

AFTER THE END:
POST-APOCALYPTIC FICTION IN THE LONG 20th
CENTURY

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Summary:

This thesis seeks to discuss and analyse the taxonomy of post-apocalyptic fiction in the 20th and 21st century, while at the same time detail why the subgenre is distinctive and attractive for writers. The thesis delves into both the cultural and historical backgrounds of both the novels discussed and the authors, to give each taxonomic category a factual base and context. The overall end result of this thesis is an evolutionary survey of the post-apocalyptic subgenre of both form and content.

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Introduction

In his essay “No place like home”, the novelist Keith Brooke suggests that writing science fiction fulfils a purpose for the writer beyond simply telling a story:

[...] S[cience] F[iction] offers a strategy for steering readers towards fresh interpretations and reassessments of their own reality; for me, one of the main reasons for writing S[cience] F[iction] is the way it allows the author to bypass readers’ preconceptions by writing about fundamental issues from different perspectives – when we write about aliens we are really just writing about what it is to be human, when we write about space wars we are really exploring what it is in our nature that leads us to war, and so on. The key element here is the critical relationship: we do not merely see things anew, but we question and examine them anew.¹

Brooke is arguing that Science Fiction’s ability to defamiliarise allows it to reassess our “own reality”, as he puts it. This theory of authorial use of science fiction coincides with the development of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction.

This thesis will demonstrate that post-apocalyptic fiction can be broken into different subject types and why it is important to develop a taxonomy of post-apocalyptic fiction. Post-apocalyptic fiction is distinctive in that it lends itself to taxonomical categorisation of this nature because of how encompassing and varied the subgenre is. Each category experienced its own unique evolution and has its own set of qualities or quirks to bring to the subgenre as well as insight into an author’s particular thoughts or feelings on the end of the world and beyond, as well as their

¹ Keith Brooke, ‘No Place Like Home: Topian Science Fiction’, in *Strange Divisions and Alien Territories: The Sub-Genres of Science Fiction*, ed. by Keith Brooke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 126 -143 (p. 133).

realities as they wrote their novels. For example, David Moody's use of the 7/7 bombing in London as a dark inspiration for his novel, *Dog Blood* (2010)² and its subsequent sequels³. Readers are reminded of how important it is to keep our world whole by seeing what would happen if it falls apart. The goal of this thesis is to develop a taxonomy of post-apocalyptic fiction in order to show what is distinctive about the subgenre. In each chapter, I will explore three novels that exemplify each category and their use of the particular literary tropes they demonstrate. In order to further understand the depth of the use of literary tropes and devices within the post-apocalyptic subgenre, I have broken down post-apocalyptic fiction into four main types: Nuclear Holocaust, Pandemic, War, and Environmental Collapse. I chose these types because they are the bases around which post-apocalyptic fiction organises itself. In his essay on the future of post-apocalyptic fiction, Jason Heller supposed that being reminded of what we should fight for is why post-apocalyptic stories appeal to readers in the first place:

Post-apocalyptic books are thriving for a simple reason: The world feels more precariously perched on the lip of the abyss than ever, and facing those fears through fiction helps us deal with it. These stories are cathartic as well as cautionary. But they also reaffirm why we struggle to keep our world together in the first place. By imagining what it's like to lose everything, we can value what we have.⁴

² David Moody, *Dog Blood* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2010).

³ David Moody, email to the author, 2 December 2013.

⁴ Jason Heller, 'Does Post-Apocalyptic Literature Have A (Non-Dystopian) Future?' in *NPR*, <<http://www.npr.org/2015/05/02/402852849/does-post-apocalyptic-literature-have-a-non-dystopian-future>> [accessed 12 September 2015].

Because modern humanity has not dealt with a large, all encompassing apocalypse as detailed by post-apocalyptic novels, readers are bound by the imagination. Nevertheless, imagining the end and the aftermath could be a terrifying enough to spur a change. Before delving into my taxonomy of post-apocalyptic fiction, however, first I will explore the definitions and history within the subgenre.

Post-apocalyptic stories are as old as the idea of apocalypse itself; as long as humans have feared that the world could be destroyed, they have hoped that something could be rebuilt from the wreckage. Because of this, post-apocalyptic stories tend to be anthropocentric. This begs a series of questions: what sets humans apart from other creatures? Why are humans the dominant species on the planet? What would happen if humans had to interact with creatures of equal or greater intelligence? Why should the human race survive, in any capacity, in the post-apocalypse? These novels question what it means to be human and question what it is about humanity that is worth saving.

The earliest apocalyptic writing can be found in religious texts with the idea that the world was created by a higher power and could, or would, be destroyed by that same higher power, for various reasons. One very well-known example is that of Noah and his ark from the Judeo-Christian Bible, although *The Bible* discusses the apocalypse often. In their analysis of the apocalypse for *America Magazine*, Nantais and Simone point out the unique nature of the way in which the apocalypse is addressed in the Book of Revelation:

Although it was revered by many in the early church as a work of the Apostle John, the Book of Revelation differs in many ways from the other texts of the Christian Scriptures. Certainly, the text's images have some parallels in pre-Christian apocalyptic literature, but their use in Revelation is often novel.⁵

The Book of Revelation in *The Bible*⁶ describes the apocalypse in terms that many people associate with the apocalypse today, including the appearance of the four horsemen and the separation of those going to heaven from those forced to remain on Earth to watch it burn. When the time comes, the good and loyal followers of the faith will be saved and the damned will not be. According to James Lovegrove in his essay "The world of the end of the world", apocalyptic prophecies defy cultural and religious boundaries:

Every major religion has a tradition of apocalypse. In Judeo-Christianity there are the prophesied 'end times', a period of extreme tribulation for humankind culminated in a final conflict between the forces of good and evil, Armageddon. The Earth will be purged, the righteous saved.

Islam has Yawm al-Qiyamah, detailed in the Qur'an as a last judgement [sic] where Muslim and non-Muslim alike will be held to account before God for their actions. According to Hindu scripture, meanwhile, we are currently living in the Kali Yuga, an 'age of vice', the last of four stages the world must go through over and over in an eternal cycle of decay and renewal, which parallels the four seasons of the year [...] The Norse canon has its Ragnarök, the 'final destiny of the gods'. Three icy years of Fimbulwinter will precede the destruction of Midgard, the Earth, and its subsequent rebirth. Going back further, we find the flood myth of the ancient Babylonians, a precursor of the Biblical flood of Noah. The Babylonian myth depicts the rising waters as a divine punishment, bringing about the demise of corrupt civilization.⁷

⁵ David E. Nantais and Michael Simone, 'Apocalypse When?', in *America Magazine* <<http://www.americamagazine.org/issue/447/article/apocalypse-when>> [accessed 17 September 2015].

⁶ *The Bible*. Authorized King James Version, Oxford UP, 1998.

⁷ James Lovegrove, 'The World at the End of the World: Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Science Fiction', in *Strange Divisions and Alien Territories: The Sub-*

Current apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic writing uses the doctrine detailed in these religious texts and puts them in the context of modern times. By using the taxonomic categories, it becomes easier to pull out the religious allegories and analyse them against their cultural and historical backdrop. Heather Hicks, in her book about twentieth century post-apocalyptic writing, states that the evolution of post-apocalyptic novels into its modern iterations began as early as 1722 with *Robinson Crusoe* and *A Journal of the Plague Year*:

For the better part of two centuries of post-apocalyptic fiction, to lose the modern was unequivocally tragic. *Robinson Crusoe*, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, and another milestone of the genre, Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), depict the prospect of failed modernity in agonizingly negative terms. This elegiac treatment of a venerated modernity remains largely dominant through the publication of H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898). Yet one also begins to detect a shift in the beginning of the twentieth century: the sharp eyes and light step of Edwin in Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) hints that perhaps the premodern might be an improvement over the swarming cities of the modern era, whose effete denizens have so readily succumbed to the plague. It is not until the Cold War period, however, that post-apocalyptic narratives begin to express gleeful relief at the collapse of modernity.⁸

As Hicks posits above, the modern pressures of society led to the evolution of post-apocalyptic fiction from a lament of the collapse of 'modernity' to a "relief at the collapse of modernity", a relief that continues into contemporary post-apocalyptic fiction. The end of the world has become part of societal consciousness. As Lovegrove

Genres of Science Fiction, ed. by Keith Brooke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 97-111 (p. 97).

⁸ Heather J. Hicks, *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century: Modernity Beyond Salvage* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).

says, the underlying point of this morbid fascination with the end of the world is a need to tell specific stories both to reconcile the disconnect between not wanting the world to end and the thrill in thinking that it might:

There is, it seems, a basic human need to believe that the world is coming to an end or has done so in the past and that, though immersion in the crucible of catastrophe, humankind is tested and purified and bettered. Not all can survive the apocalypse, but those that do will be deserving inheritors of a golden age, a perfect new world.⁹

Not all of post-apocalyptic fiction is concerned with the worthiness of who, or what, manages to survive the destruction; in real life, disasters do not pick and choose who is worth surviving them. In desiring to create a perfect world, the characters – protagonists and antagonists – usually fail, and the survivors of the catastrophe are often lucky, not inherently extraordinary.

Frank Kermode, in his series of lectures on apocalyptic fiction in a modern context, states that the foundation of much of apocalyptic literature comes from a sense of crisis:

When you read, as you must almost every passing day, that ours is the great age of crisis— technological, military, cultural— you may well simply nod and proceed calmly to your business; for this assertion, upon which a multitude of important books is founded, is nowadays no more surprising than the opinion that the earth is round. There seems to me to be some danger in this situation, if only because such a myth, uncritically accepted, tends like prophecy to shape a future to confirm it. Nevertheless crisis, however facile the conception, is inescapably a central element in our endeavours towards making sense of our world.¹⁰

⁹ Lovegrove, p. 98

¹⁰ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Kermode's assertion aligns with a common thread that runs through all of the novels discussed in this thesis, that is that they were written during times of historical turmoil. For example, in the years leading up to the publication of *The War of the Worlds* (1898)¹¹, the United Kingdom was battling for colonial control of Sudan. In the years leading up to the publication of *Oryx and Crake* (2003)¹², scientists had begun truly warning the public on the dangers of global warming and climate change and humanity's role in the slow destruction of the environment¹³. These events are crises that both authors had to make sense of in their own way.

Each book within this thesis will be looked at within the context of the time of its composition and publication. Authorial experience will be considered, but not as a complete representation of the historical event—this is a review of how each author took traumatic events such as war, pollution and overly ambitious scientific advancements, to take a few examples, then interpreted and used them to create a narrative to reconcile themselves to these events. The authors use well-established and effective literary devices, such as the last man trope and retrospective narration, to tell compelling stories which readers find easy to relate to. Rather than using fantasy as an escape from their current political situation, the authors of post-apocalyptic fiction use the genre to mirror our contemporary reality back to us, asking us to think beyond our preconceptions. Lovegrove believes the genre offers a form of catharsis:

¹¹ H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (London: William Heinemann, 1898).

¹² Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2003).

¹³ Spencer R. Weart, *The Discovery of Global Warming* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

Apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic science fiction takes [this religious doctrine] and, almost without exception, secularizes and satirizes it. For the reader, the appeal of this sub-genre is that it affords the cathartic thrill of experiencing and surviving the end of the world. He or she joins the last of the race, however few they may be, in their desperate fight to keep the spark of civilization alight. For the author, it's a chance to raise the stakes as high as they will possibly go. There can be no bigger crisis, surely, and no more dramatic milieu, than doomsday.¹⁴

While authors of literary fiction focus on depicting a recognisable world, post-apocalyptic authors harness the “thrill” of imagining the end of the world in order to metaphorically tell stories about their concerns in the real world at the time they wrote the novels - political unrest as in *The War of the Worlds*, pending nuclear war as in *Alas, Babylon* (1959)¹⁵, or environmental catastrophe as in *Oryx and Crake*.

Like many literary terms, the definition of science fiction is often contested by those with a working knowledge of the genre. According to John Clute in *The Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction*, fiction is considered science fiction when the author is conscious of using the genre:

[...] sf that is either *labelled* science fiction or is instantly recognized by its readership as belonging to that category – or (usually) both. The implication is that any author of genre sf is conscious of working within a genre with certain habits of thought, certain “conventions” – some might even say “rules” – of storytelling.¹⁶

¹⁴ Lovegrove, p. 98

¹⁵ Pat Frank, *Alas, Babylon* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1959).

¹⁶ John Clute and Peter Nicholls, *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), pp. 483-484 (p. 483).

This thesis uses several of the definitions to come up with one working definition that applies to the novels discussed in the following chapters. The definitions came from various sources, from science fiction scholars to the novelists themselves. In his introduction to the first volume of his anthology *The Road to Science Fiction*, James Gunn theorizes that:

Science fiction is the branch of literature that deals with the effects of change on people in the real world as it can be projected into the past, the future, or to distant places. It often concerns itself with scientific or technological change, and it usually involves matters whose importance is greater than the individual or the community; often civilization or the race itself is in danger.¹⁷

This definition of science fiction is helpful to anyone in need of a concise definition of the genre as it details science fiction's attempts to be as encompassing and relatable as possible, while at the same time exploring the possibilities science and creativity afford them. However, Gunn later amends this definition to a larger and more detailed one:

Traditional literature is the literature of continuity, and thus of the past; science fiction is the literature of change, and thus of the present and the future. As the literature of change, science fiction, at its most characteristic, inserts the reader into a world significantly different from the world of present experience because of catastrophic natural events, because of the evolutionary alterations of time, or because of human activities, particularly scientific and technological. Its basic assumptions are that the universe is knowable (though it may never be fully known) and that people are adaptable (that is, they, like everything else, evolve as a consequence of environment and natural

¹⁷ James Gunn, 'Introduction', in *The Road to Science Fiction: From Gilgamesh to Wells*, ed. by James Gunn (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 1977), pp. vii - xviii (p. vii).

selection); science fiction is fundamentally Darwinian and thus could also be called 'the literature of the human species.'¹⁸

Here, Gunn suggests that science fiction could be considered the literary form that truly explores what it means to be human. Kingsley Amis' definition of science fiction, however, from his comprehensive survey of science fiction from 1960, *New Maps of Hell*, was, when it arose, one of the more accurate definitions of science fiction to have been produced:

A definition of science fiction, though attempted with enormous and significant frequency by commentators inside the field, is bound to be cumbersome rather than memorable. With the 'fiction' part we are on reasonably secure ground; the 'science' part raises several kinds of difficulty, one of which is that science fiction is not necessarily fiction about science or scientists, nor is science necessarily important in it. Prolonged cogitation, however, would lead one to something like this: Science fiction is that class of prose narrative treating of a situation that could not arise in the world we know, but which is hypothesised on the basis of some innovation in science or technology, or pseudo-science or pseudo-technology, whether human or extra-terrestrial in origin.¹⁹

Margaret Atwood echoes Amis' definition that science fiction situations 'could not arise in the world we know' in her insistence that she is not a science fiction writer but a speculative writer, as the events she speculates are written with the belief that they could actually occur:

What I mean by "science fiction" is those books that descend from H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, which treats of an invasion by tentacled, blood-sucking Martians shot to Earth in metal canisters—things that could not possibly

¹⁸ James Gunn, p. vii.

¹⁹ Kingsley Amis, 'Starting Points' in *New Maps of Hell* (New York: Harcourt, 1960), pp. 11-34 (pp. 13-14).

happen—whereas, for me, “speculative fiction” means plots that descend from Jules Vern’s books about submarines and balloon travel and such—things that really could happen but just hadn’t completely happened when the authors wrote the books. I would place my own books in this second category: no Martians.²⁰

The problem with both Amis’ and Atwood’s definitions is that they do not allow for science fiction to evolve and expand, while at the same time limited science fiction to being strictly things that, according to Atwood, “could not possibly happen”. Who is to say that aliens would not come to Earth via “metal canisters”? Why should science fiction be held to Martians and spaceships and the seemingly impossible? Who defines what is possible or impossible? According to Derrida, nuclear holocaust fiction relies on the fact that the nuclear holocaust does not, and did not, exist. There is a power behind the fable-like nature of this fiction:

In two points. 1. Literature belongs to the nuclear age by virtue of the performative character of its relation to the referent, and the structure of its written archive. 2. Nuclear war has not taken place, it is a speculation, an invention in the sense of a fable or an invention to be invented in order to make a place for it or to prevent it from taking place (as much invention is needed for the one as for the other), and for the moment all this is only literature. Some might conclude that therefore it is not real, as it remains entirely suspended in its fabulous and literary epoche²¹.

Derrida’s point is interesting in relation with Atwood’s definition. A nuclear holocaust is not out of the realm of possibility in the future, but, strictly speaking, it has not

²⁰ Margaret Atwood, ‘Introduction’ in *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (London: Virago Press, 2011), pp. 1-11 (p. 6).

²¹ Jacques Derrida, Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis, ‘No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)’ in *Diacritics*, 14.2 (1984), pp. 20-31. Derrida, pp. 309.

actually happened. So do nuclear holocaust novels become speculative rather than science fiction? Atwood admits that there is a difficulty in defining the terms as they do tend to bleed into each other.²² However, that adds another layer to the definition debate: what the authors intend with their own works. Does it matter if an author wants his or her novel to be classified as science fiction? Does it change how the novel reads when the intended genre is different from the perceived genre?

Margaret Atwood does not consider her novels to be part of the genre at all. She has a reason behind refusing:

'Some people get very prickly about it because they think you're dissing science fiction. That's not what I'm doing, I'm simply pointing out I cannot write those books. Much as I'm a devotee of Star Trek, I'm not good at writing them. And I can't write dragons, either. Not my wheelhouse. That doesn't mean I can't read them. Can't write Moby Dick, either. Very keen on it. And that's not a realistic novel, by the way.'²³

Atwood considers her novels to be speculative, not science fictional. It becomes a matter of whether or not this makes a difference. According to Arthur Krystal in his short-sighted review of genre fiction, '[w]riters who want to understand why the heart has reasons that reason cannot know are not going to write horror tales or police procedurals.'²⁴ Atwood seems to believe that the stigma is no longer relevant today, that the notion of science fiction as a genre being not respected is outdated:

²² Atwood, p. 7

²³ Hermione Hoby, 'Margaret Atwood: Interview,' in *The Telegraph*, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/10246937/Margaret-Atwood-interview.html>> [accessed 20 October 2013].

²⁴ Arthur Krystal, 'It's Genre. Not That There's Anything Wrong With It!' in *The New Yorker*, <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/its-genre-not-that-theres-anything-wrong-with-it>> [accessed 20 October 2013].

Jonathan Lethem actually wrote quite a good piece about this a little while ago, about hanging out with the sci-fi cultists whose worldview is probably a bit out of date now, because it was presupposed on “Literary people scorn us. They won’t let us into their clubhouse, so we’re not going to let them into ours.” But when you have the *New Yorker* doing a science fiction issue, I would say that that particular door is no longer closed. And it should never have been closed in the first place, because you cannot write a history of prose narrative in the twentieth century without including H.G. Wells, without *Brave New World*, without *1984*. Those are key books of the century, I would say.²⁵

Lethem, to his credit, lamented the literary community’s disregard of science fiction fifteen years prior to Atwood’s comment. More recent discussions on the topic lean more toward Atwood’s point of view, however there is still an acknowledgement that there is, in fact, a divide. In 2012, there was a lengthy argument between defenders of literary fiction and defenders of genre fiction. The fact that this argument took place, in fairly notable news outlets like the *New Yorker* and *Time Magazine*, shows that Atwood is, at least slightly, incorrect. Novelist Lev Grossman argues that the moment a critically acclaimed novel that shows a hit of genre arises, it is taken from the genre category and rebranded, ‘[a]s soon as a novel becomes moving or important or great, critics try to surgically extract it from its genre, lest our carefully constructed hierarchies collapse in the presence of such a taxonomical anomaly.’²⁶ While Atwood

²⁵ ‘Margaret Atwood on Science Fiction, Dystopias, and Intestinal Parasites’ in *Wired.com*, <<http://www.wired.com/2013/09/geeks-guide-margaret-atwood/>> [accessed 20 October 2013].

