the changes that have occurred in England, and the third person objective narrative of Felix Aquila's quest in the second part of the novel (Wild England). In both the first and second part of the novel various characters are introduced, displaying the diversity of the classes and tribes of the people who inhabit the world.

In the first part of the novel the narrating historian gives an account of the "men of the woods" and the city dwellers; the most civilized of which being the inhabitants of the small villages that can normally boast approximately 50 houses. "For the most part they have their own government, or had till recently, and thus grew up many provinces and kingdoms in the compass of what was originally one" (Jefferies, 1885, p. 23). The city dwellers are the class of people that Felix and the historian belong to, yet the historian's words of "or had until recently" must be noted, as the reader is never made aware of how the historian's time differs from the time that Felix lived in. Justice in most, if not all, of these towns is corrupt and perverted, the rich exercising complete and total power over the poor. In the historian's narrative, unrest, as a result of greed and political hatred, has spread through much of the country, bringing with it Welsh, Irish and Scottish mercenaries, that claim possession of whatever they see fit. According to the gentry, slavery does not exist because technically no man is bought or sold, but as soon as someone missteps they are forthwith immersed in servitude and "Were a man to study all day what he must do, and what he must not do, to escape servitude, it would not be possible for him to stir one step without becoming forfeit" (Jefferies, 1885, p. 33). Only the continued favour of nobles is said to keep people free, "free" being understood in the most limited sense of the word, as even free people can lose whatever liberty they might have, thereby living in constant fear. The elders, who can no longer work, are left at every corner to beg and wait for death. As they can no longer serve they have no worth at all.

The less civilized, The Bushmen, live wholly in the woods and their ancestors are said to be the people who, when the ancients were still present, would not avail themselves of the benefits of civilization. Instead they obtained their food by begging, while maintaining a nomadic lifestyle and were consistently clad in rags. These people had no obvious skills at the time of the ancients and therefore had to develop other means of survival, when begging was no longer an option. As a result of this "they live to this day, having become extremely dexterous in snaring every species of bird and animal" (Jefferies, 1885, p. 23) and having somehow maintained knowledge of poison, that the more civilized people have not, they often use this to catch fish. Furthermore, The Bushmen are known for their savage frenzy, which is displayed by their overkill and wasting of food, as well as their depraved and cowardly nature. They have no homes, simply roaming around the country as they see fit, they grow no crops and they will hunt the cattle of the more civilized, sometimes for mere amusement. The Bushmen are considered a danger by the city dwellers, though only during night time due to their cowardice by day, as they have been known to kill at random. During the day the tribes will scatter if faced with other humans. "They are the human vermin of the woods" (Jefferies, 1885, p. 24).

The Gipsies, also known as Romany or Zingari, likewise roam the roads and never claim any permanent residences. As they remained apart from modern civilization in the days of the ancients so they continue to do in this time. They are divided into small tribes, each with its own ruler, who can be man, woman or adolescent female, but the rulers must be of sacred blood. Though they never stay long in the same place, they do command flocks or herds of animals, which they take with them wherever they go. The Gipsies are the most feared caste out of all of the peoples of England, as they will not hesitate to attack and rob travellers, as well as engage in wars and massacres should they feel that they have been wronged in some way. An ancient feud has put the Bushmen and the Romany at constant war and "The Romany looks on the Bushman as a dog, and slaughters him as such" (Jefferies, 1885, p. 26).

Though we are not introduced to individual characters in the first part of the novel, the introduction to the different castes is just as important as the named individuals in the second part of the novel, as all of these descriptions provide us with varying human responses to an apocalyptic event.

Jefferies imaginatively used the comparative method in *After London* to construct two kinds of savage survival: “relics of old races”, whose progress appears to have slowed to the point of stasis, and “unprogressive classes” who have gradually developed “savage” racial traits by rejecting civilized culture (Sumpter, 2011)

In utilizing a comparative method, Jefferies explores different outcomes and responses to a changed world and includes all of the different scenarios in one novel, scrutinizing how human behaviour and reactions can have an impact on civilizations as a whole. The Bushmen belong to the "unprogressive classes". They became savage and rely mostly, if not wholly, on instinct because of their rejection of civilized culture. The people living in townships, ruled by a king or a prince, are the class closest to civilized culture, yet even this class' progress seem to have stalled. They have gone back to something akin to feudal life, their lives slowed to the point of stasis, which was probably the closest example of life that they could lean on after the world as they knew it ended. This stasis can be argued to be on the cusp of developing into unprogressiveness, as the townspeople have already become partly savage, yet not on the same levels as the Bushmen. The Gipsies were static before civilization broke down and, as mentioned earlier, "they remained apart, and still continue after civilization has disappeared, exactly the same as they were before it commenced" (Jefferies, 1885, p. 25), though the wars and violence between Gipsies themselves, as well as the more civilized people, can be interpreted as a savage trait.

In the second part of the novel a range of savage traits are explored, especially in the gentry, where the malevolent and vicious treatment of servants reflects how barbaric even the most civilized caste has become. Though the heinous actions of the nobles are expected by most, it is also revealed that there are kind nobles, such as the father of Felix who does not believe in executing his servants. In contrast, when Felix seeks out the town of Aisi, the crooked and deceitful behaviour of servants and poor free people is explored, testifying that barbarism is not limited to one caste or class but applicable to nearly everyone. Moreover, when Felix encounters the shepherds and they show him kindness, while they were just as likely to be jaded and savage, the diversity in behaviour is additionally underlined, implying that everyone can become destitute and cynical.

It was not just the “residuum” of urban dwellers who were perceived by Jefferies as capable of reverting to an earlier stage of development, given the right environment and circumstances. In his notebooks, he speculated on the speed at which the rural peasantry might return to such a pre-civilized state. “Wayside Inn. 2 men etc to one woman. See how easily and rapidly men would revert to the conditions of savage life. Give these a knob-kerrie and assegai or bow and they are the same” (Sumpter, 2011)

This examination of the difference of human responses in a given context is refreshing and stimulating, seeing as Jefferies thereby underlines that there is not simply good or bad, only human.

### Apocalyptic Themes and Conflicts

All through-out the novel several themes and conflicts of a post-apocalyptic world are explored, both through the first part of the novel, via the descriptions of nature and the peoples that inhabit England, but also through the people and situations that Felix encounters during the second part of the novel. These conflicts, I suggest, are often prevalent in post-apocalyptic fictions, and therefore I believe that taking a closer look at these post-apocalyptic challenges is central in determining the relevance of the book and to be able to relate it to other post-apocalyptic fictions.