²⁶ Lev Grossman, ‘Literary Revolution in the Supermarket Aisle: Genre Fiction Is Disruptive Technology,’ in *Time.com* <<http://entertainment.time.com/2012/05/23/genre-fiction-is-disruptive-technology/>> [accessed 20 October 2013].

says there is no separation of the two, Grossman implies that there is, however the separation is creatively beneficial:

We expect literary revolutions to come from above, from the literary end of the spectrum — the difficult, the avant-garde, the high-end, the densely written. But I don't think that's what's going on. Instead we're getting a revolution from below, coming up from the supermarket aisles. Genre fiction is the technology that will disrupt the literary novel as we know it.²⁷

Michael Chabon points out that the literature versus genre divide was prevalent in his early career between being told not to write science fiction for workshops to using a pseudonym to get a Lovecraftian story published in a magazine so as not to 'tarnish' his literary good name. He thinks that there has been a change in whether genre is accepted in literary circles, but that this change came about for multiple reasons:

And that kind of boundarylessness, or literary realms where the boundaries are very porous and indistinct and can be reconfigured at will, is much more interesting and appealing to me as a writer than a world where the categories are really set and really distinct, and the boundaries are really high, and people have to stay where they start, and can't move out of those categories. I mean, that's just inherently deathly. And the reasons why it changed are bad reasons, they're economic and financial and marketing kinds of reasons, and they have to do with snobbery and academic laziness. I mean, there are almost no good reasons involved for that change that took place since writers like Dickens, who wrote crime fiction and supernatural fiction as easily as social realist fiction, and often all in the same story.²⁸

²⁷ Grossman, 'Literary Revolution'.

²⁸ 'Michael Chabon Attacks Prejudice Against Science Fiction' in *Wired.com* <<http://www.wired.com/2012/03/michael-chabon-geeks-guide-galaxy/>> [accessed 20 October 2013].

Chabon believes that, as a writer, it is more interesting for him to deal without boundaries, to take elements from everything and create a well-written story. Some critics, like Arthur Krystal, however, still look at genre as something to escape to while literary fiction is something to make one think:

The typical genre writer keeps rhetorical flourishes to a minimum, and the typical reader is content to let him. Readers who require more must look either to other kinds of novels or to those genre writers who care deeply about their sentences.²⁹

Krystal himself is a great example of how debilitating the prejudice is within the critical world. He says genre fiction is more commercial, further degrading the genre into a thing that is merely profitable, not something that can contribute to the canon. With this harsh look at the genre, it is no surprise that the likes of Atwood would hesitate to want to be within it.

Lethem says that good science fiction is overshadowed by the bad, '[t]heir work drowns in a sea of garbage in bookstores, while much of SF's promise is realized elsewhere by writers too savvy or oblivious to bother with its stigmatized identity.'³⁰ Atwood seems to believe that decades of exclusion could be rectified in fifteen years, and thus sees no problem in willingly distancing herself from a genre that her

²⁹ Arthur Krystal, 'Easy Writers' in *New Yorker*, <<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/05/28/easy-writers>> [accessed 20 October 2013].

³⁰ Jonathan Lethem, 'The Squandered Promise of Science Fiction' in *The Hipster Book Club*, <<http://hipster-bookclub.livejournal.com/1147850.html>> [accessed 20 October 2013].

inclusion could only help. She is famous, or infamous, and respected enough that were she to embrace being categorized as a science fiction author it would boost the genre.

The more accepted she is with people who prefer different genres, the more novels she would sell. Atwood says that the difference between science fiction and speculative fiction is what couldn't happen; that is a limiting ideology. Lethem argues that science fiction is, 'both think-fiction and dream-fiction.'³¹ He says that science fiction went where literary fiction did not, and that: '[f]or decades SF filled the gap, and during those decades its writers added characterization, ambiguity, and reflexivity, helping it evolve toward something like a literary maturity, or at least the ability to throw up an occasional masterpiece.'³² If Atwood feels that there is no sort of 'closed door' between science fiction and literary fiction, it is because she is on the side of the door that enables her work to be taken seriously. She has benefitted from winning awards on both sides, as well; *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)³³ was nominated for a Booker Prize and won Arthur C. Clarke award in 1987.

That is not to say there has not been a shift toward allowing more and more science fiction novels to be studied and respected. Indeed, many universities have begun to offer courses in science and speculative fiction; in the United States, the University of Kansas has the Center for the Study of Science Fiction³⁴ But to say the door is no longer closed because of this shift is akin to saying that because of the advent of vaccines, there are no more diseases.

³¹ Lethem, 'The Squandered Promise of Science Fiction'.

³² Lethem, 'The Squandered Promise of Science Fiction'.

³³ Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985).

³⁴ 'Gunn Center for the Study of Science Fiction' in *Gunn Center for the Study of Science Fiction*, <<http://www.sfcenter.ku.edu/>> [accessed 20 October 2013].

In an ideal world, categorizing books by genre would only serve to make them easier to organize. In an ideal world, Atwood would not need to acknowledge her periodic slips into the science fictional world. She writes of fear and loneliness and desperation as believable and as relatable as any other well-respected author. It is impossible not to see that, at its heart, *Oryx and Crake* is a compassionate warning against the mistreatment of the environment, about the misuse of science, about humanity's selfishness. Strip away the vampires from *I Am Legend* and there is the story of a man alone in the world, a man coming to grips with the fact that everything he knows is suddenly wrong, that going to war fundamentally changed him. Ignore the horror saturating *Dog Blood* and it is a fictional memoir of a society unable to determine which of its members can be trusted and who should determine that, and that the individual desire to compartmentalize everyone does more harm than good. These aspects of the novels are not insignificant, of course. However, the fact that the novels can still tell important stories without those elements gives them a greater purpose.

Upon Richard Matheson's death, several well-known authors took to the media to muse on how much Matheson influenced their own works. His believable settings inspired such well-known authors as Stephen King: "He fired my imagination by placing his horrors not in European castles and Lovecraftian universes, but in American scenes I knew and could relate to. "I want to do that," I thought. "I must do that." Matheson showed the way.'³⁵ Ray Bradbury said he was 'one of the most

³⁵ Stephen King, 'Tribute to Richard Matheson' in StephenKing.com, <http://stephenking.com/news_archive/article399.html> [accessed 20 October 2013].

important writers of the 20th century'.³⁶ Matheson's positive influence within the science fictional world allows his work the capability to transcend the binds of genre. His degree of respect would make it easy for his work to be studied on every literary level. The key would be going from knowing Matheson's stories and not realizing it, to studying and acknowledging his influence in culture, not just science fiction.

In 2003, Farah Mendlesohn suggested that "[s]cience fiction is an argument with the universe."³⁷ David Brin, in his collection of essays analyzing the nature of science fiction published in 2008, agreed that science fiction is literature of change and discovery:

Many people have tried to define science fiction. I like to call it the literature of exploration and change. While other genres obsess upon so-called eternal verities, SF deals with the possibility that our children may have different problems. They may, indeed, be different than we have been.³⁸

Brin's definition deals with the idea that science fiction is written by the author to reconcile their fear or uneasiness with a problem in the world and that problem's influence on their real world.

³⁶ Alison Flood, 'I Am Legend Author Richard Matheson Was Himself a Real Legend' in *theguardian.com*, <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/jun/25/i-am-legend-author-richard-matheson>> [accessed 21 October 2013].

³⁷ Gary Westfahl, *Science Fiction Quotations: From Inner Mind to the Outer Limits* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 332.

³⁸ David Brin, *Through Stranger Eyes: Reviews, Introductions, Tributes & Iconoclastic Essays* (Ann Arbor, MI: Nimble, 2008), p. 2.

There are also definitions that deal strictly with the scientific aspect of the genre; science is where and why science fiction branches from fantasy. Fantasy on the whole deals with magic or elements that are not readily explained by science. Gary Westfahl supposed that science fiction could be innovative as well as entertaining:

Science fiction is a prose narrative which describes or depicts some aspect or development which does not exist at the time of writing; one significant subgroup of science fiction additionally includes language which either describes scientific fact or explains or reflects the process of scientific thought.³⁹

Westfahl's thought is similar to Brooke's; it describes science fiction's use of original thought and writing to explain something in life that is either unexplained or too specialized to be readily comprehensible.

In his comprehensive examination of science fiction in many mediums, Everett K. Bleiler refuted the idea that science fiction could even be held down to one solid definition, that the motive to do so is a marketable one:

Science fiction is not a unitary genre or form, hence cannot be encompassed in a single definition. It is an assemblage of genres and subgenres that are not intrinsically closely related, but are generally accepted as an area of publication by a marketplace. Science fiction is thus only a commercial term.⁴⁰

The concept of genre, especially one that is as diverse as science fiction, is one that was potentially created for commercial purposes, there is no disputing that the term

³⁹ Gary Westfahl, "'Slow Sculpture' Conclusion' in *The Mechanics of Wonder: The Creation of the Idea of Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), pp. 287 – 318 (p. 304).

⁴⁰ Everett Bleiler, 'Introduction' in *Science-fiction: the Early Years* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1990), pp. xi – xxiii (p. xi).

itself has made its way into the critical lexicon. Though it is a term that is clearly up for debate, for the purposes of this thesis, the term 'science fiction' is defined as other-worldly fiction with some basis in reality, and that reality would involve one or more of the scientific branches. It is a definition that closely follows Brooke's; much of science fiction takes very human stories and tells them with seemingly non-human elements for allegorical purposes.

Dystopian fiction must also be defined in terms of how it is used in this thesis. Dystopian fiction, though common in science fiction literature, has a political origin, stemming from the early use of the word "dystopia" in political debates. Gregory Claeys, in his essay on the origins of dystopia, explains that:

The term 'dystopia' enters common currency only in the twentieth century, though it appears intermittently beforehand (dys-topia or 'cacotopia', bad place, having been used by John Stuart Mill in an 1868 parliamentary debate). The flowering of the dystopian genre was preceded by a variety of satirical tropes. Francis Bacon's scientific ambitions were brought down several notches in Swift's famous parody in book three of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). The dystopian ideal has also been linked both historically and logically to proclamations of the 'end of utopia' (for instance in Marcuse, *Five Lectures*, 1970), and has sometimes also been wedded to the now-debunked hypothesis of the 'end of history'. In the wake of totalitarianism it was also suggested, in the works of Karl Popper (see *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 1950), Jacob Talmon, and others, that the utopian impulse was itself inherently dystopian. That is to say, the desire to create a much improved society in which human behaviour was dramatically superior to the norm implies an intrinsic drift towards punitive methods of controlling behaviour which inexorably results in some form of police state.⁴¹

⁴¹ Gregory Claeys, 'The Origins of Dystopia: Wells, Huxley and Orwell' in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed by. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp. 107-131 (pp. 107-108).

So while the term dystopia described the opposite of what was happening in the world when the term was coined, dystopian fiction itself was not prevalent until the immense change in philosophy and society that emerged from the French Revolution.

Claeys describes this:

Fantasies of the 'Last Man' and of the Apocalypse occur intermittently in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But it is only with the French Revolution that we witness a dialectical relationship emerging between three elements: utopian thought, here some of the underlying principles of the Revolution; the creation of fictional utopias; and a fictional anti- or dystopian response. In this case, on the one hand we witness fictional works inspired by leading trends in utopian thought, notably by Thomas Spence (*The Constitution of Spensonia*, 1801), and by acolytes of William Godwin, particularly Thomas Northmore's *Memories of Planetes* (1795). On the other, these texts were met with a barrage of fictional satires of the 'new philosophy', loosely defined as 'perfectibility', which portrayed Godwinian invocations of a society governed by reason as inducing disaster, such as Hannah More's *The History of Mr Fantom* (1797). This is also the point at which both major strands of the later dystopian turn, population control and socialism, are addressed by the most famous anti-utopian text of the nineteenth century, and a key source for Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), T. R. Malthus's *Essay on Population* (1798).⁴²

As Claeys states, with early dystopian fiction, there was a fine line between dystopian satire and dystopian novels born from fear of drastic societal changes, changes that stemmed from anything between increased knowledge or increased population and beyond.

Adam Roberts, in his discussion of the historical context of science fiction, states that science fiction has more of an impact when it was created in dialogue with its historical context, which is often what happens with dystopian fiction:

⁴² Claeys, p. 108.

Contemporary SF is a fantastically variegated and multifarious mode: any normative statement of the type 'SF is such-and-such' will be demolished by the myriad counter-examples that can be produced by anybody even slightly acquainted with the genre. [...] one assertion I would (tentatively) stand by is that the SF that has had the greatest impact, particularly in the last 60 years or so, has done so because it articulates a dialectic that goes right back to the birth of the genre at around 1600.⁴³

The idea of dystopia has stayed true to its origins, though it has evolved slightly as time has gone on, and society's concerns changed and shifted focus. Typically, and incorrectly, dystopian fiction is thought to be the same as post-apocalyptic fiction⁴⁴. However, in much the same way as a square is a rectangle but not vice versa, a dystopian novel can be post-apocalyptic, but not all post-apocalyptic novels are dystopian. In his introduction to the *Brave New Worlds* dystopian fiction anthology, John Joseph Adams defines ambitious dystopian fiction in terms of the novel's society and its relationship to the protagonist. A dystopian society is a society that is, in almost all aspects, contradictory to the protagonist's sense of morality. In this instance, the protagonist becomes a mirror for the reader and the reader is thus made uneasy while reading:

In a dystopian story, society itself is typically the antagonist; it is society that is actively working against the protagonist's aims and desires. This oppression frequently is enacted by a totalitarian or authoritarian government, resulting in the loss of civil liberties and untenable living conditions, caused by any number of circumstances, such as world overpopulation, laws controlling a

⁴³ Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan: 2007), p. 341.

⁴⁴ John Joseph Adams, 'Dystopian Fiction: An Introduction', in *Tor.com*, <<http://www.tor.com/2011/04/11/dystopian-fiction-an-introduction/>> [accessed 12 September 2015].

person's sexual or reproductive freedom, and living under constant surveillance.⁴⁵

The foundation of dystopias is that they usually come about when society's leaders attempt at one point to create a utopia. The "loss of civil liberties" occurs when the leaders feel that society would run better with less freedom, and if government officials had more control and people were oppressed, aspiring to be rich. G. Welsey Burnett and Lucy Rollin's study of dystopias and leisure concurs: "[d]ystopian novels show what might happen when the society itself has become abhorrent."⁴⁶ Dystopias represent the long term, unwelcome aftermath of the short-sighted, quick fix offered by the idea of a utopia, a perfect society made perfect by judgment of a few. John Joseph Adams espouses a similar idea:

Many societies in fiction are depicted as utopias when in fact they are dystopias; like angels and demons, the two are sides of the same coin. This seemingly paradoxical situation can arise because, in a dystopia, the society often gives up A in exchange for B, but the benefit of B blinds the society to the loss of A; it is often not until many years later that the loss of A is truly felt, and the citizens come to realize that the world they once thought acceptable (or even ideal) is not the world they thought it was. That's part of what is so compelling—and insidious—about dystopian fiction: the idea that you could be living in a dystopia and not even know it.⁴⁷

An example of a well-known dystopia is Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932)⁴⁸, where the society itself did not see anything wrong with their supposed utopia until

⁴⁵ Adams, 'Dystopian Fiction: An Introduction'.

⁴⁶ G. Wesley Burnett and Lucy Rollin, 'Anti-leisure in Dystopian Fiction: The Literature of Leisure in the Worst of All Possible Worlds', *Leisure Studies*, 19.2 (2000), 77-90 (p. 77).

⁴⁷ Adams, 'Dystopian Fiction: An Introduction'.

⁴⁸ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932).

an outsider protagonist was introduced as a foil for the reader's own horror at the situation.

Adams goes on to further elaborate on the definition of the dystopian literary theme:

Dystopias are often seen as "cautionary tales," but the best dystopias are not didactic screeds, and the best dystopias do not draw their power from whatever political/societal point they might be making; the best dystopias speak to the deeper meanings of what it is to be one small part of a teeming civilization... and of what it is to be human.⁴⁹

The question of what it means to be human is of course central to the vast majority of science fiction, as Gunn argues, so it is not surprising that Adams believes that dystopian novels take on the "deeper meanings" of the human condition.

Frank Kermode posits that those "deeper meanings" of the human condition are actually nightmarish:

Marx once said that 'the consciousness of the past weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living,' and it is from that nightmare that the modern apocalyptists want to awake. But the nightmare is part of our condition, part of their material.⁵⁰

According to Kermode, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic writing, by nature, will have an element of a nightmare from which the characters struggle against. Dystopian or post-apocalyptic fiction, then might allow us to make sense of the present by projecting ourselves into the potential nightmare of the future.

⁴⁹ Adams, 'Dystopian Fiction: An Introduction'.

⁵⁰ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 121.

For the purpose of this thesis, the more focused definition of dystopia will be used, that is, dystopian fiction as fiction representing the fall of a society that was conceived of as utopian, such as *The Hunger Games* and *The City of Ember* (2003)⁵¹. They have societies rebuilt after an apocalypse—war and some sort of environmental disaster—by those in power who thought they knew what was best for society, but which turns out to slowly bring society back to ruin. On the other hand, *Dog Blood* (2010)⁵² and *Oryx and Crake* are not dystopian, but are post-apocalyptic. They are novels about the aftermath of a catastrophe that took place in a regular society, not one thought to be an ideal.

The term ‘post-apocalypse’ must also be defined, as it relates to the fiction that will be discussed in the context of the thesis. As stated previously, the idea of the post-apocalypse goes back a long way. It is an idea fundamental to many religions and ancient civilizations, springing from a belief that the longer the Earth and humanity exist, the more likely it is that something will come along and make it difficult for humanity to survive as it is. The ‘something’ ranges anywhere from a comet, or pieces of one, striking the planet to zombie plague. In a literal sense, the post-apocalypse means the time period after the apocalypse. The apocalypse in this instance is not the complete destruction of everything, but a catastrophic event that destroyed the population and changed the planet enough to force humanity to have to rebuild. In

⁵¹ Jeanne DuPrau, *The City of Ember* (New York: Random House, 2003).

⁵² David Moody, *Dog Blood* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2010).

his introduction to his novel *Father Elijah: An Apocalypse*, Michael O'Brien uses a similar definition for a literary apocalypse:

An apocalypse is a work of literature dealing with the end of human history. For millennia apocalypses of various sorts have arisen throughout the world in the cultural life of many peoples and religions. They are generated by philosophical speculation, by visions of the future, or by inarticulate longings and apprehensions, and not infrequently by the abiding human passion for what J. R. R. Tolkien called "sub-creation". These poems, epics, fantasies, myths, and prophetic works bear a common witness to man's transient state upon the earth. Man is a stranger and sojourner. His existence is inexpressibly beautiful—and dangerous. It is fraught with mysteries that beg to be deciphered. The Greek word *apokalypsis* means an uncovering, or revealing. Through such revelations man gazes into the panorama of human history in search of the key to his identity, in search of permanence and completion.⁵³

Taking that definition of a literary apocalypse, it is logical to look at a post-apocalypse as the continuation of that "beautiful and dangerous" aspect of human existence. With a post-apocalyptic story, the beauty and danger of humanity's desire to survive comes to the forefront.

For the purposes of this thesis, the definition of post-apocalypse is the period after a cataclysmic, or apocalyptic, event that completely changed both the Earth and human society. The subsequent rebuilding period, aftermath, and "functional" new society is post-apocalyptic. Post-apocalyptic novels are often mistakenly categorized as apocalyptic novels. A simple way to distinguish the two is that apocalyptic novels detail the catastrophic event, while post-apocalyptic novels focus on what happens afterwards. The limitation of the terms is demonstrated by the fact that, in many

⁵³ Michael D. O'Brien, 'Introduction', in *Father Elijah: An Apocalypse*, (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996), pp. 11 -12 (p. 11).

cases, a novel can be both. For example, *Lucifer's Hammer* (1977)⁵⁴ and *The War of the Worlds* have both. *World War Z* (2006)⁵⁵ and *Robocalypse* (2011)⁵⁶ flash back to the apocalypse, but take place in the post-apocalypse. Going even further back, the story of Noah and the flood in Genesis is apocalyptic⁵⁷; the events after the flood are then post-apocalyptic.

Due to the varying nature of the subgenre, it is difficult to determine a universally agreed upon number of categories of post-apocalyptic fiction. Though I have broken it down into the categories previously detailed, this taxonomy is not set in stone and many of the categories borrow from each other. The categories detailed in this thesis provide a good base for the post-apocalyptic subgenre that can be further expanded upon by other post-apocalyptic themes. Nuclear Holocaust fiction, such as Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon*, explores the importance of community and the survival of a family in the aftermath of a nuclear disaster. Chapter One examines this common theme drawing on the arguments and examples of Andrew Tate, in his collection of essays about post-apocalyptic fiction's contributions to the literary canon⁵⁸, and on Jacques Derrida's exploration of how and why nuclear holocaust is

⁵⁴ Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer* (Chicago: Playboy, 1977).

⁵⁵ Max Brooks, *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (New York: Crown, 2006).

⁵⁶ Daniel H. Wilson, *Robocalypse: A Novel* (New York: Doubleday, 2011).

⁵⁷ Genesis 6.9

⁵⁸ Andrew Tate, *Apocalyptic Fiction (21st Century Genre Fiction)*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

such a compelling topic even though it has not happened⁵⁹. Pandemic fiction is the focus of Chapter Two, where my analysis builds on Kari E. Lokke's analysis of the origins of last man trope, specifically its origins in science fiction, and how the last man relates to global pandemic and group mentalities.⁶⁰ This chapter explores a number of novels, including Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, which offers a clear illustration of the way that pandemic fiction lends itself to the theme of the last man and his place in his crumbling, or crumbled, society. War fiction explores retrospective narration as a tool to process war and invasion. Chapter Three's exploration of war fiction focuses on novels such as Max Brooks' *World War Z*, drawing on Justina Robson's work on the use of the 'other' in science fiction⁶¹, and Sarah Cole's work on the development of war writing⁶². Finally, Environmental Collapse fiction, such as *Cat's Cradle* (1963)⁶³ by Kurt Vonnegut, inspects the relationship between memory and the complete destruction of the environment. Chapter Four discusses the use of memory in ecological collapse with the aid of Brian Stableford's analysis of ecology and dystopias⁶⁴, as well as Jürgen Straub's exploration

⁵⁹ Jacques Derrida, Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)' in *Diacritics*, 14.2 (1984), pp. 20-31.

⁶⁰ Kari E. Lokke, 'The Last Man' in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 116-34.

⁶¹ Justina Robson, 'Aliens: Our Selves and Others,' in *Strange Divisions and Alien Territories: The Sub-Genres of Science Fiction*, ed. by Keith Brooke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 26-38.

⁶² Sarah Cole, 'People in War' in *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, ed. Catherine Mary McLoughlin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 25-37.

⁶³ Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963).

⁶⁴ Brian Stableford, 'Science fiction before the genre' in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 14-31.

of psychology and narrative in relation to memory studies⁶⁵. The thesis is laid out into four chapters in order to provide a sustained and multi-facted exploration of various sides of the subgenres being examined. Thus Chapter One's focus on community provides a contrast to chapter Two's focus on the individual, and chapter Three's exploration of the use of retrospective narration, along with chapter Four's analysis on the use of memories, allow me to offer a detailed analysis of the uses of the past in these texts. In taking the different taxonomic categories of post-apocalyptic fiction and dissecting the various literary devices used in the process, this thesis offers an analytic survey on the post-apocalyptic subgenre in both form and content, in an academic sense as well as in the context of cultural significance. This thesis seeks to show not only the importance of establishing these taxonomic categories, but also the uniqueness of post-apocalyptic fiction as a whole, and why and how, in writing within the subgenres, authors have the opportunity to comment on their society while exploring society's potential.

⁶⁵ Jürgen Straub, 'Psychology, Narrative, and Cultural Memory: Past and Present' in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. By Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 215-228.

Chapter One: Nuclear Destruction and Community

The fear of nuclear annihilation became more prominent in the 1940s and 1950s. However, it is a fear that persisted past that era and continues into the present day. *Alas, Babylon* (1959)⁶⁶ by Pat Frank represents the idea of nuclear fear from the 1940s and 1950s (which also extended into the 60s). This idea recurs in many novels written after that point, for example *The Hunger Games* (2008)⁶⁷ by Suzanne Collins and *The Road* (2006)⁶⁸ by Cormac McCarthy. These novels explore nuclear fear and survivalism. This chapter will delve into the idea that each novel's protagonist's drive to survive is a reflection of both the admirable and detestable qualities of the period of composition, suggesting that nuclear holocaust, post-apocalyptic fiction is distinctive in its ability to make commentary on real world strife using an unusual setting, such as a spaceship or a future dystopian dictatorship.

Survivalism, as a way of life and as a literary trope, goes hand in hand with sacrifice—how much would one sacrifice to survive? How is the extent of the sacrifice determined? If a sacrifice is involuntary, does it become less powerful or important than a voluntary one? Were people more receptive to sacrificing survival for another in the 50s/60s than they were in the early 00s? Each novel wonders, both overtly and covertly, if survival is worth sacrificing for another individual, and if the cost of sacrificing another individual is worth the price of survival. As Philip Lamy notes in

⁶⁶ Pat Frank, *Alas, Babylon* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1959).

⁶⁷ Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (New York: Scholastic, 2011).

⁶⁸ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

his book on Survivalism, the concept is ‘the physical survival of nuclear war (or some other major societal disaster) through crisis relocation, the stockpiling of food and weapons, and the practice of survival strategies.’⁶⁹ With this in mind, each novel’s protagonist, in some way, uses the survivalists’ drive to survive against all odds in order to continue within their worlds. It would be impossible and unbelievable for the characters to survive otherwise.

The foundation of Survivalism, the belief that there will come a time in which humanity will destroy itself and only the prepared will survive, was able to take root and thrive in a country bombarded with the constant threat of nuclear retaliation. Philip Lamy elaborates on this point:

Survivalists are people who are prepared (more or less) to survive the devastation wrought by changes—whether economic, societal, or nuclear disaster brought on by nature, humankind or God—by breaking away from society and becoming self-sufficient.⁷⁰

The three novels discussed in this chapter have characters that fit this description of survivalists. These characters were faced with different challenges stemming from nuclear explosions and warfare; however, they are all forced to break away from society, to some extent, or create their own societies in order to survive. Indeed, in his introduction to the post-apocalyptic short story anthology *Wastelands* (2008),⁷¹

⁶⁹ Philip Lamy, ‘Preface’ in *Millennium Rage: Survivalists, White Supremacists, and the Doomsday Prophecy* (Cambridge, M.A.: Da Capo Press, 1996), pp. v-viii (p.vi).

⁷⁰ Lamy, p. 69.

⁷¹ John Joseph Adams, *Wastelands*, (San Francisco: Night Shade Books, 2008).

John Joseph Adams credits the beginning and development the post-apocalyptic sci-fi movement to World War II and the Cold War:

Post-apocalyptic SF first rose to prominence in the aftermath of World War II— no doubt due in large part to the world having witnessed the devastating destructive power of the atomic bomb— and reached the height of its popularity during the Cold War, when the threat of worldwide nuclear annihilation seemed a very real possibility.⁷²

The sentiments behind the surge of the Survivalist movement and the not wholly sensationalised fear of “nuclear annihilation” certainly permeated other aspects of society, such as literature and publishing. Adams points out that novels like *Alas, Babylon* were published as “mainstream novels⁷³”, that is to say, novels not marketed to a particular set of people or genre. Decades later, McCarthy’s *The Road* was marketed in the same way. The fear of annihilation and subsequent survivalism knows no genre:

One of the problems with understanding speculative fiction primarily as future orientated, ‘dystopian’ speculations about what might occur somewhere down the line is that it can let us off the hook and evades contemporary political questions.⁷⁴

⁷² Adams, p. 2.

⁷³ Adams, p. 1.

⁷⁴ Andrew Tate, p .7.

The popularity of survivalism and post-apocalyptic fiction during the end of World War II and the Cold War shows that the reader cannot ignore the context during which the novels are written or evade “contemporary political questions”.

Although *Alas, Babylon's* Randy Bragg is the only protagonist who really prepares for the disaster that befalls his society—because of *Alas, Babylon's* background as a novel that is a direct speculation on a hypothetical nuclear war in America—nevertheless, each protagonist has the innate survivalist ideas in their nature. For instance, *The Hunger Games'* Katniss Everdeen routinely breaks from society's rules in order to survive, and her final act within the Hunger Games themselves, a proposed double suicide, is an act that spurs on more change in her world. And in *The Road*, though it would be easy for the man to resort to cannibalism and murder, he upholds a code of morality that would ordinarily have no place in this bleak, desolate, desperate world, but in the end is what potentially helps his son survive in this post-apocalyptic landscape.

The word ‘apocalypse’ can mean different things. As stated in the introduction, for the purposes of this thesis, post-apocalypse refers to the time period directly after a cataclysmic, world-destroying event. This does not necessarily mean the entire physical world was destroyed; it means the characters' worlds were either literally or metaphorically altered so drastically their lives could not continue as they were. According to Andrew Tate, modern use of the word apocalypse strays from the root meaning of the word:

Apocalypse is widely understood in the shared, popular imagination as a kind of class synonym for spectacular destruction, death on a vast scale and the collapse of all that a society might hold dear (families, cars, the comforts of home). Yet this misses the primary valence of the term – derived from the Greek term *apokalypsis* – that signifies revelation, the uncovering of what was previously hidden.⁷⁵

Considering Tate's idea of "uncovering of what was previously hidden", novels like *Oryx and Crake* become studies of humanity's reaction in the face of destruction and studies of what that destruction could possibly do to a person's psychological well being. Often, a character's world is destroyed in both ways. For example, in *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy's earth is being completely reshaped by the virus Crake releases and as that is happening, Oryx, whom Jimmy was in love with and who much of his life revolved around, was killed. His world was literally undergoing an apocalyptic event while at the same time his emotional world was destroyed with the death of Oryx.

The post-apocalypse is the rebuilding period, the period during which the remaining community decides how the new world will be run. It is what remains of life after the end. This period can do several things, including showing humanity's ability to learn from its mistakes, or its inability to grow and change, to better itself. In his essay, aptly titled "The End", Chad Harbach expounds on the concept of post-apocalyptic fiction being more concerned with sending a message about the author's present society than commenting on the apocalypse or the novel's new society:

It remains the method of most sci-fi novels to imagine a kind of heightened present, combining and extrapolating extant technologies (an MP3 player ... in

⁷⁵ Andrew Tate, *Apocalyptic Fiction (21st Century Genre Fiction)*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), pp. 12-13.

your brain!) to demonstrate their psychological and political effects. The post-catastrophe novel does the opposite; it takes away the MP3 player, and almost everything else. It liberates the violent potential of technology (and its enemy, nature) to create an altered world whose chief characteristic is a bewildering lack of technology. This in turn means a severely winnowed human population, and plenty of hardship and casual brutality. This future doesn't intensify the present moment, it contradicts it: What would happen if we didn't live in an overpopulated, technology-saturated world in which travel by foot is considered eccentric, tacos cost forty-nine cents, and the prerogative to commit violence—despite an amazing profusion of handheld weaponry—lies entirely with the state?⁷⁶

Harbach notes that post-apocalyptic fiction can answer, or ask the reader to consider, questions about their society and themselves. Can people change? Can people see the apocalyptic event as an opportunity to fix the mistakes of the past? Or is humanity doomed to repeat the past, whether or not it's forgotten? What Harbach does not clarify is why the “violence” and “brutality” that has come to be expected of post-apocalyptic fiction is necessary in forcing the reader to consider his or her world. But the answer is obvious; the fictional exaggeration enhances one's awareness of the reality.

The Road, however, does not rely on that otherness to tell the story beyond setting up the hopelessness of the characters' situation; '[t]hey sat at the window and ate in their robes by candlelight a midnight supper and watched distant cities burn.'⁷⁷ The reader is only slightly aware that the story is taking place much later, in the future of a society much like our own, but after a cataclysmic event from the brief flashbacks

⁷⁶ Chad Harbach, “The End”, *n+1*, issue 6: Mainstream (Winter 2008)
<<https://nplusonemag.com/issue-6/reviews/the-end-the-end-the-end/>>.

⁷⁷ McCarthy, p. 61.

and the assumed age of the boy (about nine or ten years old) who was born when the event was just starting.

Alas, Babylon does not use the future; it uses the author's present. In *Babylon*, Frank takes a fear common for the time period, of Russian retaliation with weapons already proven to cause mass destruction in World War II, and plays out that situation with a drastically different outcome, showing how quickly and easily the world could have fallen apart.

In 1939, in a letter addressed to then President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Albert Einstein warned that, with the advent of the newly discovered possibilities of nuclear technology, the creation of nuclear bombs could prove disastrous:

This new phenomenon would also lead to the construction of bombs, and it is conceivable—though much less certain—that extremely powerful bombs of a new type may thus be constructed. A single bomb of this type, carried by boat or exploded in a port, might very well destroy the whole port together with some of the surrounding territory.⁷⁸

It seemed that Einstein's warnings and predictions were slowly coming true, especially upon the founding of the Manhattan Project in 1941. In her book on the Manhattan Project and its legacy, Cynthia Kelly details how large the Project was and how influential it was not just in America, but also in world politics:

⁷⁸ Albert Einstein, '1939: August 2 Albert Einstein to Franklin Roosevelt' in *Letters of the Century: America 1900 – 1999*, ed. by Lisa Grunwald and Stephen J. Adler (New York: Dial, 1999), pp. 252 – 253 (p. 253).

The Manhattan Project, the top-secret effort in World War II to make atomic bombs, was one of the most significant undertakings in American and world history. Yet this history has been “largely invisible” to the American public. Few American know about the mammoth, \$2.2 billion construction project that created the equivalent of the automobile industry and employed 125,000 people who lived in “Secret Cities.”

The Manhattan Project indelibly shaped American and world history. As the first nation to possess nuclear weapons, the United States became a military Super Power.⁷⁹

Once the nuclear bomb was created, it was only a matter of time before the United States used their military Super Power status and used said bomb for more than scientific advancement. On 16 July 1945, the United States created the world’s first nuclear explosion at a facility in New Mexico⁸⁰. Under a month later, the same type of bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan. It was not just the sheer power that was produced in an atomic explosion that concerned people; it was the after effects—mutations, birth defects, and cancer—that were also concerning. Between 90,000 and 146,000 people died, and not all of the fatalities were a direct consequence of the bomb, a large number were due to radiation exposure.⁸¹ This was a new weapon, a weapon that could kill with city-levelling finality and with slow, painful poisoning. During the early stages of World War II, the Survivalist movement began gaining

⁷⁹ Cynthia C. Kelly, ‘Preserving America: A Strategy for the Manhattan Project’ in *Remembering the Manhattan Project: Perspectives on the Making of the Atomic Bomb and Its Legacy* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2004), pp. 142 – 148 (p. 142).

⁸⁰ Pravin P. Parekh, Thomas M. Semkow, Miguel A. Torres, Douglas K. Haines, Joseph M. Cooper, Peter M. Rosenberg, and Michael E. Kitto, ‘Radioactivity in Trinitite Six Decades Later’ in *Journal of Environmental Radioactivity*, 85.1 (2006), pp. 103-20 (p. 104).

⁸¹ B. Cameron Reed, ‘Nuclear Weapons at 70: Reflections on the Context and Legacy of the Manhattan Project’ in *Physica Scripta*, 90.8 (2015), pp. 1-20.

traction: '[t]he terrible destruction wrought by that war, reflected in the rise of fascism, the Holocaust, and the creation and use of atomic weapons, brought a new seriousness to apocalyptic thought.'⁸² It is unsurprising that a conflict as damaging as a war, especially a world war, would bring out the survival instinct within the human population to such an extent.

On the other hand, the Cold War was more of a war of escalating tensions and nuclear threats than an actual weapons-based, military-backed, battle for power. According to Nicholas Cull's survey of Cold War propaganda in the United States, it was difficult for the public to process what had happened and was happening at the time:

In new popular usage the word propaganda now stood in relation to information as murder to killing. As the United States struggled to come to terms with the process that had involved it in the war, many blamed propaganda and particularly British atrocity propaganda. Memoirs of wartime propagandists and histories alike heightened the fear of propaganda and strengthened America's determination never to be bamboozled into war again. Meanwhile, the commercial power of communications became even more palpable. Advertising came of age, feeding the boom economy of the 1920s, and public relations became an industry in its own right.⁸³

Almost immediately following World War II, the Cold War was a study in which countries were able to come to a peaceful accord and why, and which countries had the resources and desire to change international politics in their favour. The United States and the Soviet Union were the two main opposing sides of this standoff.

⁸² Lamy, p. 69.

⁸³ Nicholas John Cull, 'Prologue: The Foundations of U.S. Information Overseas' in *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) p. 9.

It wasn't until 1947 that the Cold War became 'official', and tensions came to a head during the years 1948 to 1953, declining only slightly with the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953⁸⁴. When the Soviets installed nuclear missiles in Cuba, the Cold War threatened to become an actual war until both sides were forced to realize what a nuclear attack would do to either country, and signed the Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty of 1963 instead. Though this ban stopped the testing of nuclear weapons in aboveground test sites, which slightly slowed the production of such weapons, the Soviets were angered by what they saw as American attempts to out-manoeuvre them and were determined to retaliate⁸⁵. The residual effects of the Cold War could still be felt in the early 1990s, when the intended audience for the *Hunger Games* was born, a generation only partially aware of a time without actual, or the threat of, war. According to Jacques Derrida in "No Apocalypse, Not Now", it is important to understand the idea that nuclear war was, and still is, a fiction:

Unlike the other wars, which have all been preceded by wars of more or less the same type in human memory (and gunpowder did not mark a radical break in this respect), nuclear war has no precedent. It has never occurred, itself; it is a non-event. The explosion of American bombs in 1945 ended a "classical," conventional war; it did not set off a nuclear war.⁸⁶

Derrida's point is that the nuclear holocaust itself is speculative fiction. Derrida's idea about the fictionalisation of nuclear war is particularly present in contemporary novels such as *The Hunger Games*. The intended audience for *The Hunger Games* only

⁸⁴ Britannica, 'Cold War'.

⁸⁵ Britannica, 'Cold War'.

⁸⁶ Jacques Derrida, Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis, 'No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)' in *Diacritics*, 14.2 (1984), pp. 20-31.

has the fiction to base their fear and apprehension on; they have not experienced the same nuclear foreboding that the intended audience for *Alas, Babylon* experienced. They have lived with a different war in their lifetimes. The hypothetical nuclear war is no more real for older generations. However, just because the war itself was not real, they were still a generation that had to live with air raid drills and Hiroshima⁸⁷. Derrida says that the realization that nuclear war never happened, that it is fiction, is jarring. This is because the fear and paranoia were real for the people living at that time; however, one has to distinguish the fiction from the reality in order to get to the heart of the literary discourse within nuclear holocaust fiction:

You will perhaps find it shocking to find the nuclear issue reduced to a fable. But then I haven't said simply that. I have recalled that a nuclear war is for the time being a fable, that is, something one can only talk about. But who can fail to recognize the massive "reality" of nuclear weaponry and of the terrifying forces of destruction that are being stockpiled and capitalized everywhere, that are coming to constitute the very movement of capitalization. One has to distinguish between this "reality" of the nuclear age and the fiction of war. But, and this would perhaps be the imperative of a nuclear criticism, one must also be careful to interpret critically this critical or diacritical distinction. For the "reality" of the nuclear age and the fable of nuclear war are perhaps distinct, but they are not two separate things.⁸⁸

What makes these particular nuclear holocaust novels successful is that while they do take place after a fictional bomb was dropped and fictional wars take place, they do not sensationalise the nuclear age. Derrida goes on to state that the significance of the nuclear holocaust is in its hypothetical nature:

⁸⁷ Britannica, 'Cold War'.

⁸⁸ Derrida, pp. 23.

Unlike the other wars, which have all been preceded by wars of more or less the same type in human memory (and gunpowder did not mark a radical break in this respect), nuclear war has no precedent. It has never occurred, itself; it is a non-event. The explosion of American bombs in 1945 ended a "classical," conventional war; it did not set off a nuclear war. The terrifying reality of the nuclear conflict can only be the signified referent, never the real referent (present or past) of a discourse or a text.⁸⁹

Derrida is saying here that what makes nuclear conflict terrifying is the fact that we, humanity, made it up. The horrors of nuclear war, the aftermath, and the rebuilding are all the products of imaginations and fuelled by fear. Pat Frank was confronted with a Survivalist, nuclear holocaust-fearing reality when he wrote *Alas, Babylon*. His was a reality tainted with the constant fear of another bomb drop, a swift death with nothing more than an air raid siren for a warning. In the preface to the novel, he states that this was the reason for his writing *Alas, Babylon*:

To someone who has never felt a bomb, bomb is only a word. An H-bomb's fireball is something you see on television. It is not something that incinerates you to a cinder in the thousandth part of a second. So the H-bomb is beyond the imagination of all but a few Americans [...] ⁹⁰

The same is true today; a nuclear attack is a vague notion, a distant memory or a half-hearted threat from a foreign enemy. It is not close enough to home to have the same effect for citizens of a certain generation.

Although post-apocalyptic fictions have existed for centuries, the ones centred on a nuclear holocaust are obviously more recent in terms of modern history, though

⁸⁹ Derrida, p. 5.