One of Felix's ponderings, that would be vital in any post-apocalyptic world, is the possibility that common illnesses and injuries, that could previously have been cured, are now considered deadly. Though illness is not mentioned, Felix does contemplate the high level of mortality with regards to injuries sustained during battle. In Felix's world the level of mortality in this context has become a given more than a concern, but as a reader the lack of both educated doctors as well as previously common medicine is a stark contrast.

very few, he had noticed, ever recovered from serious wounds of spear or arrow. The wounded generally died and the fortunate escaped (Jefferies, 1885, p. 140)

Felix's stance of 'escape or die' puts the question of survival at the forefront of the readers' mind. Though the reader might be aware that this England is very different from the one that once was, the returning conflicts of a post-apocalyptic England are a continuous reminder of the struggles and the challenges a reformed world brings with it.

Additionally, one of the returning themes in the novel is the undeniable and volatile nature of human behaviour. As mentioned in the former chapter, the diverse castes handle the change in civilization differently, some becoming savage to an extreme degree while others maintain a more civilized manner, though still marked by a level of savagery. This particular worry is constantly a part of Felix's travels, as he always fears running into Bushmen or Gipsies, but he is also consistently surprised by the cruelty and malice of both his own caste and class.

"Thank you, very much," said Felix, as he wished her a good day; "but why did not the man at the other ferry tell me I could cross here?" The woman laughed outright. "Do you suppose he was going to put a penny in my way when he could not get it himself?" So mean and petty is the world!" (Jefferies, 1885, p. 140)

Though the vulgar treatment of the lesser people by royals and peers is to be expected, Felix is stunned to witness that the same boorish treatment runs between the lesser people, that meanness and pettiness is not only a part of the world of the peers but a part of the world in general. As a side-effect of this, greed and violence become the expected outcomes to most situations, and displays of kindness and selfishness are a rarity that the reader does not properly encounter until the end of the novel, where Felix meets the shepherds, and even then he fears that they will never let him leave, because he is too valuable to them. Thereby, even though the shepherds are perhaps the most civilized part of culture that the reader encounters, they also exhibit less than favourable human traits.

In the most civilized of the leftover societies the recurring subject of the slaves and the division of the worth of men is also a significant theme. This particular consequence of a post-apocalyptic society is interesting, as it explores the possibility that no matter how many people are eradicated, or how ignorant the remaining people are, there will always be some that are better than others, or at the very least some that believe that they are. These people will often take control of the people who are not strong enough or inclined enough to do it themselves, whereby they claim positions as leaders. Throughout the novel it is often underlined that there are no "slaves" but instead "servants", though the distinction between the two is more semantic than anything else.

a "servant" was a slave; it was the euphemism used instead of the hateful word, which not even the most degraded can endure to bear. The class of nobles to which he belonged deemed it a disgrace to sit down with a slave, to eat with him, even to accidently touch him... the slave was less than the dog" (141)

Felix has an inner struggle when he discovers that he, a nobleman, has actually shared a meal with a slave, but eventually decides to overcome the prejudice that has been pushed upon him by condemning and snobbish cultural traditions. This inner struggle is important in the sense that while the corrupt views of the noblemen are put on display, the existence of kindness and integrity is also accentuated, providing the reader with an understanding that cultural battles can still be fought, as long as there are people to fight them.

The depravity of the noblemen is further displayed through the second part of the novel, by presenting their disregard of the significance of the lives of slaves. Seemingly killing for petty reasons or sometimes simply for fun, the deplorable depths of human nature are put into stark contrast after Felix's meeting with the slave, where a show of kindness and respect in the form of a handshake restored some measure of belief in humanity. Though killing without reason might be considered horrifying in itself, Jefferies pushed the boundaries of malevolence further by describing the torture the servants are often made to endure before, and even after, finally dying.

By a rope from the collar, three dead bodies were drawn along the ground, dusty and disfigured by bumping against stone and clod. They were the slaves, hanged the preceding day, perhaps for pilfering, perhaps for a mere whim, since every baron had the power of the gallows (Jefferies, 1885, p. 148)

This development of disregard for fellow humans, in a society where human life should have become precious instead of corrupt, furthers the illusion that everyone, even members of a previously advanced civilization, can recede into distinctive levels of barbarism. At the time of writing, Victorian England was not only known for its gentlemen and generally civilized manners but also for new inventions and the notion that one could create solutions to problems; that man could create new means of bettering himself and his environment. This notion is still present in *After London*, as evidenced by Felix's quest, but as Caroline Sumpter argues:

Yet After London also questions the reliability of history, and the assumption that we can shape the future by learning moral lessons from the past. In this curious romance, Jefferies endorsed neither a liberal nor a Marxist vision of progress: in fact, he encouraged his readers to question whether progress was possible at all (Sumpter, 2011)

Though the readers witness acts of both kindness and cruelty there is also a fine line between hope and hopelessness present, as well as the daunting possibility that even the most civilized of societies can crumble and revert back to times and behaviours that we might have thought behind us. This discouraging thought is what distinguishes *After London* and makes it even more relevant with regards to modern post-apocalyptic fictions, as the same issues and fears are still prevalent more than a century later.

## Analysis of *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy

Though *The Road* and *After London* were written more than a century apart, they share many of the same characteristics and themes that are common for the post-apocalyptic genre. McCarthy's 2006 novel became an instant classic and winner of the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, as opposed to Richard Jefferies *After London* that did not receive much attention until decades later. *The Road* can be categorized as a post-apocalyptic tale, not unlike the quest of Felix Aquila in *After London*, but in contrast this tale has no particular modus operandi other than general survival. The tale focuses on a father and a son who travel south on the American roads in hopes of a milder climate, as the father suspects that another winter in their current geographical location will kill both of them.

Some theoreticians have argued that the novel can be considered an ideal example of the importance of World War II in relation to post-apocalyptic fictions, as well as a direct reference to the cruelty during World War II and the impressions left on the world afterwards.