⁹⁰ Frank, p. xv

not as recent as the advent of nuclear warfare itself. In his book, *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction*, Paul Brians elaborates on that notion:

Novelists did not wait until August 6, 1945 to begin writing accounts of atomic warfare. The public imagination had been inflamed with all manner of wild fancies in reaction to the discoveries of X-rays by Roentgen in 1895, of radioactivity in uranium by Becquerel in 1896, of radium and polonium by the Curies in 1898, and of the possibility of converting matter into energy according to Einstein's relativity theory of 1905. Popular fiction was not slow to adapt the new knowledge to military uses.⁹¹

Brians goes on to state that he believes the first novel on the potential world-destroying power of atoms, and the people who misuse them, was Robert Cromie's *The Crack of Doom*, published in 1895.⁹² This was of course before the discovery of radioactivity by Henri Becquerel in 1896 and the subsequent discoveries of polonium and radium by the Curies. The novels starting from this period and working up to World War II had differing degrees of atomic influence. According to Brians, George Griffith's war novel from 1906, *The Lord of Labour*, had the British and the Germans fighting a war in which the British win with 'helium-radium bullets of stupendous explosive power.'⁹³ In Edgar Mayhew Bacon's 'Itself', published in 1907, radioactivity heals rather than kills. Upton Sinclair's 1924 novel, *The Millennium: A Comedy of the Year 2000*, goes back to the ideas of atomic energy destroying humanity, when a mad professor smashes a jar full of a new atomic element. And in 1912, Edgar

⁹¹ Paul Brians, *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction 1895-1984*, (Kent State University Press, 1987), para 12.

⁹² Brians, para. 13

⁹³ Brians, para. 13

Rice Burroughs wrote about radium bullets in *A Princess of Mars*, the first novel in his series detailing the Martian adventures of the protagonist, John Carter, from Earth⁹⁴.

The variability of the themes in the novels and stories show that, because this science was so new, there were thought to be many possibilities for humanity. At least a few of them deal with the human inclination toward war and using new power to restart the world or wipe out enemies. It is interesting to note that Bacon's idea of radiation to heal rather than to destroy was one of the only stories of its kind.

According to Andrew Tate, much of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction represents a type of guilt for how humanity is treating the planet:

We are, the subtext is clear, making a horrible mess of things and nostalgia for the present is relatively rare. The apocalyptic tradition is sometimes highly misanthropic; the earth, it suggests, would be in better condition if Homo sapiens were no longer around.⁹⁵

This guilt makes the novels of this subgenre more intriguing, as they are novels about the survival of the characters' family (families) while forsaking all others the characters encounter. These novels are less concerned about humanity's treatment of the planet than the survival of a select, though important, few. This is a significant distinction, as will be shown later in the thesis, because pandemic novels are almost the opposite of this, choosing instead to highlight the plight of one character, the last man, as he struggles to live in a world without his family or community.

⁹⁴ Brians, para. 13

⁹⁵ Tate, p. 134.

Although *Alas, Babylon* deals with the time directly before the uneasy cease fire, nuclear-based anxiety was still highly prevalent in the United States, especially in areas that were thought to be close to likely missile targets. Florida, with its proximity to Cuba and with an abundance of military bases around metropolitan areas, was considered one of these targets.⁹⁶ The Cuban missile crisis was looming in the late 1950s. As quoted earlier, Frank believed that the concept of an H-bomb was out of reach for most Americans and that thought created a disconnect between people who were rightfully worried about the war, and people who were flippant and ignorant of the repercussions. He notes that, ‘the British have lived under the shadow of nuclear-armed rockets longer than we. Also, they have a vivid memory of cities devastated from the skies.’⁹⁷ *Alas, Babylon* shows what could have happened if, instead of the events leading to 1963’s treaty, everyone’s greatest fear at the time became a reality.

The novel follows protagonist Randy Bragg, a member of one the founding families of the town of Fort Repose, near Orlando, Florida. The town itself is set up as an ideal—a prospering farm, a lively river, and active inhabitants—but also decent driving distance to important military bases around Florida, which is a concern during wartime:

We’ve got the Jax Naval Air complex to the north of us, and Homestead and Miami to the south, and Eglin to the northwest, and MacDill and Tampa to the

⁹⁶ Sarah Chace, ‘The Cuban Missile Crisis: Leadership as Disturbance, Informed by History’ in *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 9.2 (2015), pp. 63-68.

⁹⁷ Frank, p. xv.

southwest, and the Missile Test Center [sic] on Canaveral to the east, and McCoy and Orlando right at the front door, only forty miles off.⁹⁸

Randy, a former member of the Army Reserves, is well aware of the costs of war, especially with his brother Mark in the Air Force. Not only is Randy living with the anxiety of a nuclear attack, he's living with the anxiety that any telegram that comes for him could be a warning of his brother's death. Randy is the embodiment of the few Americans Frank says would understand the gravity of an attack as an actual problem rather than a vague wariness of distant Sputniks. According to David Seed: '[t]he novel was written with the clear purpose of bringing home to an American readership the probable nature of nuclear war.'⁹⁹

Randy's failed attempt at becoming a government official is a foreshadowing of things to come. The election, which he describes as disastrous only after he was unable to answer a key question centred on racial tensions in the south, showed the community's distrust of a leader desiring of change:

He believed [racial] integration should start in Florida, but it must begin in the nursery schools and kindergartens and that would take a generation. This was all difficult to explain, but he did voice his final conviction.¹⁰⁰

Randy's belief that change can only come from a fresh start will be vital when the bombs do drop and Fort Repose is cut off from the rest of civilization except for a few tenuous links. And Randy having to work to get the respect of the people who did not

⁹⁸ Frank, p. 17.

⁹⁹ David Seed, *Under the Shadow: The Atomic Bomb and Cold War Narratives*, (Kent: The Kent State University Press, 2012).

¹⁰⁰ Frank, p. 9.

vote for him is also important, as he finds himself as the leader of a post-apocalyptic period reminiscent of the starting days of Fort Repose's existence. He is the most prepared and capable person in the town, and therefore a natural choice for leader.

The contrast between people who have too much faith in the current society's ability to function under all situations and those with the ability to adapt is a strong one throughout most of *Babylon*. From the very beginning, the people in the town who Randy interacts with are in denial about the beginnings of war; anyone with a healthy sense of fear has the potential to survive the entire novel. For example, Florence Wechek is concerned about the Russians and their Sputniks:

Florence gathered her pink flannel robe closer to her neck. She glanced up, apprehensively through the kitchen window. All she saw were hibiscus leaves dripping in the pre-dawn ground fog, and blank gray sky beyond. They had no right to put those Sputniks up there to spy on people.¹⁰¹

It is this healthy dose of fear and cynicism, along with Randy's loyalty to her, that allows Florence to survive the post-apocalyptic struggle with Randy's help. In this instance, Florence becomes what Derrida demonstrates in his essay; she is looking for, anticipating, and fearing a fiction. She does not know if there are satellites spying on her and yet the hypothetical spies are just as concerning as they would be were they real.

On the other hand, there were people like Edgar Quisenberry, a man who valued money so much that the thought of a world without money drove him to suicide: '[w]ell, let them try to go on without dollars. He would not accept such a

¹⁰¹ Frank, p. 3

world.’¹⁰² Early on in the novel, when Randy is attempting to cash a cheque before the bombs drop, Edgar scoffs and preens, showing off his power that, most assuredly, will mean nothing in the coming pages. Frank is showing that too much confidence in the current system's survival, in spite of the circumstances, results in an inability to cope with the destruction of that system, a flaw that proves fatal to some characters. The doctor, perhaps the most stressed character in the entire novel, comments on this acutely: ‘[s]ome nations and some people melt in the heat of crisis and come apart like fat in the pan. Others meet the challenge and harden.’¹⁰³ Randy Bragg’s community could not have survived without the crops and the water they shared with the black family who lived next door. It is impossible to survive if prejudices exist in such dire situations.

Certainly, in a novel about a community in post-apocalyptic Florida, the struggle for survival is a key point. Who survives, why they survive, and how well they survive all come into question. Randy, as a protagonist and eventually the leader, becomes almost godlike in that all the people who survive and survive well have some sort of connection to him and his family. He picks and chooses who to tell about Mark’s warning, thus giving some people time to prepare, to think of the potential destruction, to even aid in the community’s survival. He tells his girlfriend, Elizabeth (Lib) McGovern and her parents, but does not tell Edgar Quisenberry. He tells his neighbours the Henrys, ‘[t]hey were black and they were poor but in many ways closer to him than any family in Fort Repose;’¹⁰⁴ Dan Gunn, ‘[g]oing upstairs Randy

¹⁰² Frank, p. 122.

¹⁰³ Frank, p. 133.

¹⁰⁴ Frank, p. 47.

decided that Dan, too, should know of Mark's warning. If anybody ought to know, it was a doctor;¹⁰⁵ Alice Cooksey, and Florence, 'Alice was one of his favorite [sic] people. He really ought to tell Alice about Mark, and what Mark predicted. Ought to tell Florence as well.'¹⁰⁶ Randy does not, however, tell Bill Cullen when he is buying meat or Pete Hernandez at the grocery store. Perhaps subconsciously, Randy is withholding information in order to further ensure the potential survival of those he truly cares about, he is hand picking the community he needs to survive. The use of free indirect speech in an almost stream of consciousness narrative style here serves to enhance how uncertain everything in this world is. Randy knows that every decision he makes impacts not just his survival, but the community's as well. Nothing he does can be done in the spur the moment, and what is good for one person may not be good for a group.

Significantly, Randy has already gone to war, and uses his past wartime coping mechanisms to deal with his current post-apocalyptic situation. He is often jarred back into memories of his time in Korea depending on the situation: 'smelling the odors [sic] of the Riverside Inn, Randy recalled the sickly, pungent stench of the honey carts with their loads of human manure for the fields of Korea.'¹⁰⁷ However, despite his actual time in a real war, he does not display the typical behaviour of many Survivalists at the time.

This is another example of Derrida's distinction between fiction and reality. Having experienced a real war shows Randy that it is perhaps not possible to plan for

¹⁰⁵ Frank. P. 55.

¹⁰⁶ Frank, p. 62.

¹⁰⁷ Frank, p. 160.

it or ensure your survival. Randy becomes a grounding character for the reader in that respect. While characters like Florence and Bill represent a plausible subsection of humanity, Randy becomes the character the reader wants to be. In fact, Randy frequently doubts his ability to survive in the situation, which is an understandable hesitation: 'Randy began to consider how little he really knew of the fundamentals of survival.'¹⁰⁸ He really only acts best when he is not thinking specifically about what he is doing: 'Randy had spoken instinctively. He found it difficult to put his objection into words.'¹⁰⁹ He is a man who would sacrifice almost anything for those he cares about, which includes taking up the mantle of lawmaker when the survival of his community was on the brink: '[w]ell, when the rules are off you make your own.'¹¹⁰ And he does this even though this role comes along with an inherent loneliness he will be unable to shake regardless of if he is with people or not.

Randy's little community on River Road ended up functioning and thriving much better than the communities that were in denial about the potential threat. It is a mentality that, as discussed earlier, is similar to the one prevalent during the time when Pat Frank wrote the novel. Nuclear war was difficult to fathom because there was no precedent for it. Claire P. Curtis believes that *Babylon* exists on the shaky line between appreciating politics and shunning it:

The tension between the perfect freedom of the state of nature and the license that can shift us into a state of war reveals a time period when the rational inhabitants of the state of nature are going to be thinking about the advantages of entering into civil society. *Alas, Babylon* walks a fine line on this question,

¹⁰⁸ Frank, p. 50.

¹⁰⁹ Frank, p. 95.

¹¹⁰ Frank, p. 267.

recognizing the importance of the idea of consent to political authority to confer legitimacy, but also using the vestiges or remnants of the federal government to externally authorize (sic) the political authority that emerges.¹¹¹

While the members of Randy's makeshift community appreciate his position as an authority figure and the "remnants of the federal government" that he represents, they still, by nature of being in a world changed by a nuclear bomb blast, have their own "civil society" they are creating and thriving within. Using different characters, Frank echoes the real world ignorance of the lasting damage a nuclear attack would cause. The idea that the effects of a nuclear missile would dissipate in a few years - '[i]t may be a year, even two. I can wait'¹¹²- or that it would not even happen at all - '[o]h, I'll admit it looks bad in the Mideast but that doesn't scare me. We might have a little brushfire with war, like Korea, sure. But no atomic war'¹¹³ - were very real beliefs that not only prevented mass panic, but also allowed people to distance themselves from the ongoing aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Although the novel details bleak events, in the end, however, *Babylon* promises hope. Curtis notes that *Babylon* is a novel that really displays the productivity humans are capable of:

On the one hand *Alas, Babylon* is out to celebrate the self sufficiency, industry and organization (sic) of the community surrounding Randy Bragg's home on the Timuacan River. Their life post war is a state of nature in the absence of external authority. But it also illustrates what work people are capable of doing when they are freed from meaningless rituals, customs and

¹¹¹ Curtis, p. 79.

¹¹² Frank, p. 202.

¹¹³ Frank, p. 75.

bureaucracy. As in many postapocalyptic (sic) accounts, there is a stress here on how much better off some of these characters are since the bombs fell.¹¹⁴

As Curtis says, though the characters are set back a couple of hundred years in many aspects of life, the people remaining in Fort Repose can begin the slow march toward progress, and they can do so as a community. They no longer have to fit in with a society not of their making.

While *Babylon* maintains a lightness in a dire situation, Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* paints a darker, stark, and savage contrast of both the landscape and of humanity. The road to survival is incredibly difficult and the only hope is the small possibility that things will be better either in death or at the nebulous southern location to which the man and boy are heading. It is a story not just of the process of survival, but why there is a need to survive. When the world has been reduced to ash and greyness, what is the point of going on? Who do you survive for? Can there be a happy community in the end with the promise of rebuilding into something better?

The Road begins *in medias res*, as opposed to *Babylon*, which showed the lead up to and aftermath of the apocalyptic event. McCarthy shows the reader, through his characters, that dwelling on a long gone society is not beneficial to the survival of an individual in the present. The world in *The Road* has been thriving for ten years, and the surviving humans have established the rules of this post-apocalyptic life: '[h]e pushed the cart and both he and the boy carried knapsacks. In the knapsacks were essential things. In case they had to abandon the cart and make a run for it.'¹¹⁵ This is

¹¹⁴ Curtis, p. 79.

¹¹⁵ McCarthy, p. 4.

not a story of a community banding together to survive, as in *Babylon*; here, trusting anyone could mean death for the man and subsequently his son. From the beginning of the novel, it is set up that the man needs the boy as much as the boy needs the man, perhaps even more so: '[w]hen he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night he'd reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him.'¹¹⁶ The man and boy have been travelling for the boy's entire life; at this point the reader has to assume that there is no destination. There is no safe place and the man knows this. However, the man also knows that if he admits to this truth, the boy will give up the desire to keep living. If the boy does not live, the man's purpose is gone. To put it in symbolic terms, the boy is hope and the future; if those die, there is no point to life.

The boy had not experienced the pre-apocalyptic world, having been born when society was already crumbling: '[s]ometimes the child would ask him questions about the world that for him was not even a memory. He thought hard how to answer. There is no past.'¹¹⁷ All the boy has to try to imagine a time when survival wasn't so desperate are his father's stories and his dreams of the south, '[t]he child had his own fantasies. How things would be in the south. Other children. He tried to keep a rein on this but his heart was not in it. Whose would be?'¹¹⁸ In this world where it is not unusual to just want to sit down and die, the boy's fantasies are almost as important to surviving as food and clean water are. No one, as far as the reader knows, has stepped in to try and rebuild a society to mimic the one that was lost. There are no obvious moral codes to follow aside from the ones the man instilled in the boy.

¹¹⁶ McCarthy, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ McCarthy, p. 55.

¹¹⁸ McCarthy, p. 55.

As *The Road* is a novel that follows the 9/11 terror attacks in New York City, it could do either of two things, in a critical sense. It could serve as a reaction text to the events; the bleak atmosphere and lack of morality in everyone who is not the man or the boy represent the feelings of hopelessness and lawlessness felt in the world after the attacks. Or it could become a warning to readers; if humans give into fear they are doomed to a metaphorical long, slow walk down a cold, grey road; '*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. As an open-ended warning McCarthy may leave more space for human agency to act against such an end.'¹¹⁹

In *The Spirit of Terrorism*, Baudrillard posits that because of the fact that survivalism and disaster literature have enjoyed such peaks of popularity, these novels cannot shock readers, as they are, to an extent, a self-fulfilling prophecy:

All that has been said and written is evidence of a gigantic abreaction to the event itself, and the fascination it exerts. The moral condemnation and the holy alliance against terrorism are on the same scale as the prodigious jubilation at seeing this global superpower destroyed—better, at seeing it, in a sense, destroying itself, committing suicide in a blaze of glory. For it is that superpower which, by its unbearable power, has fomented all this violence which is endemic throughout the world, and hence that (unwittingly) terroristic imagination which dwells in all of us.¹²⁰

According to Baudrillard, people have within them the capacity of imagining or even wishing for these acts of violence, so novels like *The Road* are not warnings, but are

¹¹⁹ Curtis, p. 37.

¹²⁰ Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (London: New Left Books, 2003).

manifestations; the morally dubious cannibals are not as farfetched or outrageous as we wish to believe.

Cooper elaborates that *The Road's* scenery corroborates Baudrillard's theory that people, specifically the west, revel in the "nightmare", '[e]ven more than the father's dream of the dark-seeking beast, *The Road* conjures up a nightmare world of fire and ash that illustrates Baudrillard's claim. After all, as the man's wife points out, their world is not just ruined; it is cinematically destroyed.¹²¹ What counter's Baudrillard's claim is that the reader only reads about the cinematic destruction from the characters; McCarthy himself does not put it in detail within the novel. McCarthy is not interested in the events leading up to the world in which the man and boy are living, he is interested in how the man and boy are surviving in the world as it is.¹²² This means that instead of describing the cinematic destruction, McCarthy describes the characters' reaction to the destruction.

Throughout the struggles of travelling, and the very small hope of relief in the south, the man is dying. It is one thing the boy knows for sure and does not question. He wonders what the man would do if he, the boy, died, but not what he would do if the reverse were true:

What would you do if I died?
If you died I would want to die too.
So you could be with me?
Yes. So I could be with you.¹²³

¹²¹ Cooper, p. 222.

¹²² Curtis, p. 37.

¹²³ McCarthy, p. 9.

What McCarthy does with sentence and paragraph structure here is interesting. The reader is not necessarily sure which character is saying which sentence. That makes the reader stop to consider if both variations of the exchange would be true, not just the straight forward surface interpretation that the man says he would want to die if the boy did. Would the boy want to die if the man died? The reader has to think about this conversation at the end when the man does, in fact, die and the boy is forced to decide if he should go on. Several times the boy wishes for death but does not, even in his darker moments, wish they were *both* dead.

This unwillingness to go on without the boy is not only because of the man's complete love for the boy, though. It has its roots in the man's failure to keep the woman safe, and his failure to convince her that he could keep all three of them alive. This fact haunts the man: '[h]e did not take care of her and she died alone somewhere in the dark and there is no other dream nor other waking world and there is no other tale to tell.'¹²⁴ Soon after the birth of the boy, the woman decides that she can no longer live in this bleak world, and decides to walk away from the tiny family. In her eyes, the horrors of reality leave no room to hope that things could get better. According to Thomas Carlson's essay "With the World at Heart: Reading Cormac McCarthy's 'The Road' with Augustine and Heidegger", in rejecting the man and the boy in connection to rejecting the post-apocalyptic wasteland, she is also rejecting everything the man and the boy represent, the future and a destroyed past:

The mother's hopelessness, the failure of her heart, or the turn of her heart toward that darkness and death in which sorrowing itself is swallowed up,

¹²⁴ McCarthy, p. 32.

relate fundamentally if negatively to the question of world and time and their founding conditions in the openness of a possibility, which means a futurity and its past, that simply no longer appears to her. In the absolute closure of such possibility, in the total presence of death, she suggests, there is not only no life to live or love but also - what amounts to the same - nothing more to say, no story still to tell.¹²⁵

The woman's refusal to go on expresses her belief that there is no future that she wants to be part of. She is giving in to the hopelessness.

The Road represents a belief briefly presented in *Babylon* – that it is necessary to keep your family alive during a crisis, even if that means forsaking others. The man and boy run from, are uneasy around, or refuse to help any other people they encounter on the road. To that effect, the boy sees himself and the man as the “good guys” and everyone else as the “bad guys”. This fact is shown in full relief when the man and boy encounter an old man and the boy decides to give the old man food: ‘You should thank him you know, the man said. I wouldnt [sic] have given you anything.’¹²⁶ The man is surviving for the boy and no one else; he has no reason to help anyone unless that help can translate to something good for the boy. However, the man lets the boy decide to give the old man food because he does not want the boy to become like him. The boy will have no family to live for once the man is gone, and the man does not want the boy to give up the moment he is alone. He wants the boy to see the world as something worth surviving for and not something to struggle through until death takes him away.

¹²⁵ Thomas A. Carlson, ‘With the World at Heart: Reading Cormac McCarthy's "The Road" with Augustine and Heidegger’ in *Religion & Literature*, 39.3 (2007), pp. 47-71.

¹²⁶ McCarthy, p. 184.

The family's story of survival comes to an end when the man succumbs to his unspecified disease, and the boy is left to fend for himself, to go on to the south or wherever he can live and find the "good guys": '[y]ou need to find the good guys but you cant take any chances. No chances. Do you hear?'¹²⁷ The boy does find people he has to trust, people with children, a family with whom to start again. However, whereas the boy has to find the good guys and live with them, Katniss in *The Hunger Games* has no real idea who the good guys are and chooses to remove herself entirely from the situation toward the end of the trilogy.

The Hunger Games trilogy is a mix of elements of both *Alas, Babylon* and *The Road*, taking the hopelessness and desperation of *The Road* and the fierce desire to protect the family from *Alas, Babylon*. Katniss Everdeen represents the man in *The Road*, cold and severe when she has to be, '[...]it isn't in my nature to go down without a fight, even when things seem insurmountable.'¹²⁸ She is also very much like the boy in *The Road*, hoping against hope that someday the pain will be over. She even shares food even when she knows it cannot possibly end well:

Needling me, at the very back of my mind, is the obvious. Both of us can't win these Games. But since the odds are still against either of us surviving, I manage to ignore the thought.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ McCarthy, p. 298.

¹²⁸ Collins, p. 36.

¹²⁹ Collins, p. 208.

While *The Road* and *The Hunger Games* have vastly different narration styles, they both use narration in similar ways. The use of the first person keeps the reader within Katniss' consciousness, seeing what she feels and thinks without the filter of a narrator. However, even though *The Road* technically has a narrator, its third person narrative has the same sort of effect as the first person narrative in *The Hunger Games*; the reader is fully immersed in the critical immediacy of all three characters' fight for survival.

Katniss is like Randy in *Alas, Babylon*, prepared when she's not thinking about it, frightened and unsure when she is. Like the man and Randy, she is completely driven by protecting and keeping alive those close to her.

The Hunger Games novels were not published in a vacuum; there were several post-apocalyptic and dystopian YA series in print before and after the trilogy debuted. *The Hunger Games*, however, more than any other dystopian series published at the time, seemed to benefit from how powerfully the story reflected the turmoil of the time and resonated with readers. In his analysis of the trilogy, Tom Henthorne states that the mood of the world, specifically of America, at the time the novels were published helped its reception:

The *Hunger Games* trilogy, of course, is a product of its era, just like every other cultural artifact (sic). The appearance of the first volume of Collins's series coincided almost exactly with the beginning of the world economic crisis that began in late 2008. Although critics could hardly argue that *The Hunger Games* represents a reaction to the crisis—the volume having been completed before the crash—the mood of the time shaped its reception; the book's biting irony matched the mood of the times as a population, which was already weary of

the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and suspicious of its political leaders, faced a very real prospect of economic ruin.¹³⁰

The popularity of the novels, at first, was partly due to lucky timing in publication. But its successive popularity was a result of the fact that the events that coincided with its publication did not get resolved quickly, if at all, years and years later. People continued to be suspicious of their political leaders, continued to face the real prospect of economic ruin, continued to be weary of ongoing wars in the Middle East. However, it must be noted that though *The Hunger Games* presents a form of social commentary for the time when it was written, it is still an exaggeration of the reality made greater by the dystopian setting. Katniss' dystopia has very real potential in the modern world.

The Hunger Games tells the story of 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen's struggle to survive with her family in the country of Panem, where children are, on the surface of it, killed for the entertainment of a nation. At the heart of the games is a terrible reminder of not only what war can do, but also what governments can do:

Taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch — this is the Capitol's way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion. Whatever words they use, the real message is clear. 'Look how we take your children and sacrifice them and there's nothing you can do. If you lift a finger, we will destroy every last one of you. Just as we did in District Thirteen.'¹³¹

¹³⁰ Tom Henthorne, *Approaching the Hunger Games Trilogy: A Literary and Cultural Analysis* (North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2012), p. 2.

¹³¹ Collins, p. 22.

These games are the remnants of a war for independence that ended with a whole district, District 13, supposedly being wiped out of existence. On top of the ingrained yearly reminder of the Hunger Games themselves, the people occasionally see footage of the burned out ruins of District 13, footage they believe is current. It is not until the Capitol Government, led by President Snow, begin to lose its hold on the people of Panem. The talk of rebellion strengthens when it comes to light that this footage is not current, and District 13 becomes a symbol of hope and a destination for dissenters. In the second novel of *The Hunger Games* trilogy, *Catching Fire* (2009)¹³², the idea of rebellion and another drastic change is what drives characters on: '[o]f course the idea of an independent, thriving District 13 draws her. I can't bring myself to tell her she's chasing a dream as insubstantial as a wisp of smoke.'¹³³ Before the whispers of overthrowing the government begin, though, Katniss is still a girl whose only desire is to be the one out of twenty-four other teenagers who comes out of the Games alive.

Unlike with *The Road* and *Alas, Babylon*, Katniss's survival in the games is dependant on several factors out of her control, in addition to her willingness and ability to kill other people. One of the main factors, aside from the gamemakers' reluctance to kill her, is if she has sponsors watching the games, willing to spend money to ensure she lives until the last cannon sounds. Not only does she have to be able to keep herself alive with basic survival tactics, she has to hope that the viewing public stays on her side. This is one of the main differences between her situation and

¹³² Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, (New York: Scholastic, 2009).

¹³³ Collins, *Catching Fire*, p. 178.

Randy's and the man's. However, it is similar in theory to the boy's; if the man had decided that he did not want to continue on with the boy, he could have easily put them both out of their misery. The boy relied on the man not just for the basic human needs, but also for motivation to keep on. Katniss relies, however reluctantly, on the Capitol for part of her survival, while feeling responsible for the survival of her friends and family. This is key because Katniss eventually rebels against the Capitol and her attachment to her friends and family is continuously used against her.

One of the main struggles Katniss has in this series is dealing with other people dying for her sake. She finds owing anyone anything intolerable, and death is the ultimate sacrifice that she would be hard pressed to pay back: 'I feel like I owe him something, and I hate owing people.'¹³⁴ Often, this struggle clashes with her immediate desire to do everything she can to ensure that the people close to her survive. She volunteers for the Games specifically to save her sister from having to participate, promising her sister then that she will win in order to come back and continue her job as provider.

Katniss's survival instinct becomes skewed—she's not surviving simply because she wants to keep on living or fears death, she's doing it because of a self-assigned obligation to her family. She says as much several times, mostly when she makes what she perceives as a misstep throughout the training period before the games:

Oh, what does it matter? It's not like I was going to win the Games anyway. Who cares what they do to me? What really scares me is what they might do

¹³⁴ Collins 1, p. 32.

to my mother and Prim, how my family might suffer now because of my impulsiveness. Will they take their few belongings, or send my mother to prison and Prim to the community home, or kill them? They wouldn't kill them, would they? Why not? What do they care?¹³⁵

This becomes the breaking point for Katniss when she realizes, in the end, that she really was incapable of guaranteeing their survival in the first place because of how little she thought about others' reactions to her actions. It is a reminder to the reader that, despite everything, Katniss is still a child. Though she is a child of a post-apocalyptic dystopian nightmare, she is still a child in need of protection to some extent. *Games* represents a nightmare of the future, not of the present.

Karl Hand, however, in his essay on *The Hunger Games* and the Bible's gospel of Luke, states that reading *Games* as a futuristic dystopian novel is inaccurate. To him, the current world we live in is the dystopia and our horror upon reading the terrible events in the novel is disingenuous:

The Hunger Games as a horrible future possibility implies a blushing reader who cannot fathom such injustices today. But we know that young people are caught up in terror, war, genocide, slavery, and oppression, and we take some comfort in the fact that, unlike the citizens of Panem, we are not 'entertained' by it. Reading *The Hunger Games* as dystopia allows us this comfort. While I do not deny the genuine horror that people experience at images of children caught in violent conflict, or that the media are cautious in showing images of child fatalities, I do question whether such reactions of horror are completely honest.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Collins 1, p. 103.

¹³⁶ Karl Hand, 'Come Now, Let us Treason Together: Conversion and Revolutionary Consciousness in Luke 22:35-38 and The Hunger Games Trilogy'. *Literature and Theology*, 2015; 29 (3): 348-365.

Hand's theory is further proven by the fact that *Games*, according to Collins, was directly inspired by current events, especially the American war in Iraq and Afghanistan¹³⁷. Again, in using an event as politically and culturally significant as a war for inspiration, Collins broadened her audience and gave her novels perspective.

Collins, McCarthy, and Frank each demonstrate their vision of how humanity will react to the end of the world, based on the current trajectory of human behaviour. *The Hunger Games* novels are a commentary on society, the blurred division between war and reality television spurred the creation of the series:

It was contemplating this relationship while channel-hopping between a reality show ('Young people competing for a million dollars or a bachelor or whatever') and reports of fighting in Iraq ('The lines between these stories started to fuse in a very unsettling way') that sowed the seed of *The Hunger Games*. Collins remembers connecting TV news reports from Vietnam with her father's absence as a child.

She believes that today's media-friendly youth is overexposed to contrived reality on television, leading to a detachment from images of others' real pain and terror. 'Too much of people's lives are put on television and we're desensitised to actual tragedy unfolding before us.'¹³⁸

Although the novels had the present as inspiration, the past is used as a reason for punishment; District 13 was destroyed by the Capitol because of its resistance to the established order, yet doing so only fanned the flames of rebellion rather than extinguishing them. The people of Panem are constantly reminded to be remorseful

¹³⁷ Susan Dominus, "Suzanne Collins's War Stories for Kids." *The New York Times*, 09 Apr. 2011. Web. 25 July 2017.

¹³⁸ Geraldine Brennan, 'Suzanne Collins: The Queen of Teen Fiction for Tomboys' in *The Observer*. The Guardian Online, 18 Mar. 2012, <<http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2012/mar/18/suzanne-collins-the-hunger-games-profile>> [accessed 6 November 2012].

of a past most of them had no part of, and learn to resent the rebels who caused problems.

In the third and final novel, *Mockingjay* (2010)¹³⁹, Katniss, previous winners of the games, and the new rebel-led leadership must decide either to perpetuate this cycle of punishment in the form of one last Hunger Games, or abolish the Games entirely: “No,” says Beetee. “It would set a bad precedent. We have to stop viewing one another as enemies. At this point, unity is essential for our survival. No.”¹⁴⁰ The decision is a difficult one for Katniss. By this point, her sister, the one person who kept her grounded and gave her a reason to go on, is dead—killed by the people Katniss was trying to protect her from. So Katniss has to decide if she wants to allow other peoples’ sisters to suffer, other families to be torn apart as vindication for the destruction of her own, and, in turn, the destruction of her identity.

When Katniss feels broken, she thinks vengeance is what she should want, but finds it difficult to even feel that desire. She just wants everything to end, whether it be her life or the world, she no longer cares: “[...] it benefits no one to live in a world where these things happen.”¹⁴¹ This feeling of despondence often appears in post-apocalyptic fiction; nevertheless it is up to the author to ensure that the feeling does not hinder the character’s ability to act or the reader’s ability to empathize. If the character sees nothing worth living for, why would the reader want her to keep living? Hopelessness cannot drive a narrative that is based on the idea that humanity can survive even in dire situations.

¹³⁹ Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay*, (New York: Scholastic, 2010).

¹⁴⁰ Collins, *Mockingjay*, p. 432.

¹⁴¹ Collins, p. 270.

The Hunger Games, *The Road*, and *Alas, Babylon* represent nuclear holocaust survivalism in three different ways and present three different variants of a central theme—that you keep your family alive at all costs. Family, in the twentieth century, is significant because it is the representation of a group of people who are vital to the survival of a specific ideal. That ideal is contrary to that of the outsiders attempting to destroy the community. In Randy’s case, his survival coexisted with the survival of his clan. There was no question that he would do whatever it took to keep himself, and those he felt responsible for, alive. In fact, the community’s survival depended on his own. This is different in *The Road* with the man and boy in that the man cares only for the boy’s survival, knowing that his own time is limited. The boy only depended on the man as long as the man was alive; the reader least hopes that the boy will live on, ‘You need to go on, he said. I cant go with you. You need to keep going. You dont know what might be down the road. We were always lucky. You’ll be lucky again.’¹⁴² Tate connects the apocalypse and the desire not to repeat past mistakes to the figure of the boy in *The Road*:

McCarthy’s *The Road* is divided between the voice of weary experience (the man) and open innocence (his son); the latter is faced with the responsibility of ‘carrying the fire’, a metaphor for their tentative (and questionable) preservation of hope and virtue, when the father dies and he continues their journey with another wandering family. The figure of the child fits the messianic logic that is a displaced legacy of Judeo-Christian apocalypse: s/ he might be a herald of new possibilities, an alternative to the failed, decaying old order. Children and young adult characters in both fable and contemporary

¹⁴² McCarthy, p. 297.

fiction are frequently burdened with a responsibility of overturning the world created by previous generations and, in particular, of putting right their parents' horrible mistakes.¹⁴³

Both Katniss and the boy are “burdened” the responsibility to fix past mistakes and putting right all the problems created by the previous adult generations. Because Katniss is a child-like figure in some aspects of the trilogy but an adult in others, she displays many characteristics of both the adult and the child personas that Tate details. She has the boy's hope in a seemingly hopeless situation, and the ruthlessness of the man she had displayed during the games, during the rebellion, becomes the cautious hope of the boy.

Katniss' original focus was to win the games to get back to her family. In the process of this, she allows herself to be used by the rebellion in order to keep the family safe. When she was finally able to survive simply for herself she became like the boy—searching for a reason to make living worthwhile. She also represents Randy's entire community's desire not to continue the mistakes of the past. They used the apocalypse to start anew just as Katniss eventually uses the destruction of the Capitol and that toxic society to begin her life anew. Katniss did not want to lead, much like Randy did not want to lead, '[c]ommand, whether of a platoon or a town, was a lonely state.'¹⁴⁴ They both felt a sense of loneliness in the isolation caused by being the face of a new society. Both wondered, at times, why it was necessary to be the leader, be the one people turned to in desperation, especially Katniss: 'I may have

¹⁴³ Tate, p. 128.

¹⁴⁴ Frank, p. 217.

been a catalyst for rebellion, but a leader should be someone with conviction, and I'm barely a convert myself.'¹⁴⁵

Whereas the Cold War had clear lines of animosity drawn between two sides and a general hesitation between those sides to unleash nuclear bombs with the potential to cause catastrophic damage to the world, not just the intended targets, the War on Terror spawned from 9/11 was presented differently. There weren't just two distinct countries battling it out and forcing other countries to take sides, this was a rally against hatred, against a way of life. According to David Holloway's study on what 9/11 did to create the War on Terror, the rallying point for supporters of the war was the fact that the 9/11 was an attack on the American identity rather than American foreign policy:

Nevertheless, the idea of a 'clash of civilisations' was popular after 9/11, partly because it made for a reassuring abstraction of contemporary events and partly because it implied that 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were the working through of broadly predetermined outcomes. The suggestion that suicide bombers attacked the World Trade Center [sic] because of 'who we are', rather than because of the policy-making of US political administration since the 1950s, made it easier for citizens to live with the realities of war, not least because it dovetailed so neatly with official explanations of events coming from the White House and Downing Street.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Collins, *Catching Fire*, p. 150).

¹⁴⁶ David Holloway, *9/11 and the War on Terror*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 10.

It was again an instance in which ignorance of both consequences and facts brought about complacency, such was the case with the destruction of District 13 and the creation of the Hunger Games. It was easier for Americans to disregard the costs of war when they were unaware of them. Just like the Cold War, this was a war of propaganda, of carefully chosen words and phrases. Holloway elaborates on this point:

From the very beginning, '9/11' and the 'war on terror' were so appropriated by storytelling and mythmaking that the events themselves became more or less indivisible from their representations, or simulations, in political rhetoric, mass media spectacle and the panoply of other representational forms that made the events feel pervasive at the time – films, novels, photographs, paintings, TV drama, specialist academic debates and other forms of public culture and war of terror kitsch.¹⁴⁷

The common citizen did not know what the war on terror actually meant to them and their everyday lives, and that made the situation terrifying and complicated from a civilian standpoint.

On top of the tangible war, the boom of technology was both exciting and worthy of concern; while computers and electronics were making life easier, they were also presenting new battlefields for wars formerly considered to be science fictional. The change in the dynamics of war made it difficult to find an enemy to fear. There was no specific country to look at on a map and know that was the enemy; cyber terrorism could come from anywhere. Plane-bombing terrorists could be anyone. There were many people who feared and hated the wrong thing, '[...]by

¹⁴⁷ Holloway, p. 5.

August [2003], a *Washington Post* poll found that an incredible 69 per cent of Americans believed that Saddam Hussein probably played some part in the attacks.¹⁴⁸ Collins and McCarthy were alive during this propaganda war just as Frank watched the beginnings of the Cold War start up. Lydia Cooper argues that McCarthy wrote *The Road* as a direct result of 9/11: “[t]he apocalypticism of *The Road* seems to be a response to an immediate and visceral fear of cataclysmic doom in the United States after the terrorist attacks on 9/11”¹⁴⁹.

While demoralizing reality television gained popularity, there was an influx of ordinary people wanting to be heard, whether or not they had something worth hearing. The anonymous narrator and mysterious human main characters in *The Road* serve as a significant contrast against the sudden boom of socially based technology. Not knowing the names of the characters or where they are provides a great disparity to the real world of over-sharing that became popular in the 2000s.

The fact that Katniss has to always watch what she says and does for fear of being seen or overheard by the omniscient and unforgiving Capitol is a parodic amplification of the lack of privacy prevalent both with the addition to new social technologies and with the idea that true patriots should have nothing to hide. As detailed by Holloway, this apparently acceptable breach of confidentiality was the most blatant in the introduction of the Patriot Act in the United States:

¹⁴⁸ Holloway, p. 5.

¹⁴⁹ Lydia Cooper, ‘Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative’, *Studies in the Novel*, 43:2, Summer 2011, pp. 218-236.

'Human Rights NGOs, lawyers and political activist attacked the Act for fostering a 'lack of due process and accountability; which 'violates the rights extended to all persons, citizens and non-citizens, by the Bill of Rights'.¹⁵⁰

Katniss's persistent feeling of loneliness even in a crowd epitomises the idea that with millions of people constantly connected, it is even easier to feel ignored. McCarthy's novel completely bypasses this feeling in favour of eliminating the incessant chatter and cutting off survivors from each other, bringing back the innate, animalistic feeling of distrust toward strangers.

Randy, the man, and the boy are single-minded in their behaviour throughout their novels. However, during her trilogy, Katniss fluctuates between being noble in sacrificing herself for her sister, to giving up, to aiding a rebellion, and finally to murder for revenge. The novels show all of the problems involved in catastrophic situations; the reader should wonder how young is too young to have to deal with having an entire society on one's shoulders.

The Road is also a commentary on society which explores how well humanity can get along without a structured, lawful society in which to live, which forces the reader to think about humanity's place in the world: "[t]he desire to reconstruct the world by deconstructing it seems to reflect the fundamental fear underlying the novel, namely, the fear that human beings may not in fact deserve to survive."¹⁵¹ This means that by destroying the majority of the world McCarthy is perhaps saying that humanity does not deserve to survive, but by allowing characters who are, for the most part, good to survive and thrive in the newly destroyed world, McCarthy is

¹⁵⁰ Holloway, p. 34.

¹⁵¹ Cooper, p.221

saying that humanity does deserve to survive, but not in its current state. Whereas, *Alas, Babylon* comments on what a group of humans can accomplish in a more ideal post-apocalyptic situation; humanity does deserve to survive, Frank is saying, and here is the best way for them to do it.

A novel that notably puts together thematic elements of all three of these novels discussed above is *Lucifer's Hammer* (1977)¹⁵² by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle. Published about halfway between the publication of *Babylon* and *The Road*, it shows three stages of the apocalypse: pre-apocalypse, catastrophe, then post-apocalypse. By showing all three stages, the reader is able to fully comprehend the full scope of the degradation of the novel world's society. Because of this, *Hammer* is similar in scope to *Alas, Babylon*, another community-focused post-apocalyptic novel. However, while *Babylon's* focus is more with the banding together of people in order to survive, *Hammer* shows society's inability to cooperate for the sake of rebuilding. The humans in Niven and Pournelle's world are selfish, territorial, and desperate. While *Babylon* is hopeful, *Hammer* is cynical. *Babylon's* focus is of survival through cooperation but *Hammer* shows the deterioration of humanity.