The increasing popularity of the post-apocalyptic genre after World War II has generally been attributed to the spectre of nuclear annihilation heralded by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and continuing to loom during the Cold War. (Germana & Mousoutzanis, 2014, p. 162)

The reason behind the apocalypse in the novel is never directly mentioned, though there are references of a sheer of light, where-after electricity ceased to work. This gives the reader the impression that the apocalypse was sudden and violent, creating incontrovertible connotations to the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, concluding with everything being completely covered in permanent ash. As the importance of the historical trauma of World War II has previously been covered, I find it pertinent to put *The Road* into a historical post-apocalyptic context, focusing on the echoes of the Holocaust and how these can be interpreted in the novel.

recognizing the echoes of the Holocaust in post-apocalyptic texts can provide insights into the pervasive presence of the Holocaust in the collective consciousness and offer a new perspective on the uncanny appeal of contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction (Germana & Mousoutzanis, 2014, p. 162)

Interestingly, McCarthy has produced a work that can be argued to be full of both veiled and direct Holocaust references. The father's acknowledgement that his son looks like something out of a death camp is a direct reference to the aftermath of the apocalypse that was the Second World War, directing the imaginations of the readers to pre-existing images of death camp victims. The hidden references of the novel include the sadistic and brutal treatment of other human beings, after humanity has been lost, which can be transferred onto the actions of Nazi soldiers during the war.

With regards to the uncertainty of the origins of the apocalypse:

McCarthy has stated that this vagueness is deliberate... McCarthy's intentional ambiguity shifts the novel's focus from the event to its consequences, but also leaves room to explore multiple implications within the disaster (Germana & Mousoutzanis, 2014, p. 164)

Thereby, McCarthy, like Jefferies, has made a conscious decision that the apocalypse in itself is not of importance, the paramount subject is how we as a species might react to it. *The Road* is undoubtedly more barbaric and depraved than *After London* in its explicit presentation of human behaviour,but whether this can be attributed to the strong connotations to World War II, or to the fact that the level of destruction is so much more comprehensive in *The Road,* is hard to estimate and it may indeed be that both of these are reasons behind the degeneracy of many characters in *The Road.*

### Setting, Plot and Structure

Going out from Brian Graham's table of taxonomies of the apocalypse, *The Road* is placed in the fourth column of the second table, the table that includes the demise of God, mankind, the animal kingdom and the vegetable world, whereas *After London* was only placed in the second column on the second table, the one that includes the demise of God and mankind. This signifies that the sheer level of destruction in *The Road* is much more severe and the means of survival are that much more limited. Where God and faith were never consuming themes in *After London*,the question of God, or more correctly the lack thereof, emanates throughout *The Road.* During the entire novel the father often has internal monologues aimed at God, challenging God to answer him or give him some sign as to what the meaning for being alive is.

He raised his face to the paling day. Are you there? he whispered. Will I see you at last? Have you a neck by which to throttle you? Have you a heart? Damn you eternally have you a soul? Oh God, he whispered. Oh God (McCarthy, 2006, p. 10)

Through the father's numerous rants at God it becomes obvious that he still has some sort of belief in something divine, but it emerges more as a desire for revenge and an outlet for his powerlessness than actual faith and belief in salvation. If there is indeed something divine present, then the father believes that whatever deity rules the realm that they have been doomed to roam, must surely be a heartless and soulless presence, to have brought the end of days upon them and still left them alive in a world where their imminent death is always a present threat.

As a result, the father and son aimlessly roam around the country with no particular endgame in sight other than surviving the winter. Through the father's flashbacks the reader is introduced to the events leading up to the journey that they have embarked upon, and how the world consistently continued to deteriorate throughout the years.

The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions. He got up and went to the window. What is it? she said. He didn't answer. He went into the bathroom and threw the light switch but the power was already gone. (McCarthy, 2006, p. 54)

The flashback relates that the apocalypse happened suddenly at 1:17. After a sheer of light and some concussions electricity went out and never came back. Through a series of similar flashbacks it is also made apparent that the man was with his pregnant wife at the time, who then gave birth to the son after the apocalypse had occurred. Thus the timeline for the following post-apocalypse can be interpreted through the boy's age, who is estimated to be roughly ten years old, providing the audience with an opportunity to witness both the crumbling civilization and the after-effects.

Within a year there were fires on the ridges and deranged chanting. The screams of the murdered. By day the dead impaled on spikes along the road

(McCarthy, 2006, p. 33)

The witnessing of the swift breakdown of humanity is never stated directly, as the events are mirrored in the father's thoughts, but through his flashbacks it is made clear that after the apocalypse people were being murdered and impaled on spikes. The reason for these brutalities is never explored, simply implying through the conversations between the father and the son that there are good people and bad people and all of the good people are seemingly hiding. Here it is also made clear that the father and son consider themselves good guys.

Additionally, it also needs to be stated that McCarthy has had a general interest in displaying the apocalypses of people in different contexts, as evidenced in *Blood Meridian* (1985) which focuses on the massacres of Native Americans and others living close to the Mexican border. *No Country for Old Men* (2005), though not classic apocalyptic fiction, focuses on a drug deal gone bad, where an entire gang of drug dealers end up being killed, leaving no one to tell their story; in essence, the apocalypse and total destruction of a localised mini-civilization.

one of the insights in McCarthy's work is that, in a sense, there have been many apocalypses. Many cultures have perished from this earth and, to a person alive within one of those cultures, those ends were final" (Germana & Mousoutzani, p. 171)

In *The Road* we seem to follow some of the very last survivors at the very end of the post-apocalypse, an oxymoron in itself. For years people have survived in what appears to be a completely shattered North America, with no hopes of growing crops and no animals left either, the ultimate end of civilization seems to be undeniable and quickly approaching.

### Narrative and Characters

The narrative voice present in the novel is a third person omniscient narrator, though it focuses mostly on the father's thoughts and concerns instead of the son's. It is also through this third person narrative that the flashbacks are told, still using the father as the narrative tool for the events leading up to the novel. Though there are only two main characters in the novel, the nameless father and son, various supporting characters emerge along the way. The actions of these characters are important to the interpretation of humanity, as are the reactions of the father and son during these encounters. Through a flashback we witness a conversation between the man and the mother of the boy, taking place sometime after the apocalypse.