Hammer opens with the beginning of a party, where an important guest, Tim Hamner, the owner of a large soap and lucrative soap company, is just arriving. Hamner regales the party with the news that he is now famous, or infamous: 'Hamner-Brown Comet!' Tim waved the telegram. 'Kitt Peak Observatory has confirmed my sighting! It's a real comet, it's *my* comet, they're naming it after me!'¹⁵³

¹⁵² Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, *Lucifer's Hammer* (Chicago: Playboy, 1977).

¹⁵³ Niven and Pournelle, p. 7.

The characters did not have time to reflect on what the comet strike meant to them at the time or time to contemplate what they should or should not have done in the lead up to 'Hammerfall'. 'The Hammer' is the nickname given to the comet, and the name not only has biblical connotations stemming from the verse in the Old Testament stating that the word of God is like a hammer, 'that breaketh the rock in pieces'¹⁵⁴, but it also implies destruction as wrought by an actual, not metaphorical, hammer. The range of characters may not seem important before the failed comet fact-finding mission (an event serving as the apex of the story arch) that makes everyone realize, perhaps too late, that the comet is going to do extensive damage to the planet. However, the characters become important after the fall, when survival becomes more important than a documentary or a soap company. Many of the characters change drastically after Hammerfall out of both necessity and psychosis.

Hammer is similar to *Alas, Babylon* in that it is broken up into 'before, during, and after', showing every stage of the apocalypse and post-apocalypse. This is important because while a novel about people living in a world after a comet strike could be interesting on its own, the reader is slightly more invested in the outcome when they've witnessed how normal everything was before the hammer did fall. Emotional engagement and investment ensure that the novel's impact on the reader is significant, and the reader thus more likely to reflect on the issues the novel has raised. The reader is also given the benefit of being removed from the action; they know something terrible is going to happen and almost cringe with the short-sightedness of the characters who do not know, and perhaps keep reading in order to

¹⁵⁴ Jeremiah 23:29

revel in the *schadenfreude* the characters' ignorance presents. According to Diletta De Cristofaro in an essay on the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel, the point of modern post-apocalyptic fiction is: 'to critique, rather than to salvage, modernity and its apocalyptic ideological foundations.'¹⁵⁵ In other words, modern post-apocalyptic fiction is meant to critique a modern society problem, not to lament the loss of an aspect of society.

Historically, *Hammer* came out of a time and a country enduring an extremely unpopular war, the Vietnam War, as well as the Cold War that was still going on in the background, its ending still another twenty years away. The 1970s in America was punctuated with protests, many of them ending in tragedy, against the Vietnam War and the draft sending naïve young men to fight to the death for a cause they only understood vaguely. The country, the world, was in turmoil:

At home, the nation was undergoing a legitimization crisis, with growing opposition to American troops in Vietnam, public revulsion at the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, and the televised spectacle of troops and demonstrators clashing at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Internationally, Vietnamese liberation forces were holding at bay American military power, revolutionary groups were appearing throughout the Third World from Mozambique to Uruguay, and a worker-student alliance had come close to seizing state power in France. Richard Nixon's election in 1968 seemed to herald an intensification of the conflict, with a growing schism between the forces of reaction (much of the United States with its law and-order president) and of international revolution. With the Nixon administration came a more serious and more deadly wave of repression, and in May 1970, during demonstrations

¹⁵⁵ Diletta De Cristofaro, "Time, no arrow, no boomerang, but a concertina": Cloud Atlas and the anti-apocalyptic critical temporalities of the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel,' *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 2017.

protesting Nixon's decision to invade Cambodia, four students were killed at Kent State and two were killed at Jackson State.¹⁵⁶

In this shadow of all of the turmoil listed in the above quote, *Hammer* was created, and *Alas, Babylon* was created at a different time but in a similar way with similar fears. However, instead of war and nuclear explosions, it was a celestial object that collides with Earth.

Though there was implicit evidence of asteroid hits on Earth, for example the Shoemaker Crater in Australia and the Barringer Crater in Arizona, no one had explored what an impact would do to the Earth's population. So, opposed to *Babylon's* terrible what-ifs in a country decimated by atomic warfare, Niven and Pournelle tackle the possibility of uncontrollable destruction from another source: space. As of 1997, scientists were still quoting *Lucifer's Hammer* as an example of what could happen, both to humanity and to the planet:

They didn't call a big asteroid strike a "dinosaur killer" when we wrote *Hammer*. They do now, and some even call it the Hammer. A few years after *Lucifer's Hammer* hit the bestseller list, Dr. Alvarez was giving a presentation to the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He stopped in the middle as we came in. "There they are," he said, and referred questioners to the book if they wanted to know what a modern strike might be like.¹⁵⁷

While current scientists have a better idea of what would happen should a comet strike the Earth (it would result in much more atmospheric and planetary devastation than detailed in the novel), the fact remains that *Hammer* was influential enough in

¹⁵⁶ Ken Wachsberger, *Insider Histories of the Vietnam Era Underground Press: Part 1* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011).

¹⁵⁷ Niven and Pournelle, 'Introduction to eBook edition'.

the scientific community to be talked about as much as thirty years after it was published, and still lauded for its attention to detail today:

[...]Lucifer's Hammer is distinguished by its thorough and informed imagining of a broadly plausible cataclysm never before described. Niven and Pournelle went out of their way to make the impact and its attendant horrors — tsunamis, earthquakes, climate change and crop failure, wars for the best remaining farmland — believable at a time when remarkably little scientific attention had been paid to such things.¹⁵⁸

For a work of fiction to be touted for its accuracy by the scientific community is an anomaly.

Although *Hammer* is not a nuclear holocaust novel, it shares the theme of community with the nuclear holocaust category. Claire P. Curtis, in her book detailing the correlation between post-apocalyptic fiction and society, posits that the key similarity between *Hammer* and *Babylon* is the idea that both novels, in some way, “mourn” the loss of familiar, organized societal norms:

In *Lucifer's Hammer* we see people mourning the loss of civil society and trying hard to create some semblance of a life recognizable to them as secure. *Alas, Babylon* shares the desire for security, but it focuses far more on the successful re-creation of a meaningful society. One where people are self reliant and creating an improved world. *Alas, Babylon* stresses far more the “enjoyment” of one's property and it ends with the achievement of a “comfortable, safe and peaceable” community.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Oliver Morton, ‘In Retrospect: Lucifer's Hammer’ in *Nature*, 453 (2008), p. 1184.

¹⁵⁹ Claire P. Curtis, *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract: We'll Not Go Home Again* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 73.

Curtis' main point is that while *Hammer's* society is almost archaic in its reestablishment, with the cannibalistic cults and fundamentalist religious sects, *Babylon's* society is more of an adaptation to the situation rather than a desperate scramble to create a new society. *Babylon's* rebuilding period is calmer whereas *Hammer's* descends into chaos as the population desperately mourns and attempts to get back to the society that was lost.

As these novels showed, community, or family, is very important in the survival of the individual within the post-nuclear landscape. The community and family bring with them a drive to survive, to continue on. Because of its position as a fictional occurrence with a real foundation, as previously noted by Derrida, nuclear fiction is a near-absolute destruction that allows for, and encourages, rebuilding.

In each novel, the destruction of the previous societies is all encompassing. For instance, While there are individual stories of survival, particularly in *Alas, Babylon* and *Lucifer's Hammer*, each individual is struggling to survive for, or in spite of, "the condition of all the others", a point exemplified by Katniss' position as the symbol of the rebellion in *The Hunger Games*. These novels embraced the destruction of pre-apocalypse society and gave rise to a society completely different and, one hopes, completely better. Derrida believes that to some extent we as a society were wishing for nuclear destruction by fantasising about it:

Some might call it a fable, then, a pure invention: in the sense in which it is said that a myth, an image, a fiction, a utopia, a rhetorical figure, a fantasy, a phantasm, are inventions. It may also be called a speculation, even a fabulous specularization. [sic] The breaking of the mirror would be, finally, through an act of language, the very occurrence of nuclear war. Who can swear that our

unconscious is not expecting this? dreaming of it, desiring it? You will perhaps find it shocking to find the nuclear issue reduced to a fable¹⁶⁰.

It is interesting to note that these three nuclear novels (and in the case of *The Hunger Games*, the entire series) have semi-hopeful endings, which would not necessarily be the case if a real nuclear event occurred. That fact could be explained by the Derrida's point that nuclear holocaust is, in actuality, a fable. Because we as a society have not experienced something as devastating as a nuclear holocaust and do not know how such a situation would turn out. The significance of this is made clearer when analysed in conjunction with pandemic novels, which deal with an opposite trope to the nuclear holocaust novels, and do not necessarily end hopefully. While nuclear holocaust novels show an apocalypse that brings communities and families together, pandemic novels demonstrate an apocalypse that drives people apart and gives rise to a well used theme – the last man.

¹⁶⁰ Derrida, p. 23.

Chapter Two: Pandemic and The Last Man

Pandemic post-apocalyptic fiction is a category grounded in fear—fear of nature turning on humans in the form of an untreatable disease, fear of the effects of nuclear warfare, fear of a scientific experiment gone wrong.

I Am Legend by Richard Matheson, *Oryx and Crake* (2003)¹⁶¹ by Margaret Atwood, and *Dog Blood* (2010)¹⁶² by David Moody all use the typical structure of pandemic literature within a speculative or science fictional context. However, each author goes about dismantling and rebuilding that context to suit the story he or she wishes to tell, while also utilizing various aspects that make up pandemic fiction, most notably the last man trope.

The figure of the 'last man' is a key component of pandemic fiction. Whereas nuclear holocaust fiction tended toward the idea of family and bonding together in times of panic or stress, pandemics appear to turn the individual inward. This could be for several reasons; perhaps the individual feels safer alone, as pandemics can happen at any time to any one for any reason, or there is, quite literally, no one else for the individual to be with. The idea of the last man is structurally beneficial for each of these novels in that each man is compelled to look inward at his choices and decide whether or not he wants to keep moving forward. Matheson's man has to decide if trying to singlehandedly rid the planet of the monsters is enough to keep living. Atwood's man has to decide if being the shepherd of a new dominant species is

¹⁶¹ Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2003).

¹⁶² David Moody, *Dog Blood* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2010).

enough for him to keep living. And Moody's man has to decide if the hope that he will see his daughter again is enough for him to keep going. These men are outsiders in their respective worlds and reject conforming to the new world and society. They do not fit in the new society and, as the figurative representations of a world that ends with them; conformity would metaphorically, and possibly literally, kills them.

Scientifically, pandemic is defined as 'an epidemic occurring worldwide, or over a very wide area, crossing international boundaries and usually affecting a large number of people'¹⁶³. So while pandemic does not necessarily mean a slow destruction of society, the very definition has an ominous sense to it; once international boundaries are easily crossed, it becomes uncontrollable. It becomes bigger than the safety of human-set comfort zones. It transcends culture, language, even race. Pandemic ignores the labels humans put on themselves; no man is safe. And while that could easily bring society together, as it did with nuclear holocaust fiction, it can, just as easily, tear it apart. Tearing communities apart is what nurtures the idea of the literary last man. The last man is often immune to the pandemic in some way; in *I Am Legend*, for example, the protagonist is immune to the vampire virus that wipes out humanity because of a bite from a bat, or so he believes. In *Oryx and Crake*, the protagonist is immune because he was unknowingly given an antiviral by his friend, who was the creator of the humanity-destroying virus. It is likely that

¹⁶³ Miquel S. Portia, *A Dictionary of Epidemiology*, 5th ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

the nature of how these viruses are spread and the protagonists' immunity to them serves the purpose of pointing out that these last men are, in fact, special in some way. How they survive the plague and avoid contamination is unique, thus making them unique. Many other pandemic novels follow this logic with good reason; there would otherwise be nothing special about these last men if they did not somehow have a reason for being the last. How the protagonists survive their various pandemics is as important as the onset of the pandemic.

There have been several instances of real pandemic historically. Recorded instances of pan/epidemics go as far back as 430 BC with the first acknowledged instance of the bubonic plague in Athens¹⁶⁴. This was followed by the European plague in the 1300s, the Great Plague in London in 1665, and the first worldwide pandemic of influenza in 1729 followed closely by another, worse, influenza pandemic in 1781¹⁶⁵. The Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918 was one of the worst pandemics in human history. With an estimated death toll of 20 to 40 million people, it killed more individuals than the World War that preceded it¹⁶⁶. In recent history, however, the ongoing HIV/AIDS pandemic overshadows most current pandemics, mostly because it is truly worldwide in scale with no real ending in sight:

Ebola is very unlikely to become the next Black Death. But that doesn't mean something else won't. Even with modern medicine, we haven't rid ourselves of pandemics; indeed, they have sprung up far more recently than 1918.

¹⁶⁴ T. F. Hoad, 'Pandemic' in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

¹⁶⁵ Hoad, 'Pandemic'.

¹⁶⁶ Antoni Trilla, Guillem Trilla, and Carolyn Daer, 'The 1918 "Spanish Flu" in Spain' in *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, 47.5 (2008), pp. 668-73.

HIV/Aids is the most recent truly devastating pandemic – and H5N1 avian flu was even more widespread, though less deadly¹⁶⁷.

There have been other less devastating scares in recent history, with the SARS outbreak in 2002 and H1N1 in 2009.

War can engender a fear of pandemics, both biological and nuclear. And this, too, appears in post-apocalyptic literature as a ‘sinister extension of the plague theme’¹⁶⁸. A real concern for people living in the aftermath of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and later with the Cold Wars, more specifically surrounding the, albeit short, Cuban Missile Crisis, was the idea that nuclear radiation could create genetically mutated people and, just as frightening, genetically mutated diseases. Recent studies suggest that, although there is no concrete evidence proving that A-bomb radiation exposure causes genetic difficulties in the victims’ offspring, scientists believe that it is important to keep the possibility open that problems could still occur¹⁶⁹. This means that, although there is the illusion of ‘safe’ atomic radiation, the possibility of adverse biological consequences is a continuing concern. Even though there wasn’t an immediate outbreak of nuclear-based diseases following the

¹⁶⁷ Nicky Woolf, ‘Ebola Isn’t the Big One. So What Is? And Are We Ready for It?’ in *theguardian.com*, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/03/-sp-ebola-outbreak-risk-global-pandemic-next>> [accessed 12 October 2015].

¹⁶⁸ Joan Slonczewski and Michael Levi, ‘Science fiction and the life sciences’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 174–185 (p. 179).

¹⁶⁹ Yoshimi Tatsukawa, et al, ‘Radiation Risk of Individual Multifactorial Diseases in Offspring of the Atomic-bomb Survivors: A Clinical Health Study’ in *Journal of Radiological Protection*, 33.2 (2013), pp. 281-93.

bombs, the thought of it pervaded literature at the time, mostly due to how very little the public actually knew about the situation.

Biological warfare was prevalent mainly in the Korean War, although adding a biological/chemical aspect to defence began in the United States as early as 1947. As Endicott and Hagerman observe:

The Army Medical Center [sic] of the Chemical Corps began an indoctrination in biological warfare defense [sic] in 1947, with some knowledge transferable between defensive and offensive preparation.¹⁷⁰

Some types of biological/chemical warfare began in World War II, and due to their 'success', further expansion on these weapons continued after the war ended. By the time the Korean War came around in 1950, The Chemical Corps had studied 'anthrax, botulinus toxin, brucellosis, tularemia and dysentery, rickettsias, and viruses' and especially 'diseases uncommon in different geographical areas'¹⁷¹

The United States used several different biological weapons against Korea and Korean allies. One method was dropping bombs containing germ-carrying payloads, such as feathers and insects onto the targeted areas. The hope was, of course, to create a pandemic, or at least an epidemic, that would wipe out or weaken soldiers before ground warfare began¹⁷². According to William M. Creasy, head of the Research and Engineering Command of the Chemical Corps during the years 1945 – 1953, the point

¹⁷⁰ Stephen Lyon Endicott and Edward Hagerman, *The United States and Biological Warfare: Secrets from the Early Cold War and Korea* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 65.

¹⁷¹ Endicott and Hagerman, p. 65.

¹⁷² Endicott and Hagerman, p. 64.

of biological warfare was 'essentially anti-personnel in nature...directed at man himself or his food supply'¹⁷³. And though Agent Orange was used mainly to destroy crops, the effects of the chemical were very much biological. According to the Vietnam Red Cross, about three million people have incurred some sort of adverse effect from the use of Agent Orange, be it cancer, physical deformities, or death; 150,000 of those people are children with birth defects¹⁷⁴.

Although pandemic fiction has a scientific foundation, the science is often incorrect with regards to the behaviour viral and bacterial diseases exhibit, especially in earlier works. In many novels, the virus or pathogen mutates at a rapid rate, so rapid that scientists are unable to create a cure to stop it spreading. Typically, though bacteria can mutate fairly quickly, the evolutionary process takes longer than can be expressed in a few pages. Several conditions have to be favourable for a disease to evolve quickly enough to infect an entire population without being stopped; 'for instance, the virulence of a bacterial infection (measuring the severity of an infection) depends on its demographic properties as well as on the host's immune response'¹⁷⁵.

In pandemic novels, symptoms are usually instantaneous for those infected, such as via a bite from a zombie to a human, and the diseases spread faster in highly populated areas. This mirrors the behaviour of real life viral outbreaks; norovirus, a

¹⁷³ Endicott and Hagerman, p. 64.

¹⁷⁴ Dominique Mosbergen, 'Agent Orange Victims Captured In Heartbreaking Portrait Series Decades After Vietnam War' in *The Huffington Post*, <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/03/-sp-ebola-outbreak-risk-global-pandemic-next>> [accessed 12 October 2015].

¹⁷⁵ Jean-Baptiste André and Minus Van Baalen, 'Chapter 2 : Collective Traits in Pathogenic Bacteria' in *Evolutionary Biology of Bacterial and Fungal Pathogens* (Washington, DC: ASM, 2008), pp. 13-20.

virus common on cruise ships, can also spread through nursing homes, hotels, and tour buses:

The norovirus also lurks in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities, where daily group activities, shared dining rooms and visitors from outside provide countless opportunities for it to spread. 'It's a perfect tinder box to spread rampantly,' Hall [an epidemiologist in the CDC's division of viral illnesses] said, adding that most norovirus deaths occur in such facilities, in part because if residents become infected, they are more likely to succumb to illness. That's why, in nursing homes especially, disinfecting is crucial on surfaces such as doorknobs, bed rails and bathrooms.¹⁷⁶

With most viral diseases, however, it could take hours or even days for symptoms to manifest. Rabies, the virus many zombie-type, science fictional viruses are based on, is an interesting, if not frightening disease, for several reasons. In their book detailing the history of the disease, Bill Wasik and Monica Murphy state the instances in which rabies lent itself to being the catalyst for many science fiction stories:

On entering a living thing, it eschews the bloodstream, the default route of nearly all viruses but a path heavily guarded by immuno-protective sentries. Instead, like almost no other virus known to science, rabies sets its course through the nervous system, creeping upstream at one to two centimeters [sic] per day (on average) through the axoplasm, the transmission lines that conduct electrical impulses to and from the brain. Once inside the brain, the virus works slowly, diligently, fatally to warp the mind, suppressing the rational and stimulating the animal. Aggression rises to fever pitch; inhibitions melt away; salivation increases. The infected creature now has only days to live, and these he will likely spend on the attack, foaming at the mouth, chasing

¹⁷⁶ Debra Goldschmidt, 'Norovirus Is Not Just on Cruise Ships' in *CNN*, <<http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/23/health/norovirus-not-just-on-cruise-ships/>> [accessed 18 October 2015].

and lunging and biting in the throes of madness— because the demon that possesses him seeks more hosts..¹⁷⁷

Rabies presents humanity with one of the only real-life comparisons to the “zombie infection,” where a person or creature transitions from being perfectly healthy to a state of violence, deliriousness, and eventual death:

After a bite, the rabies virus binds quickly into the peripheral nerves but then makes its course with almost impossible slowness, usually requiring at least three weeks and often as long as three months to arrive at and penetrate the brain. On rare occasions a full year, or even five years, can elapse before the onset of symptoms. During this time the wound will heal over, and the victim may even forget about his scrape with a snarling beast. But healed or no, as the virus enters the brain, the wound will usually seem to return, as if by magic, with some odd sensation occurring at the site.¹⁷⁸

Immunity is an important aspect of both real life pandemics and fictional pandemics, and a defining factor of rabies is that there is no immunity. Up until 2004, there was a 100% mortality rate for the virus¹⁷⁹. According to the American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are two types of immunity; the first type is active immunity, which ‘results when exposure to a disease organism triggers the immune system to produce antibodies to that disease’¹⁸⁰ and then passive immunity, and that ‘is provided when a person is given antibodies to a disease rather than producing

¹⁷⁷ Bill Wasik and Monica Murphy, *Rabid: A Cultural History of the World's Most Diabolical Virus* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

¹⁷⁸ Bill Wasik and Monica Murphy, ‘Undead: The Rabies Virus Remains a Medical Mystery’ in *Wired*, <http://www.wired.com/2012/07/ff_rabies/> [accessed 18 October 2015].