"We used to talk about death", she said. "We don't anymore. Why is that?" "I don't know." "It's because it's here. There's nothing left to talk about." "I wouldn't leave you." "I don't care. It's meaningless. You can think of me as a faithless slut if you like. I've taken a new lover. He can give me what you cannot." "Death is not a lover." "Oh yes he is." (McCarthy, 2006, p. 58)

Death emanates through their entire lives and eventually the mother decides to take her own life, to have an impact on her own death, instead of simply waiting for it to happen to her. It is stated that she is well aware of what will happen to all of them if they are ever found - "they" will rape her and the son and eventually eat all of them. Though there might, at one point, have been a hope for survival, a hope that the ashes would disappear and crops would be able to grow again, this hope has completely diminished over the years and has been replaced by fear and acceptance of death, at least by the mother. On the contrary, the father continues to believe that there must be something out there, some reason for their survival, interpreting the birth of the son as a sign that life is still possible in a changed world.

The father and the boy continuously refer to themselves as "the good guys" and often remind each other that they are "carrying the fire". "The fire" most likely refers back to the goodness they carry with them, the humanity that is still intact within them, and though the boy displays a great deal of innocence and openness towards other people, the father has become much more cynical and brutal, as evidenced in their run-ins with other survivors. When encountering an old man shuffling down the road, the boy instantly wants reassure him that they will not hurt him, as well as provide him with some food. While the father is clearly torn by that proposition, not quite supporting the idea that he is indeed a good guy, he eventually capitulates with a whispered "damn", and lets the son choose something for the old man to eat. Though the father has reluctantly agreed to provide the old man with some food, he draws the line at a spoon, instead letting the old, toothless man sip from a can, attesting that even though the father considers himself a good guy there are limits to the kindness of good guys.

Although it can be confounding to witness the blurred lines between good and bad, it is these complexities and juxtapositions that make the reader question human moralities and abilities in the novel. While one chapter might introduce horrifying and detailed actions of cannibals, the next chapter may portray how, in the midst of a ruined world, there are examples of the innocence and normality that has somehow crept into even the bleakest of times. The boy is the undeniable source of the human integrity that they seek out more of, and it is often directly and indirectly stated that the innocence of the boy is what keeps the father inspired and hopeful that there could be others like them.

"Look, papa", the boy whispered. "I see", the man said. The boy turned and looked at him. "I know what the question is", the man said. "The answer is no". "What's the question?" "Can we keep him. We can't." "I know." "You know." "Yeah." "All right." (McCarthy, 2006, p. 174)

In the above quote one of the few displays of normalcy and humour present in the book is demonstrated. An exchange that could be attributed to the keeping of a stray dog in the old world, has been adapted to the boy's wish of keeping the old man and taking care of him. However, the dad makes it quite clear that it is not a possibility, as he would both slow them down in their travels as well as limiting their food resources. Interestingly, the old man is also the only character in the novel that presents himself by name, Ely, even though he later admits that it is a fake name. This particular name leads us back to the returning theme of faith and God, seeing as the name shares biblical roots with the prophet Eli.

The act of cannibalism is a recurring factor and threat throughout the novel. The first cannibalistic concerns are voiced by the mother in one of the first flashbacks and the constant threat of getting eaten seems to be what pushes her over the edge. After that, the boy and the father come across what they assume to be an abandoned house, and even though the boy does not want to go in, the father presses him to follow in their desperate search for food. In the first cannibalistic encounter, the father and son discover several live people tied up in a basement, with missing limbs and in varying stages of decomposition. Though they manage to escape the cannibals the father is worried of what the son has witnessed and repeats that "what you see stays with you forever". Later in the novel they seek out a camp, as they want to ascertain that they will not be ambushed later on.

He was standing there checking the perimeter when the boy turned and buried his face against him. He looked up quickly to see what had happened. What is it, he said. What is it? The boy shook his head. Oh Papa, he said. He turned and looked again. What the boy had seen was a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit. (McCarthy, 2006, p. 211)

The boy discovers the spitted, headless infant and after the father squires him away from the camp, the boy goes dangerously quiet. The father tells him to close his eyes, referring to the earlier phrase that otherwise the images will stay with him forever. "They're already there" is the boy’s response, indicating that he has seen the infant and the world for what it now is. Despite this, the boy still endeavours to believe in the existence of goodness in others. In her essay "Billows of Ash: Cormac McCarthy's Road Back to Auschwitz", Francesca Haig argues that these particular references can be linked back to the reader's own images of World War II and the death camps, seeing as similar horrid images and scenes exist in a World War II context.

"The echoes of the Holocaust in post-apocalyptic or dystopian texts suggest that the Holocaust has been a factor in shaping how we conceive of a future apocalypse" (Germana & Mousoutzani, p. 172)

Haig further argues that the images of ash, death camps, godlessness and even words uttered (such as when the boy talks about the images in his head; "they're already there") create connotations to the historical trauma. They are already a part of our subconscious and closely connected to a pre-existing historical trauma that cannot be neglected when speaking of apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic and even dystopian fictions. Neglecting to acknowledge historical contexts and images would be neglecting to see a broader picture that could be of great importance with regards to working through a certain trauma. As a result of this, it can be said that the impact of post-apocalyptic fiction stems not only from the horrors it envisages, but also from the horrors that it remembers, which is then expressed through different fictions. Holocaust scholar Terrence Des Pres has philosophised that

Some hideous impression of Auschwitz is in every mind, far removed from conscious thought but *there*; and not only as a repressed perception of historical events but as an image which stirs up the demonic content of our own fears.

(Germana & Mousoutzani, p. 172)

In the context of *The Road*,the entire environment and framework of the novel can then be viewed as a constant reminder of the fiendish content of earlier traumas continuously resurfacing in our subconscious. To exemplify; when the words "death camps" are mentioned most minds would automatically connect that to the death camps during the Holocaust, a subconscious impulse connected to a relentless historical trauma, or when a reference is made to a sheer of light and low concussions, after which time seemingly stops, many would automatically conclude that atomic bombs might be involved in the demise of the world as it once was. Additionally, graphic images of the gaunt, starving and filthy shapes of the father and son are often emphasized, further inducing connotations to the captives of WWII.

After the father and son part from Ely, the father tells Ely that he should thank the boy for the supplies, to which Ely replies "maybe I should, maybe I shouldn't". Ely explains his hesitancy with a "I wouldn't have given him mine", indicating that even though he is pleased with the assistance in surviving, he still would only have looked after himself and not have aided the man and the boy, should they have been in his situation. When Ely professes that the boy will get over his goodness at some point, it further underlines the level of corruption and indifference that has spread throughout the survivors. Even people who would not normally be considered specifically malicious, have developed a harshness and scepticism, as well as a firm belief that everyone will reach that stage at some point, possibly to live with their own deteriorated humanity. The father disagrees with Ely's statement, simply saying "no he won't". Whether the faith the father has in his son is because the father wants to believe the very best of him, or because he truly believes that his son is different from everyone else that they have met, is unclear.

### Themes and Post-apocalyptic Conflicts

With regards to themes and conflicts, *The Road* shares many similarities with *After London*, the most obvious of which being the focus on the barbarism of humankind. In accord with the different levels of destruction there are also varying levels of after-effects in *The Road*, the most obvious of which being human savagery and the resort to cannibalism, which is arguably one of the most taboo subjects with regards to survival, thoroughly accentuating the desperation and desolation that has been reached. The suicide of the mother is strongly affected by the looming threat of being eaten and raped, and the fact that the father and son carry a gun with two bullets left also illustrates that they would take the route of suicide, should it ever become necessary. After having encountered the cannibals with live and partially eaten prisoners, they attempt to make a quick escape but end up being chased. When it becomes clear to the father that they may not be able to escape, he swiftly quizzes the son on the use of the gun saying "you know how to do it. You put it in your mouth and point it up", but the father realizes that the son is too terrified and will never be able to pull the trigger. While hiding that night, the father's monologue gives further insight in the internal battle that he is fighting.

Can you do it? When the time comes? When the time comes there will be no time. Now is the time. Curse God and die. What if it doesn't fire? It has to fire. What if it doesn't fire? Could you crush that beloved skull with a rock?

(McCarthy, 2006, p. 120)

Having spent years protecting his son and dragging him miles upon miles, in a fruitless pursuit of salvation, the father comprehends that he might have to end the life that he has been so persistent in protecting, as well as recognizing the possibility that he might have to crush the son's skull with a rock in order to spare him further grief in the form of torture and death by the hands of the bad guys. In *The* *Children of Men* (1992)P.D. James states that "Man is diminished if he lives without knowledge of his past, without hope of a future he becomes a beast". This statement can be transferred onto all of the survivors in *The Road*, both good guys and bad. The proclaimed bad guys have become beasts in the sense that nothing but survival is the essence of their being, and having to kill and consume others is simply a pattern to their survival. The good guys, though more civilized than the bad, have still reached a level of beastliness by surviving like animals and eating whatever leftovers they can find, but by abstaining from the act of cannibalism they maintain their basic humanity. This basic humanity is then continuously tested, especially in the case of the father, when he has to shoot a militiaman to protect himself and the son, or when he has to entertain the thought of bashing the son's skull in as the best alternative. All actions in the novel are largely, if not singularly, process-based instead of goal-oriented, as the end goal is an actual result and not the process of reaching it. Survival is usually a process to reach an ultimate goal, e.g. a happy, secluded life on a safe farm with plenty of food, or ridding the world of the bad guys. If the goal-aspect, i.e. the future, is taken away, only focusing on the process, man eventually becomes a beast.

Another ongoing theme that was not given much thought in *After London*,is the issue of God and faith in a world that seems to have been abandoned by any Gods there might have been. Though Graham has placed *After London* in the column that indicates the demise of God and mankind the difference between the two novels becomes quite clear with a faith perspective in mind. Distinctively, *The Road* is brimming with godlessness, frustration and anger and the father alternates between begging God for an explanation or a sign and ranting or cursing at him for having left them in a godforsaken world with no hope of salvation. When meeting Ely, the father and Ely discuss the foreboding possibility of being the last man on earth, and though Ely has no belief that there is any God out there, the father seems more sceptical.

"How would you know if you were the last man on earth?" he said. "I don't guess you'd know it you'd just be it" "Nobody would know it" "It wouldn't make any difference. When you die it's the same as it's the same as if everybody else did too." "I guess God would know it. Is that it?" "There is no God". "No?" "There is no God and we are his prophets" (McCarthy, 2006, p. 180)

The father's questioning "no?" indicates that even though his internal monologue sometimes questions the existence of God he either used to be, wants to be, or still is a believer. Furthermore, in a world that appears to have lost all aspects of religion, and instead focuses on the survival of the individual, the father seems to be quite preoccupied with the failings and desertion of God. After the boy's first encounter with a bad guy, whom the father ended up shooting, the father summons the name of God as the reason for his quest to keep the boy alive, justifying his actions.

You wanted to know what the bad guys looked like. Now you know. It may happen again. My job is to take care of you. I was appointed to do that by God. I will kill anyone who touches you. Do you understand? (McCarthy, 2006, p. 80)

Whether the father truly believes in God, or he simply invokes God as an excuse to survive and commit previously inhuman acts in the wake of that survival, is uncertain. It is apparent that he is struggling with his belief and the flashback of the wife's choice of suicide supports this as she says "you can think of me as a faithless slut if you like", which could imply that faith had been an important element in their lives and she eventually stopped believing, as such making her faithless, but it could also indicate the simple loss of belief in the future.

As the father eventually dies, the boy is taken in by another family, supposedly more good guys, but even though it seems that the father is given some kind of peace, and the boy is given another chance to survive, there is no happy ending or solution to the post-apocalyptic situation. The open ending in itself, and the lack of clarification of the conflicts, dislodges the assumption that humanity will simply rebuild after disaster, which also means that we have to speculate what the outcome then is; more grey? More ash? More cannibalism and more death until finally the world is nothing but an empty shell?

The sinking feeling of pointlessness and melancholy in the novel seems to correlate with the after-effects of World War II and the discovery of death camps and mass killings by the Nazis, in a world that was thought to be at the very height of scientific discovery, where humanity was supposed to have risen above such barbaric behaviour. In Jan Guillou's fourth book, *At Inta Vilja Se*, of his recent family saga Det Stora Århundradet, the very end of the war was described thus: "It was the apocalyptic hell recreated in the earthly reality of incredible human cruelty" (Guilllou, 2014, p. 350), relating back to inconceivably menacing behaviour displayed by the survivors in *The Road*. Though these connections can never be confirmed with certainty, it is thought-provoking that the same state of hopelessness that emanates from works focusing of the Holocaust tends to be congruent with the hopelessness that emanates from some post-apocalyptic fictions.