¹⁷⁹ Wasik and Murphy.

¹⁸⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, ‘Vaccines and Immunizations,’ in *cdc.gov*, <<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/immunity-types.htm>> [accessed 18 October 2015].

them through his or her own immune system'¹⁸¹. Immunity due to a genetic mutation, however, is a completely different issue, and incredibly rare. A notable instance of an individual being immune to a pandemic force was that of Stephen Crohn, a man resistant to HIV. Dubbed by the media as 'The Man Who Couldn't Catch AIDS'¹⁸², Crohn ended up taking his own life possibly due to the guilt of watching the people he cared about die of a disease he could not get. Crohn was an anomaly, forced to watch the disease ravage the world with the knowledge that it would never touch him. Crohn's situation is similar to the literary last man figure's; he inexplicably could not be infected by the pandemic that would otherwise wipe out the rest of humanity and was alone as he watched members of his community die around him.

Perhaps the most well known, though not the earliest, pandemic survival novel is Mary Shelley's *The Last Man*. According to Kari Lokke's essay about *The Last Man*, it was story of survival from 1824 that Shelley wrote as a response to the violence around her:

Shelley thus joins her contemporaries in her apocalyptic response to the horrors of the French Revolution, the subsequent carnage of the Napoleonic wars, and the metaphysical and cultural uncertainties attendant upon Romantic-era attacks on religious and political authority. Yet the extremity of her particular form of apocalypse bears comparison with twentieth-century existentialist, absurdist, and nihilist reactions to two World Wars, the Holocaust, and the atomic bomb, such as Camus's *La Peste* or Ionesco's *Les*

¹⁸¹ CDC, 'Vaccines and Immunizations'.

¹⁸² John Schwartz, 'Stephen Crohn, Who Furthered AIDS Study, Dies at 66' in *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/15/health/stephen-crohn-who-furthered-aids-study-dies-at-66.html?_r=0> [accessed 18 October 2015].

Chaises, thus revealing *The Last Man*, like *Frankenstein*, as an uncannily prescient novel. In its refusal to place humanity at the center [sic] of the universe, its questioning of our privileged position in relation to nature, then, *The Last Man* constitutes a profound and prophetic challenge to Western humanism.¹⁸³

Having experienced the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, and the attacks on religion from the politicians of the time, Shelley used the post-apocalyptic nature of the novel to parallel her fears in regards to those important and destructive events, a tactic still used by not just modern post-apocalyptic writers, but writers of all genre types. And although she shared her subject matter with many of her contemporaries, including Cousin De Grainville whose work's title also translates to *The Last Man* and was written almost twenty years prior, the severity of Shelley's writing instead mirrors the work of twentieth century authors:

Shelley's *The Last Man*, drawing a contrast between the sickness of humanity and the health of nature, stands out as unique against its literary precursors that depict the demise not only of humanity but also of nature – or even of the entire universe. Whereas most nineteenth-century versions of the “last man” theme represent the end of the human race at the hands of transcendent cosmic or divine forces that also destroy the earth itself, Shelley's humanity succumbs to the plague in the face of a vigorous and blooming nature utterly indifferent to its fate.¹⁸⁴

The Last Man has several different layers to it, in addition to the previously stated social commentary, that makes it more than just a novel about a man's survival in the face of the overwhelming destruction of the population. It has an autobiographical

¹⁸³ Kari E. Lokke, 'The Last Man' in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 116-34 (p. 116).

¹⁸⁴ Lokke, pp. 116-117.

aspect, with Shelley's writing the novel partially to help her overcome the immense gravity of events in her life, such as the death of her husband and close friends. She took some of the characters straight from her personal life and transposed them onto paper like a disease-laced elegy:

In this challenge to humanism, *The Last Man* also renders a devastatingly modern critique of the political, scientific, spiritual, and artistic aspirations of the post-revolutionary, Romantic era. *The Last Man* demands as well to be read as a *roman-à-clef*, an act of mourning for Percy Bysshe Shelley and for the three children they had lost, for Byron, and for the collective life they had led. The affinities between Percy Shelley and the character Adrian, Earl of Windsor; Byron and Lord Raymond; Perdita, Lionel Verney and Mary Shelley herself are unmistakable.¹⁸⁵

In terms of pandemic, *The Last Man* takes on the notion that nature is healthy and humanity is the sickness, and because of this, both nature and humanity will be destroyed:

The agonizing course of the novel, in fact, demonstrates that the human mind is above all the source of the evil that is universally suffered. And the relentless progress of the plague shows uncontrollable and inscrutable nature to be anything but the minister of man.¹⁸⁶

This is where Shelley's influence on the pandemic sub-category is hugely evident. *The Last Man* becomes the model for the genre; rather than being the first, Shelley takes an established trope and turns it on its head. It is a tactic speculative and science fiction writers employ today, as well. According to Brian Stableford in his essay,

¹⁸⁵ Lokke, p. 117.

¹⁸⁶ Lokke, p. 125.

'Science Fiction before the Genre' Fiction, *The Last Man* 'became grandparent to an entire genre of elegiac British disaster stories':

Modern historians of SF often locate the origins of British scientific romance in the works of Mary Shelley, although the Gothic trappings of *Frankenstein* (1818) place it firmly within the tradition of anti-science fiction, and *The Last Man* (1826), a fatalistic disaster story, is equally antithetical to the philosophy of progress. Neither work made its influence felt immediately, but both became formative templates heading powerful traditions of imaginative fiction. The *Frankenstein* formula of an unruly and unfortunate artefact bringing about the downfall of its creator became established in the last decade of the nineteenth century as the principal narrative form of anti-science fiction, and still retains that status, while *The Last Man* became grandparent to an entire genre of elegiac British disaster stories, more directly fathered by Richard Jefferies's *After London* (1885)¹⁸⁷.

Shelley also attempted to explain how the plague that wipes out her fictional world works, albeit in a slightly confusing manner. This is an important point in pandemic fiction; the author's method of destroying their world is very telling in relation to the world in which he or she lives. Shelley's plague is both airborne and contracted by human-to-human contact. Shelley's protagonist, after he becomes ill, blames his interaction with a 'negro half clad':

It was quite dark; but, as I stept within, a pernicious scent assailed my senses, producing sickening qualms, which made their way to my very heart, while I felt my leg clasped, and a groan repeated by the person that held me. I lowered my lamp, and saw a negro half clad, writhing under the agony of disease, while he held me with a convulsive grasp. With mixed horror and impatience I strove to disengage myself, and fell on the sufferer; he wound his naked festering arms round me, his face was close to mine, and his breath, death-laden, entered my vitals. For a moment I was overcome, my head was bowed by

¹⁸⁷ Brian Stableford, 'Science fiction before the genre' in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 14-31 (p. 19).

aching nausea; till, reflection returning, I sprung up, threw the wretch from me, and darting up the staircase, entered the chamber usually inhabited by my family.¹⁸⁸

The fact that the man the protagonist encounters is not the only person in the house to have the plague counters the claim, however. As Peter Melville says in his essay ‘The Problem of Immunity in *The Last Man*’, the disease was already in the house and, indeed, the protagonist may have already had it before he encounters the other man:

The presence of multiple victims in the home suggests that it is not the case that a single sufferer is breathing immediately toxic exhalations onto and thus infecting people—an idea, incidentally, that Lionel himself dismisses as being based purely in “vulgar superstition” (p. 204). More likely, it is the case that plague is in the air, that the home (not unlike the many other homes throughout an “unpeopled London” already visited by the plague) accommodates the stagnant conditions conducive to the spread of disease (p. 266). The individual sufferer may indeed contribute to the increasing presence of stagnating effluvia in the air, but he or she is not the singular cause of contagion. Lionel already shows discernible signs of disorderliness before stumbling upon and wrestling with the black man.¹⁸⁹

So then what is Shelley’s plague? Does the irregularity of how the plague is contracted reflect Shelley’s own feelings of being a last (wo)man in her own right? She was a young female surrounded by older males, making her mark in a male-dominated profession:

Having been a participant-observer in the culture of Italy, and having been a professional woman of letters in a field dominated by male writers, Shelley knew well the condition of “betweenness.” Shelley’s “betweenness” made her reluctant to decide between the individual and the group, and between

¹⁸⁸ Mary Shelley, *The Last Man* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), p. 245.

¹⁸⁹ Peter Melville, ‘The Problem of Immunity in *The Last Man*’ in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 47.4 (2007), pp. 825-46 (p. 833).

collectivist and individualist ideas of how we live among others.¹⁹⁰

According to Timothy Morton, Shelley was stuck in a liminal state that made it difficult for her to decide where she fitted.

Peter Melville suggests that, because Shelley's last man Lionel Varney is immune to the plague, that makes Varney 'a man whose immunology is monstrously disproportioned to all those around him'.¹⁹¹ Varney is as freakish as the plague itself. Logically, this fact should be true for all pandemic survivors, all of the so-called Last Men. Being 'a freak of nature', of a sort, does not mean the character behaves in a disruptive or disturbing manner, it simply means the character is going against a set norm. In this case, the norm is dying or being transformed by *something* infecting everyone around him.

The Last Man exemplifies many of the variations on the pandemic sub-category, not just the overall death by destructive virus. We see the viral aspect, the indeterminable quality of the origin of diseases; but we also see the idea that nature has the ability to turn on man at any point. Lokke questions whether or not Shelley's plague is a metaphor for human destruction or the society she felt was stifling:

The central question, then, for contemporary readers of *The Last Man* is whether the plague it portrays is, as Mellor suggests, socially constructed or whether it is a manifestation of an ultimately uncontrollable and uncontainable impulse – death-drive? will-to-power? – at the heart of human nature. Approaching this perhaps unanswerable question requires examination of the political, religious, and aesthetic responses to the plague

¹⁹⁰ Timothy Morton, 'Mary Shelley as a cultural critic' in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, ed. by Esther H. Schor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 259-273 (p. 262).

¹⁹¹ Melville, p. 825.

depicted in *The Last Man*. And Shelley's depictions of these cultural responses reflect her own highly ambivalent reactions to the liberal ideologies of her parents, and the Romantic ideologies of her husband and dearest friends.¹⁹²

Shelley shows this with the plague's progress as well in that 'uncontrollable and inscrutable nature to be anything but the minister of man'¹⁹³.

Despite its lack of notoriety, *The Last Man* is considered the basis of modern pandemic fiction. According to James Lovegrove, the clumsiness of the writing and the fame of *Frankenstein* overshadow *The Last Man's* importance to the genre:

The Last Man is nowhere near as memorable or as influential as Shelley's earlier *Frankenstein* (1818). It is in many respects a clumsily executed piece of work. For instance, the text purports to be a translation of various scraps of prophetic writing found littering the cave of the Sibyl at Cumae near Naples – yet the prophecy takes the form of a first-person memoir being written for the benefit of posterity (not that anyone remains to read it). This literary structure does not hold up to scrutiny.

That said, the book has moments of undoubted power, and it is the godfather of all A&PASF [Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Science Fiction]. Whatever directions later novels took the sub-genre, their roots lie in this one. *The Last Man* came first¹⁹⁴.

While *The Last Man* represents the roots of the pandemic subgenre with its use of the Last Man trope and the idea of unexplainable immunity, *I Am Legend* is one of the sturdier branches, with both its protagonist and its author mirroring Shelley's world

¹⁹² Lokke, p. 126.

¹⁹³ Lokke, p. 125.

¹⁹⁴ James Lovegrove, 'The World at the End of the World: Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Science Fiction' in *Strange Divisions and Alien Territories: The Sub-Genres of Science Fiction*, ed. by Keith Brooke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 97-111 (p. 99).

and her protagonist in setting and behaviour, almost one hundred and thirty years later.

When writing *I Am Legend* (hereafter known as *Legend*), Richard Matheson was experiencing his own feelings of being a last man. Matheson is a clear example of the troubles of his time period directly influencing the narrative. In his essay 'A Biocultural Critique of Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*', Mathias Clasen pinpoints the exact fears from Matheson's life that are reflected in the novel:

The abstract fear of death can be fleshed out in locally specific, context-dependent ways. In one context it's the fear of a large carnivore attacking at night; in another, the fear of bombings. The adaptive fear response is largely generalized, and the physiological fear response is triggered by a range of diverse threats, from thunderstorms to predators, from darkness to social separation. *I Am Legend* obviously extrapolates from the kind of anxieties that grow particularly well in the shadow of a mushroom cloud. The fear of nuclear and biological warfare looms over much of Matheson's nineteen-fifties work, and in *I Am Legend*, Neville and his wife speculate in a flashback on a possible relationship between nuclear bombings and the vampire virus, or rather, mutated insects as disease carriers (IAL, p. 45). So what was the young Richard Matheson afraid of? Insofar as *I Am Legend* is a window into his psyche, he was afraid of nuclear war, of predation, of being all alone in a dangerous world. While the first fear is a highly context-dependent one, the second two generalize across cultures and times.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Mathias Clasen, 'Vampire Apocalypse: A Biocultural Critique of Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*' in *Philosophy and Literature*, 34.2 (2010), pp. 313-28 (p. 317).

Matheson created a character who resonates with the reader, and Robert Neville's position as a character who is not particularly extraordinary becomes more important as the novel goes on. Robert Neville not only performs the role of the last man, but also the everyman; the reader goes from empathizing with him to wondering, perhaps not even consciously, if something similar could happen to him and if they could deal with it in the same manner as Neville.

On the level of plot, *Legend* is the story of a man who thinks that he is the last human on Earth—a fact that turns out to be true—trying to survive after a disease ravaged the human population. He is somehow immune to the disease that takes his entire family and everyone around him. The disease causes the host bodies to act in traditionally vampiric ways. That is, they have an aversion to sunlight, garlic, mirrors and crucifixes, and previously inanimate corpses can be reanimated and have a hunger for blood. The disease is bacterial in origin, a fact that Neville discovers while exploring more efficient ways of eradicating the supposed vampires. Neville's past is told through flashbacks while he is sitting in his home as the vampires swarm around his house. In one flashback for example, Neville and his wife speculate on the origins of the virus sweeping through their neighbourhood:

'Maybe the insects are...What's the word? Mutating.'

'What's that?'

'Oh, it means they're...changing. Suddenly. Jumping over dozens of small evolutionary steps, maybe developing along lines they might not have followed at all if it weren't for...'

Silence.

'The bombings?' she said.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Matheson, pp. 43-44.

This exchange exemplifies the feelings and fears of the time, as well as the evolution of plague (pandemic) fiction. Since pandemic fiction started in the 1800s, there have been many permutations of bacteria and disease ravaging the planet. According to Joan Slonczewski and Michael Levy in their essay on science fiction's relationship with life sciences, plagues, however, could be helpful to the human cause:

The spread and mutation of microbial life-forms, often deadly plagues, has been a theme since Wells's *War of the Worlds* (1898) in which, ironically, a plague from Earth saves humans from invading Martians. In most plague stories humans do not fare so well.¹⁹⁷

The slow movement of the virus, from infection to full-blown vampiric symptoms, is fairly realistic in terms of the incubation period with many diseases. It takes a few days from the moment Neville's wife starts feeling slight symptoms for her to finally succumb to the disease. Neville then begins his vendetta against the vampires with her; he is forced to kill his wife when she comes after him as a reanimated, bloodthirsty, walking corpse.

Neville suspects that he's immune due to his encounter with a true vampire bat when he was in the war:

'I don't know about you. As for me, while I was stationed in Panama during the war I was bitten by a vampire bat. And, though I can't prove it, my theory is that the bat had previously encountered a true vampire and acquired the *vampiris* germ. The germ caused the bat to seek human rather than animal

¹⁹⁷ Joan Slonczewski and Michael Levy, 'Science fiction and the life sciences' in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 174-185 (p. 178).

blood. But, by the time the germ had passed into my system, it had been weakened in some way by the bat's system. It made me terribly ill, of course, but it didn't kill me, and as a result, my body built up an immunity to it. That's my theory, anyway. I can't find any better reason.'¹⁹⁸

Scientifically, of course, this would not be the case and if one really considers it, several different questions arise from Neville's theory. For example, why then, is Neville the only normal human left? Where are the other immune individuals? Also, where did this supposed true vampire come from? Did it only encounter and infect bats? Did it only encounter and infect the one bat? Why would that be? In any case, Neville's reasoning shows that, in his solitude, he has been forced to think about the origins of the disease and the reasons behind his immunity. He does not accept it as something that happens, he is a man who craves answers and has nothing but time to get these answers. Again, the reader is meant to empathize with Neville on a personal level. For all the bloodletting and people-eating vampires, this is a story about a desperate, lonely man. Because Neville is both an everyman and a last man, the reader both reflects on his plight and fears its inevitability. If a regular man like Neville could be thrust into such an extraordinary ordeal, then it could, theoretically, happen to anyone.

As the novel goes on, Neville encounters what he believes is another survivor and goes through several stages of disbelief and denial before he can confirm she is actually there and not a figment of his despairing imagination:

I've gone mad. The words presented themselves abruptly. He felt less shock at that possibility than he did at the notion that she was real. He had, in fact, been

¹⁹⁸ Matheson, pp. 132-133.

vaguely preparing himself for just such a delusion. It seemed feasible. The man who died of thirst saw mirages of lakes. Why shouldn't a man who thirsted for companionship see a woman walking in the sun?

He started suddenly. No, it wasn't that. For, unless his delusion had sound as well as sight, he now heard her walking through the grass. He knew it was real. The movement of her hair, of her arms. She still looked at the ground. Who was she? Where was she going? Where had she been?

He didn't know what welled up in him. It was too quick to analyze [sic], an instinct that broke through every barrier of time erected reserve.

His left arm went up.

'Hi!' he cried. He jumped down to the sidewalk. '*Hi*, there!'

A moment of sudden, complete silence. Her head jerked up and they looked at each other. Alive, he thought. Alive!

He wanted to shout more, but he felt suddenly choked up. His tongue felt wooden, his brain refused to function. Alive. The word kept repeating itself in his mind. Alive, alive, alive...¹⁹⁹

His excitement upon seeing another person out in the daylight completely blinds him to the possibility that the disease is mutating again within its hosts. Although he thrives on being alone, this new potential companion is thrilling. But there is also the sexual aspect to it that comes up quite often in the novel. Women are a constant source of mental torment for Neville in his everyday life:

It was the women who made it so difficult, he thought, the women posing like lewd puppets in the night on the possibility that he'd see them and decide to come out.

A shudder ran through him. Every night it was the same. He'd be reading and listening to music. Then he'd start to think about soundproofing the house, then he'd think about the women.²⁰⁰

It is fitting, then, that a woman brings about Neville's apparent downfall. It's this idea that makes being a true last man quite difficult. Although pandemic novels seem to

¹⁹⁹ Matheson, p. 111.

²⁰⁰ Matheson, p. 7.

stress the idea of being alone in a world that has turned on the protagonist, the protagonist is never truly alone. There is always someone haunting him. In Neville's case, his female family members, especially his wife, burden him with their absence the most.

Ruth, apparently the only other survivor, is Neville's undoing. As it turns out, she is a liaison for the vampire majority, sent by them to monitor Neville's actions and report back to them so they can decide what to do with him. Neville's constant murdering of vampires results in the new vampire authority deciding that he must die. In their eyes, he is a threat to their survival who has killed many innocents, the remnant of a society that no longer can, or will, exist. The new society, the outcasts, the ones that Neville feels he has to kill, are now becoming the dominant species on the planet. They were once the monsters, these representations of abnormality, but the tables are turning and Neville is becoming the monster. In a way, Matheson is saying that societal norms can change, and it is up to the individual to decide if he is going to change with them or eventually run himself into the path of destruction. Neville's steadfast behaviour keeps him alive for the majority of the novel, but it ends up causing his death. Ruth, the epitome of the transformed, reformed vampire, warns him to leave because the situation has changed and his desire to rid the world of vampires has become his downfall. Neville does not leave:

'I...couldn't,' he muttered. 'I almost went several times. Once I even packed and...started out. But I couldn't, I couldn't...go. I was too used to the...the house. It was a habit, just...just like the habit of living. I got...used to it.'²⁰¹

²⁰¹ Matheson, p. 155.