The Holocaust has been, however, rightly or wrongly, the definitive tragedy of the popular Western consciousness since World War II; recognizing its pervasive presence in post-apocalyptic writing will enrich our grasp of such texts (Germana & Mousoutzani, 171)

Francesca Haig also states that even though it can be discussed whether the focus on World War II, in a Western consciousness context, is right or wrong, it is undeniable that the Holocaust has been the defining tragedy of Western culture in modern times, confirming that civilizations that were thought to have reached a peak in both scientific and developmental regards can fall, just as civilizations before them fell. As such, the greatest tragedy of the modern era is a returning factor in much of what we produce, be it film, literature or games, with World War II being the closest historical example we have of the extent of human depravity and the possibility of its reoccurrence. Furthermore, the possibility of a return of such events is constantly looming, spurring humanity to question "can it or will it happen again?".

The Road’s didactic message is less political.... it is also less political than most post- apocalyptic fiction, a genre that tends towards the warnings of either the personality traits or the political conditions that produce or exacerbate apocalyptic events. On the other hand, The Road uses a fear of this desolation to perhaps awaken in the reader a desire to work against whatever forces might be out to produce it. (Curtis, p. 37)

Of course, this focus on World War II does not mean that other critical events, with focus on the post-apocalyptic, have not taken place. It is not a minimizing of other wars or massacres that have occurred in other places around the world, but those events have simply not had the same all-consuming impact on Western society, or the same media coverage, that World War II had. Therefore, Haig argues, that insufficient interest is not a display of indifference but more of a geographical, and Westernized, response to something more relatable and frightening in a given context. In relation it can be discussed whether America has the same invested interest in WWII that most of Europe has, as it can be debated to what extent America was affected by the war. This also means that a more current and local event, such as the terrorist attack on the twin towers, could potentially be a more relevant example of why the apocalyptic has affected, and continues to affect, the American audience.

The truth is that most other genocides have been of insufficient interest to Western intellectuals for them to ponder their metaphysical dimensions in the way the Holocaust has been pondered (Germana & Mousoutzani 171)

Therefore, it is also important to remember that even though apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions in a Western context may be highly influenced by World War II it does not mean that similar fictions in other geographical locations are shaped by that same tragedy; they may have their own reasoning for interest in the genre. Examples of this are found the Indian fictions *Escape* (2008) by Manjula Padmanabhan and *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women*. The apocalyptic source of both fictions is the eradication of women (femicide) that has spread across India. As such, these fictions do not appear to be influenced by WWII or other apocalyptic events of the Western world, instead focusing on a localised trauma, giving testimony to the importance of geographical locations in post-apocalyptic contexts.

*The Road*, while primarily classified as being Godless, as seen in Graham's table, can then also be interpreted as a direct image of modern Western society and the struggle of faith and purpose in a world that does not seem to care. Before Nietzsche declared the death of God, people had something to aspire to, to save their souls so that they may rest in peace and be let into the heavens. When people no longer have the same religious aspirations the entire dynamic of society changes as well. Of course, this can never be viewed as the only rule, as some people still aspire to it, but it can be considered a general rule that has taken over much of society.

"While Nietzsche suggested that the death of God left us adrift in an infinite darkness, certain post-modernists suggest that we are now frozen in an all-encompassing spotlight" (Heffernan, p. 43)

Theoretician Slavoj Žižek has categorised this frozen state by the phrase "between two deaths". God has died, an apocalypse in itself, and after World War II the depravities of humans became clear, another apocalypse. Somehow humanity, or the shell of it, survived and evolved, but it can also be argued that the bomb, or even the post-apocalyptic, is only a metaphor. The end of the world has already happened, God has died and humanity has proved how truly disturbed it can be, and thus we only maintain our basic functions, we survive but without a purpose. We inhabit a future that has no future, the ultimate goal has been reached and we are the leftovers in an otherwise burnt out world. This exact scenario is compellingly displayed in *The Road*, where the believers, the good guys, continue to have a purpose. They must continue to survive, while maintaining their goodness, because otherwise why would they have been left alive. In contrast, the bad guys have shed whatever goodness they may have had to begin with and become evil, not too dissimilar from the Nazis, and thereby they survive only for the sake of survival.

The last part of the novel is puzzling in the sense that, even though the father is dead, the boy continues to talk to him instead of talking to God, possibly because the familiarity of talking to his father gives the son some kind of comfort. The woman's reply to the boy's internal conversations with his father indicates her firm belief that though the boy is thinking of his father he is still communicating with God, because God is a part of man.

She would talk to him sometimes about God. He tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didn't forget. The woman said that was alright. She said that the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time (McCarthy, 2006, p. 306)

Moreover, this ending also gives the impression that even though the world has, by all accounts, ended, there is some fragile hope that some survivors can prevail and go on, while maintaining humanity and bringing faith and God with them in this new world. In that sense, the entire novel could be seen as a rebirth of humanity and faith, a revelation and a New Jerusalem. If we tie this back to Žižek, then there seem to be two possibilities for humanity in the case that we refuse to accept the possibility that we are nothing but empty shells left in a world without meaning. The best outcome, but least likely scenario, is that we work through the historical traumas, once again creating an objective purpose for humanity and shed the level of purposelessness that we have reached. The second possibility is, as evidenced in *The Road*, a total and global annihilation of purposeless shells, thereby forcing through a new, albeit changed, objective for the leftovers of humanity.

There is a certain confusion in these passages, as there is often in Zizek, between the emphasis on enjoyment of the symptom, on the repetition of trauma that ends in obliteration, and on the possibility of a narrative working through of the symptom. (Berger, p. 43)

As such, the *The Road* can be interpreted both as a pessimistic and a positive demonstration of the possibilities of humanity, depending on the eye of the beholder. If a post-apocalyptic world cannot be avoided then at the very least humans have the option of choosing what kind of people to be - the good guys or the bad guys. Though the vast amount of bad guys present in the novel might seem depressing, the simple existence of good people in world riddled with despair is in some way reassuring. This, in turn, can then be transferred onto the real world. If enough good people are in existence, prior to a post-apocalypse, there is the possibility of working through traumas and integrating them in our world, turning the post-apocalypse into something that can be fought.

# Discussion of the Apocalyptic and Post-apocalyptic Relevance

One might be tempted to ask "why this analytic focus on the apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic?". Is it necessary and relevant for modern society to engage with these genres or is it a temporary fascination that will eventually fade? Of course, the historical focus on the genres speaks of a certain level of relevance, and the fact that the interest has continued to intensify after World War II means that the genres have also become an integrated part of modern and post-modern fictions. As such, even if the interest eventually fades, the attention towards the genres has still occurred and will always be a part of both literary and popular culture. Furthermore, the genres speak not only of the interest in certain fictions they are also mirror images of a society that feels a connection to them.

## The Preppers and the Survivalists

This connection to the genres becomes more apparent when looking into the vast amount of "how to" guides surrounding apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic scenarios. "How to survive the apocalypse", "how to survive successfully after the world has ended" and "how to prepare for disaster" are all questions asked and, with differing levels of triumph, answered in the many genre-specific self-help books, documentaries and websites available. Some of them provide the necessary standard information of how to prepare the essentials for survival (such as preparing a bug out bag containing food, water, weapons and first-aid), while others are more in-depth guides of how to decontaminate water, build traps and make fire. Featured below are some of the most popular guides for surviving apocalyptic events and continued successful survival in a post-apocalyptic world.

|  |
| --- |
| *The Disaster Diaries* by Sam Sheridan (2013) |
| *The Post-Apocalyptic Primer* by K. Scott Bradbury (2010) |
| *The Knowledge: How to Rebuild Civilization in the Aftermath of a Cataclysm* by Lewis Dartnell (2015) |
| Apocalypse 101 - Reality TV |
| How to Survive the End of the World - Reality TV/Documentary |
| Doom Guide at http://www.doomguide.com/ |
| Survival Training at http://survivial-training.wonderhowto.com/ |
| Survive the Apocalypse at http://www.survivetheapocalypse.net/ |
| American Preppers at http://americanpreppersnetwork.com/ |

All of these guides are rooted in human fears of an oncoming apocalypse, but some of them also deal with the level of emasculation that people have given into over the ages, whereby the human species has largely become unable to defend itself and unable to perform the simplest tasks of survival. Furthermore, many of the guides explore a great deal of the different subgenres that have previously been mentioned (such as disease, eco-centred or nuclear war), meaning that the subgenres of the apocalypse are not only important in relation to fiction but even more important in relation to real life survival. Many of these guides have also expanded upon the subgenres by splitting them into further subgenres; or sub-subgenres as they could be categorised. As such, if the apocalyptic is the genre and disease is a subgenre, zombies could be a sub-subgenre, which differs quite a deal from a genre where disease has simply left a lot of the world uninhabited. Thus, the reason for the apocalypse, and the level of destruction in the post-apocalypse, are accentuated as imperative. It is important to note that sub-subgenres do not always occur. As was seen in both *After London* and *The Road* the world can struggle on without having to deal with various after-effects such as zombies or radiation.

There can be various sub-subgenres of a particular subgenre. The sub-subgenres of the eco-centred subgenre can for instance also include earthquakes, global ice age or volcanic eruptions. What might be necessary for survival in the case of earthquakes may not be the same for a global ice age, and so the distinction in sub-subgenres is a vital part of understanding how diverse and widespread human fears are rooted.

In addition, books, documentaries and websites are no longer the only sources of information with regards to surviving a post-apocalyptic world. Though many standard survival courses are offered across the world there are also some more specialized courses, some of them serious, while some of them act as source of entertainment. Across America many zombie survival schools, and indeed post-apocalyptic role-playing forums, have come into existence, mainly focusing on defeating the undead, while also honing general survival skills. With this in mind, it is notable that the genres have moved from mediums and onto reality. The reality that there is a vast interest in these training camps furthers the argument that the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic takes up more of our awareness than ever before, and a noticeable number of people feel that there is a need to develop new subgenres, so as to better acknowledge the diverse circumstances that can cause the end of the world as we know it. In extension of this there is also a need to further explore the interest on a scholarly level.

## The Post-apocalyptic Future

When researching a genre that has only become popularized in recent years it also follows that the interest in the genre can fade just as quickly. This might happen naturally, the audience simply exhausting the general interest by being overexposed to it for too long, and not wanting to focus on the grim possibilities of the world ending any longer. M.R. Carey, author of the post-apocalyptic novel *The Girl with All the Gifts* (2014), has stated, on the topic of the post-apocalyptic interest, that:

We're drawn to the idea of civilisation coming crashing to the ground because it would make most of our day-to-day worries irrelevant at a stroke. You'd never have to fret about going into the office again, about traffic or money worries or noisy neighbours or political corruption or your kids getting on at school. It's like what Renton says about heroin addiction in Trainspotting:­ it just gives you the one BIG thing to worry about, so all the scary complexity of life fades away. (Anders, 2014)

While Carey has a point with regards to worries, which can also be linked to James Berger's theory of wanting to create a New Jerusalem because we are dissatisfied with the existence that we are currently leading, the opposite reality of post-apocalyptic interest may also be the answer. The truth may indeed be that we do not have enough worries, or simply that the worries that do take over our everyday lives are no longer important enough to draw our interest away from fictitious speculations. Accordingly, a theory could be; we only turn our attention towards time-consuming musings such as literature, TV, games and so on, when we no longer have something real to avert our attention to. If we no longer have to struggle with the basics of survival we divert or attention onto something less substantial and creating worries.

It then follows that there is also the possibility that this interest in the post-apocalyptic will fade if we enter into a real apocalyptic scenario, such as a nuclear war. When what was previously fictitious becomes reality, the grounds for further exploration become exhausted. It may no longer be favourable to speculate of a New Jerusalem when that New Jerusalem finally comes and humanity discovers that basic survival is not truly entertaining.

Apocalyptic thinking plays a significant role in revolutionary movements. Social upheaval is dependent upon visions of a transfigured future, without which no revolutionary movement would be able to disengage from dominant orthodoxies. (Graham & Rix, 2013, p. 9)

Though apocalyptic thinking can be interpreted as a way of a striving for a better future, or at the very least for exploring the option that there could be a better future, it seems contradictory in the world that we inhabit now. While the world as we know it clearly has its flaws, such as the constant threat of a possible nuclear war, it also has strengths those prior civilizations and states did not have. Nations have come together and support each other when the need arises. Charity has become globalized, making it possible for people from one continent to assist those in need from other continents and to do it swiftly. So even though there are worries present in the form of global warming and constant wars, these are not fresh fears. Going back a couple of hundred years, and looking at Western civilizations, wars were ongoing, nearly constant and much more localized. The sheer amount of women and children that died during childbirth has developed from being a very likely scenario to being a rarity and though childbirth deaths still occur in developing countries, Western countries are now providing assistance in those provinces to fight unnecessary deaths. For the most part, much of the Western world has been blessed with an existence without wars, without plague and with guaranteed social welfare as well as education and housing. From a historical point of view the world has evolved into something better and surer, yet people are anxious and fearful, thinking up scenarios that will most likely never be and focusing on the problems instead of the answers and solutions. Though fears are understandable in a modern context, where the end has become much more probable as a result of the existence of nuclear weapons and exhausting earth's resources, we are also better equipped to handle said fears. The fact that most countries across the globe strive for the same utopian goals should be considered a strength, rather than a weakness, yet we continually represent ourselves as inadequate. James Berger's epilogue of "After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse" contains the musing that:

Everything is *not* all right. The bomb has not exterminated us, nor has the virus; aliens have not landed and blown up the White House. And yet, unspeakable and portentous events have occurred, are occurring, as we are looking the other way, or even watching directly (Berger, 1999, p. 217)

In that sense, the various disaster films, as well as apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic representations, may be the transferred image of our own inadequacies. We have been given a world of plenty, blessed with the ability to evolve quickly in both philosophical and scientific respects, yet we are still not able to achieve the utopias we strive for, persistently letting down each other and ourselves. This, then, interconnects with the vision of hope that is often displayed in the various fictions; we long for someone to take the reins, for fate to take control.

Finally, the discussion of the relevance of apocalypse and post-apocalypse in modern society must also be seen in context. As we cannot simply pinpoint one particular reason for the interest, we have to be open to the possibility that there are many reasons, inherent to the particular individual and the background of that individual. The representations of the end can therefore be argued to be context-based. These contexts could be an interesting follow-up for this thesis, looking into local and global interpretations of apocalyptic interest as well as the importance of the social backgrounds of these interpretations. As no such quantitative studies are yet in existence the development and gathering of individuals' own interpretations could prove valuable in further studies, highlighting points that have not previously been proven, only speculated.

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# Conclusion

Conclusively, it can be said that there seems to be a general consensus between theoreticians, that the popularized interest in the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic is affected by history. It is these historical aspects, traumas and fears that are expressed and examined in the fictions of the apocalypse, whereby the fictions function as an outlet. Though there are varying theories in existence with regards to the level of trauma that the world and humanity has suffered, some claiming that the apocalypse has already occurred and we are only living shells, the importance of WWII is a recurring factor in most contexts. Additionally, by examining different subgenres of the apocalypse and post-apocalypse, it was found that in recent years a surprising level of hybridity has become an integral part of the genres. By pairing large and small genres such as horror, comedy, romance, disaster, dystopian, apocalyptic and many more, the diversity and complexities of the genres have revealed a general need for odd pairings, to investigate previously unexplored scenarios. The fact that all of these genres expand to both adult and young adult fictions further demonstrates that the interest is not age-specific but applicable to everyone.

Furthermore, it was found that a symbiosis between the development of the genres and the development of different media in recent years has likely had an impact on the advanced interest. As the means of distribution and available media have evolved to not only include literature, but to also include films, TV, comics and games, the possibility of enticing a larger number of people has also expanded. This can possibly be attributed to the fact that while some might have been interested in the literature, others may not have been enticed by the genres until something less literature-based was made available. While all of the different genres may exhibit diverse themes and storylines a great deal of common themes are recurring, as analysed in *After London* by Richard Jefferies and *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy. Though the level of horror and depravity may differ, many of the speculations remain the same. What happens to us if the world as we know it ends? Have we become too dependable on modern technology and amenities? What are we truly capable of - both good and bad? Our neglect to acknowledge these realities and the effects of them, such as the development of nuclear weapons and global warming, in conjunction with our mulish insistence to not face facts, may be our Achilles heel. The speculations also include the hubris that the human race has displayed in the last 100 years, as well as the shock we will have to go through when that hubris is proved ill-advised. Also included is an exploration of pushing the reset button and bringing about a new world order or a New Jerusalem, where the values and possessions of modern day are deconstructed and we have to return to basics.

It can be debated whether thedepravities demonstrated in *The Road* are more immoral than the actions in *After London,* due to the time in which the novel is written, as the writer has had more, or at least different, historical traumas to work through, or whether it is simply due to a change in history and the ways of writing. Where Jefferies was one of the first people ever to experiment with the post-apocalyptic literary genre, McCarthy entered a pre-existing genre which he could already draw inspiration and knowledge from. Regardless, one thing that can be concluded as being a part of both novels is the critique of the contemporary world that Jefferies and McCarthy were/are a part of. Fascinatingly, a warning of the world we inhabit, as well as an exploration of the possible outcomes to humanity, and a longing for a New Jerusalem, become focal points of both novels and continue to be the focal points of most other fictions within the genres. Humans are diverse and this diversity is also expressed in the fictions that we create and follow, as oftentimes competing fears and world views are integrated in the same fiction.

Lastly, the apocalypse, or the interest in the apocalyptic, tends to come in cycles. The resurgence in post-modern times often focuses on the year 2000, the coming of Armageddon and the predictions of Nostradamus, or 2012 and the official end to the Mayan calendar, which has been interpreted as the end of the world. The manifestation of two doomsday theories situated so close to each other, while the world was still trying to recuperate after WWII, the Cold War and other historical traumas, paired with modern concerns of exhausting earth's resources and the possibility of nuclear war that can potentially annihilate all life, means that a particularly long period of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic interest has transpired. This has also brought with it a state of hyperawareness of both Earth's and humanity's prospects of recovering from trauma and bettering itself in the future. As a result, it is also important to take into account the global and local apocalypses, and the meanings of these, as they may harbour different meanings to different peoples. The apocalypses that may concern the Western world may not be the same apocalypses that concern other parts of the world, as witnessed by the focus on femicide in two Indian instances of post-apocalyptic/dystopian fictions. Thereby, even though apocalyptic fictions are relevant for modern society, we always have to keep in mind that they have different meanings, depending on the eye of the beholder, and that diversity and hybridity is a significant part of the genre.

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