If Neville had a habit of living, the vampires were against that habit, in his eyes, and thus had to be destroyed. However, as Ruth points out, the same was true for them in regards to Neville and indeed, in regards to any society struggling to survive:

‘New societies are always primitive,’ she answered. ‘You should know that. In a way we’re like a revolutionary group – repossessing society by violence. It’s inevitable. Violence is no stranger to you. You’ve killed. Many times.’

‘Only to...to survive.’

‘That’s exactly why we’re killing,’ she said calmly. ‘To survive. We can’t allow the dead to exist beside the living. Their brains are impaired, they exist only for one purpose. They *have* to be destroyed. As one who killed the dead and the living, you know that.’²⁰²

The logic here is familiar; one group sees a threat in another group and thus that group has to be extinguished. In telling the story from Neville’s point of view, Matheson forces the reader to decide who is, in fact, right. Is Neville the monster in trying to keep what little humanity there was left alive? The reader has to wonder if the vampires were the monsters for also wanting to survive and for fighting back. Does the reader identify with Neville, who is, in essence, the representation of humanity, or does the reader identify with the vampires who, we find out in the end, were just trying to survive in their position as dominant species on the planet? This concept is where the novel gains its complexity; Matheson is saying that the separation between self and other is not as clear as humans are good and vampires are evil. As Edwin Thumboo posits in his essay on the “other” within society and

²⁰² Matheson, p. 156.

culture, 'we are both Self and Other, depending on who constructs and manages the equation, who does the inspecting, and who is the inspected.'²⁰³

The distinction between self and other is further complicated in the *Hater* trilogy. *Dog Blood*, the second novel of the trilogy, tells the story of a man trying to survive in a world that has completely shifted from familiar to unfamiliar in a matter of days, with no promise of reversal in sight. Interestingly, however, rather than presenting the reader with a pseudo-distinct hero in the same way Matheson did with his Robert Neville in *I Am Legend*, Moody gives the reader Danny McCoyne, who not only has to cope and adjust to a radically different world, but has to cope with being one of the people who causes the change. He is an 'other'; he has the genetic abnormality that causes him to kill those unlike him, almost on sight, what the government starts to call a Hater.

The reader is then faced with the difficult task of feeling something other than disgust for Danny. The pre-pandemic Danny is not a sympathetic figure; Moody himself admits that Danny is not the most admirable character, '[h]e's lazy and frequently frustrating at the beginning of *Hater*, but he still longs to be with his family and does what he can to support them, no matter how grudgingly.'²⁰⁴ Whereas, in *I Am Legend*, the reader meets Robert Neville after he has already suffered every loss

²⁰³ Edwin Thumboo, 'Conditions of Cross-Cultural Perceptions: The Other Looks Back,' in *Embracing the Other : Addressing Xenophobia in the New Literatures in English* ed. by Dunja M. Mohr (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2008), pp. 11-36 (p. 15).

²⁰⁴ David Moody, email to the author, 18 September 2013.

imaginable, *Hater* trilogy readers see Danny while he is at his most normal; while he's taking his family for granted, while he's stuck in a dead end job he hates, while he's dealing with the mundane absurdity of everyday life. Both men are strong characters in their own ways. Moody counters this, though, by immediately making Danny an 'other'. Danny is no longer just an everyman or a relatable guy next door the reader can understand. Danny is, on the surface, the monster. The first thing the reader sees Danny do after the "change" is kill his father-in-law. His family flee and the story very quickly reverts from the tale of a monstrous man doing monstrous things to a man's quest to find his daughter the only one in his family he feels is like him.

When writing the *Hater* trilogy, Moody had several things in mind, the most notable of which being the natural interactions between people on a day-to-day basis, as he writes 'I find the interactions between people and the way we adapt our behaviours to accept and be accepted (or not, as the case may be) fascinating.'²⁰⁵ Moody sought to create an example of how he thought the population would react when it became difficult to find ways to accept others by way of commonality. That is to say, he wondered what would happen if one stripped away the typical ways humans use to categorize each other:

I wondered what would happen to society if a new division arrived which simply did away with all the previous divides and rendered them obsolete, therefore turning people against each other who might previously have been close: parents and their children, lovers, etc., whilst forcing prior opponents to have to work together to stay alive.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ David Moody, email to the author, 18 September 2013.

²⁰⁶ David Moody, email to the author, 18 September 2013.

Moody reversed the societal norm of gathering together because of perceived similarities, which is something the reader would be used to; eventually, that becomes more horrifying than the events that follow.

Moody took inspiration from the terrorist attacks in London on the 7th of July, 2005. The War on Terror had again taken shape in a tangible attack. Not only were the attack and the aftermath terrifying in themselves, but also the thought that seemingly normal, well-adjusted people carried out these attacks on their fellow citizens was appalling. This was the trigger for Moody, the seed that spawned the concept of the Hate that infects Danny and many of his compatriots:

Several days later it emerged that one of the bombers worked as a classroom assistant in a primary school. It's terrifying to think that someone can spend so much of their time trying to benefit society and help children to grow, only to head into the capital the next week with a nail bomb strapped to their back with the intention of killing as many people as possible.²⁰⁷

Just as terrorists can suddenly turn on the people around them, Moody's fictional Hate forces society to deal with the same situation on a larger scale. In an editorial in *The Guardian* written four days after the 9/11 attacks in New York, Ian McEwan suggests that if there is any sort of humanity within the terrorist, acts of terror simply could not be performed:

If the hijackers had been able to imagine themselves into the thoughts and feelings of the passengers, they would have been unable to proceed. It is hard to be cruel once you permit yourself to enter the mind of your victim.

²⁰⁷ David Moody, email to the author, 18 September 2013.

Imagining what it is like to be someone other than yourself is at the core of our humanity. It is the essence of compassion, and it is the beginning of morality.²⁰⁸

This is exactly the point Moody makes with the Hate. Other than Danny, the people in Moody's book are turned into brutal animals when infected; the only thought in their minds is the primal desire, the need, to kill anyone who is not the same as they are. Danny is unique in that he is able to think about how each killing will affect his overall goal of finding his daughter. The Haters, in essence, become home-grown terrorists; a destructive force suddenly disgusted with their society and the people they have interacted with on a daily basis.

Not only, however, is the mentality of a 'home-grown' terrorist a compelling, if not horrifying, concept; that is not the only part of the 7/7 events Moody is commenting on. The direct aftermath of 7/7 created a culture of suspicion in the United Kingdom as the hunt for those responsible raged in the streets of London, fuelled by an occasionally sensational, bloodthirsty media. It became difficult for some, both survivors and other citizens, to cope with the aftermath. In reflecting on a similar attack to help explain how he was feeling after surviving 7/7, John Tulloch found Ian McEwan's thoughts on 9/11 beneficial; 'The terrible attacks, the huge event, had affected my life personally, and in a much wider way, too.'²⁰⁹ Tulloch is referring to the way he felt upon hearing McEwan's interview after McEwan's novel, *Saturday*

²⁰⁸ Ian McEwan, 'Only Love and Then Oblivion. Love Was All They Had to Set against Their Murderers,' in *Theguardian.com*

<<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/15/september11.politicsphilosophyandsociety2>> [accessed 20 October 2013].

²⁰⁹ Tulloch, p. 200.

(2005)²¹⁰, was published. Because the bombings were executed at the heart of a city centre, because the terrorists themselves were people anyone could have interacted with daily, it was almost as though the psychological impact of the 7/7 bombings was so huge that it began to affect the minutiae in peoples' lives.

While Matheson uses the Korean War as inspiration for his allegorical vampires and for Neville himself, and while Atwood's novel is a commentary on humanity's slow destruction of the planet, among other things, Moody's rhetoric is focussed tightly on the horror felt by the public upon discovering that a very real monster walked among everyday citizens. That comparison is clear with the manifestation of the Hate, which strikes seemingly at random, suddenly, and with no regard for familial or friendly ties.

Moody points out that the trilogy, and specifically *Dog Blood*, is not simply a documentation of the apocalypse and subsequent post-apocalyptic rebuilding period. Instead, they are more orientated towards exploring the human condition in the confines of the post-apocalyptic world:

I think of the *Hater* books as being Danny's story first and foremost, rather than being specifically about the end of society. In that respect, freeing him from the trappings of his old life and routine and responsibilities enabled him to find himself and figure out his purpose in life.²¹¹

Looking at the novel in that way allows the reader to attempt to come to terms with Danny's subsequent behaviour as he searches for his purpose and his daughter. It is

²¹⁰ Ian McEwan, *Saturday* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005).

²¹¹ David Moody, email to the author, 18 September 2013.

also stated at the very beginning of *Dog Blood* that, though the reader's first impulse will be to ask why—why did the hate appear in the population, why did it affect the ones it affected, etc.—it does not matter in the context of the overall story. At least, it does not matter to the people within the story:

The cause of the Hate (as it had come to be known on both sides of the uneven divide) was irrelevant. At the very beginning, when the doubters had been forced to accept that something was really happening and that the troubles weren't just the result of media-fueled, copycat mob violence, the usual raft of baseless explanations were proposed; scientists had screwed up in a lab somewhere, it was an evolutionary quirk, it was a virus, a terrorist attack, aliens, or worse...Thing was, people were quickly forced to realize, *it didn't matter*.²¹²

The discerning reader is still going to want to know why, and eventually that curiosity is sated when Hate scanners are introduced and Danny finds himself faced with people who want to kill him as much as he wants to kill them. What is important, though, is that society as a whole has to collectively agree that there are more pressing issues regarding the Hate. As previously mentioned, Danny is faced with people who do not have the Hate rounding up and exterminating those who do. Much like in *I Am Legend* and, to a lesser extent *Oryx and Crake*, it becomes a matter of one group deciding that it has the right to inhabit the Earth and must get rid of the group that it feels does not. Pitting one group against another drives these stories and plays upon the societal conditioning that there is, more often than not, one group that is superior to the others. Edwin Thumboo culturally contextualises this idea in the introduction to his essay on the "Other":

²¹² Moody, p. 1.

As a literary term, the circumstances of Other applications are generally cross-cultural, colonial to ex-colonial, their continua and subsequent incarnations. Almost inevitably, there are nuances of inequalities, and one-sided understandings, compulsions, urges, preferences, and judgments. These reflect a fundamental difference that defines the Self as content, thus making it a word, a metonym for national identity, sustaining the 'us' and 'we', as distinguished from 'them' and 'they', respectively subject and object; put another way, it is a difference between locations that enquire and locations enquired into.²¹³

Thumboo's definition of self and other as a 'metonym for national identity' is prescient in the novel, as the reader discovers later on in the books that Danny has the unique ability to control his hate, making him not only an 'other' in his present society but also an other among others. He becomes the last man standing in a rapidly diminishing population, he's the last man in his family once he finds then loses his daughter again, and he's the last, perhaps only, man in this new breed of humanity who can function in both the old and new society. Again, like Robert Neville, there is no real explanation as to why Danny is becoming increasingly immune to the effects of the Hate that once compelled him to kill the non-Haters on sight, but again that does not really matter, ' "Doesn't matter why," he says, "fact is you did it. Takes a person of intelligence to do that. Someone who can look beyond all this hatred and fighting and see what's really important."'²¹⁴

It is vital to remember that although the protagonist is essential to the story, usually he or she represents a larger idea. So while Danny may or may not be considered a monster as a person, what he represents could very well be monstrous.

²¹³ Thumboo, p. 12.

²¹⁴ Moody, p. 177.

Jeffery Jerome Cohen, writing on the historical context of the monster in literature, states that:

The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment— of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the monstrum is etymologically "that which reveals," "that which warns," a glyph that seeks a hierophant. Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again.²¹⁵

To identify the monster is to identify what is wrong with society. If Robert Neville is in fact the monster of his world, then war and its after effects, grief, everything that Neville embodies becomes the monster. If Danny McCoyne is the monster, the flaws prevalent within the society that created him, for example lack of compassion, lack of love, laziness, or indifference, are also the monster. The monstrous identity cannot solely be placed on the individual, as he is the product of the combination of societal influence and his own self. This idea makes determining the monster in simple terms almost impossible.

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* does not present an easy answer to the question of who the reader should think is the monster. Crake sees what he is doing

²¹⁵ Jeffery Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p 4.

as good, and even in the scene where Jimmy finally realizes that nothing Crake was working on was completely innocent, there are no real accusations or authorial attempts to make the reader hate Crake. The scene where everything comes together, in a horrible reality for Jimmy, is presented emotionlessly:

Crake's beige tropicals were splattered with redbrown. In his right hand was an ordinary storeroom jackknife, the kind with the two blades and the nail file and the corkscrew and the little scissors. He had his other arm around Oryx, who seemed to be asleep; her face was against Crake's chest, her long pink-ribboned braid hung down her back.

As Jimmy watched, frozen with disbelief, Crake let Oryx fall backwards, over his left arm. He looked at Jimmy, a direct look, unsmiling.

'I'm counting on you,' he said. Then he slit her throat.

Jimmy shot him.²¹⁶

It is not until Snowman—Jimmy in the future—reflects on what happened that the reader realizes that Jimmy has been showing signs of the emotional impact Crake's last act had on him the entire time. Before this, Snowman was just a man who was alone, perhaps somewhat deranged because of this loneliness. It was obvious that he has lost someone, he has lost everyone, but the pain of having to lose his best friend and the woman he loved at the same time is a turning point. He can blame Crake for what happened, for the destruction of humanity, because he sees Crake all around him in everything that is still in existence, but Crake is dead and Jimmy is left alone with the guilt that Crake is unable to experience:

Crake's emergency storeroom. Crake's wonderful plan. Crake's cutting-edge ideas. Crake, King of the Crakery, because Crake is still here, still in possession, still the rulers of his own domain, however dark that bubble of light has now

²¹⁶ Atwood, p. 328.

become. Darker than dark, and some of that darkness is Snowman's. He helped with it.²¹⁷

Jimmy shoulders the guilt that Crake cannot experience on top of the guilt, "the darkness", he feels he contributed.

On the surface, *Oryx and Crake* could be said to be a bildungsroman. Both Jimmy and Glenn (Crake) go through the normal trials of childhood and adolescence in a slightly abnormal way—as they attend a school specifically designed to nurture their scientific curiosity no matter what strange avenues that curiosity takes them—in their vaguely askew, futuristic world. It's Crake's, and to a lesser extent, Jimmy's, intelligence that takes the novel from an everyday coming of age story to something larger, something terrifying. They're in schools that reward inventiveness, and that makes Crake ambitious, '[T]he students at Watson-Crick got half the royalties from anything they invented there. Crake said it was a fierce incentive.'²¹⁸ As Crake pushes his ambitions further throughout his schooling, from university and graduate school to his high-powered research job, his ideas become more radical. Concluding that humanity's dominance is the source of nature's problems, Crake develops Crakers, a new species with everything he sees as wrong with humanity edited out of their genes:

What had been altered was nothing less than the ancient primate brain. Gone were its destructive features, the features responsible for the world's current illnesses. For instance, racism – or, as they referred to it in *Paradise*, pseudospeciation – had been eliminated in the model group, merely by switching the bonding mechanism: the *Paradise* people simply did not register

²¹⁷ Atwood, p. 333.

²¹⁸ Atwood, p. 202.

skin color [sic]. Hierarchy could not exist among them, because they lacked the neural complexes that would have created it. Since they were neither hunters nor agriculturalists hungry for land, there was no territoriality: the king-of-the-castle hard-wiring that had plagued humanity had, in them, been unwired.²¹⁹

Crake develops the Crakers under the guise of them being a new pet people will want to buy, all the while planning to use the Crakers to usurp humanity's place as the dominant species on Earth. Essentially, the Crakers are de-evolved humans, who are closer to the rest of the animal kingdom in their simplicity; Crake took away the aspects of humanity such as sexuality and racial identity because of the problems he believed those issues caused. He secretly develops a virus that slowly wipes humanity out, with the exception of Jimmy, who he was secretly inoculating, '[T]he antibody serum was in the pleeb vaccine. Remember all those time you shot up with that stuff?'²²⁰ Crake wants Jimmy to carry on his work, to protect the Crakers and let them inherit the Earth. Jimmy is thus forced to become the last man standing in a world he, as a human, is supposedly unsuited for. Unlike Robert Neville, Jimmy does not feel the drive to make the world go back to how it was, even if he had the resources to make that possible. And unlike Danny McCoyne, Jimmy, or Snowman, has no one and nothing to get back to or look for.

Whether or not he is truly the last man standing is debatable if the other novels in the MaddAddam trilogy are taken into account. However, it can be argued since Jimmy believes he is alone, he still possesses the traits of the 'last man.' What keeps Jimmy struggling in the new world is the loyalty he has for Oryx, and a small desire to

²¹⁹ Atwood, p. 304.

²²⁰ Atwood, p. 328.

defy Crake. Even the name Jimmy chooses to present for himself to the Crakers as their guardian goes against Crake's past naming conventions:

It was one of Crake's rules that no name could be chosen for which a physical equivalent – even stuffed, even skeletal – could be not be demonstrated. But those rules no longer apply, and it's given Snowman a bitter pleasure to adopt this dubious label.²²¹

Snowman watches over the Crakers for Oryx, and feeds them information that he should not, to spite Crake. The ideas he gives the Crakers about Crake himself, and his role in their creation, is in complete defiance of Crake's own beliefs in that Crake did not believe in God and would be appalled by his deification:

Their adulation of Crake enrages Snowman, though this adulation has been his own doing. The Crake they're praising is his fabrication, a fabrication not unmixed with spite: Crake was against the notion of God, or of gods of any kind, and would surely be disgusted by the spectacle of his own gradual deification.²²²

Praising and beatifying Crake does two things. Firstly, it makes Snowman's fading memories slightly more palpable as he replays them *ad nauseum*—he can make fun of Crake. While it could be argued that the fact that he is looking after the Crakers at all is still in accordance to Crake's final wishes, Jimmy can take a small pleasure from knowing that he is finally going against Crake by twisting his vision of the future. It is no small irony that Crake himself plays God by creating the Crakers and destroying

²²¹ Atwood, p.7.

²²² Atwood, p. 103.

the majority of humanity, laying the foundation of religious adulation that he so despises.

Secondly, Atwood is warning us against the rampant, unethical development of science. Anne Franciska Pusch, in her study on the links between science and science fiction, wonders about Atwood's possible concern for the ethics of certain scientific practices:

The imagined world borrows from contemporary biotechnology, thus creating a fictional future scenario that can help understand the impact of today's animal experiments. By incorporating detailed descriptions of experimental settings and their outcomes the trilogy manages to paint a vivid picture of biotechnological procedures and possible effects. It is this overlapping of science and science fiction that makes Atwood's narration so useful in reflecting upon current technoscientific developments and their consequences for bioethics—especially those not yet being openly discussed among a mass audience.²²³

Atwood's interaction with science in her fiction encompasses both warnings for the future and a little bit of fear – she's warning against the destruction of the planet and fearful of unchecked scientific advancements. The detail she puts into her spliced animal creations and, indeed, with the Crakers in general, reveals a curiosity but distrust in scientific advancements. As Allison Dunlap states in her essay on ecocriticism and *Oryx and Crake*:

Whereas many novels depict the utopian possibilities inherent in the collapsing of human over-nature hierarchy, *Oryx and Crake* offers a dystopian

²²³ Anne Franciska Pusch, 'Splices: When Science Catches Up with Science Fiction' in *Nanoethics*, 9.1 (2015), pp. 55-73 (p. 57).

picture of this same collapse, presenting instead the negative consequences of enacting one ecotopian vision.²²⁴

Oryx and Crake presents scientific achievements to an extreme extent. Crake is so focused on the environment and humanity's treatment of it that his logical conclusion is to destroy humanity, leaving Jimmy (Snowman) as the caretaker of the new world with nothing but memories, both painful and not, and the Crakers to keep him occupied.

Snowman can anticipate which memories are going to hurt him the most and he acknowledges that he cannot avoid them; he cannot avoid constantly reliving the past, '[h]e's stuck in time past, the wet sand is rising. He's sinking down.'²²⁵ He understands that remembering the past; that even the faintest wish of having things like they were before is damaging. He lives his life in the Craker world the only way it could be lived under the circumstances, avoiding, as much as possible, thoughts of things he cannot have. It is difficult at times, but he could not live otherwise, '*[I]t is important, says the book in his head, to ignore minor irritants, to avoid pointless repinings, and to turn one's mental energies to immediate realities and to the tasks at hand.*'²²⁶ He has to ignore the past in order to live in the present, but the past is the only thing he has.

²²⁴ Allison Dunlap, 'Eco-Dystopia: Reproduction and Destruction in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*' in *The Journal of Ecocriticism*, 5.1 (2013), pp. 1-15 (pp. 2-3).

²²⁵ Atwood, p. 337.

²²⁶ Atwood, p. 45.

Deferring thinking about and understanding the nature of one's terrible past is a tactic used by people who experience trauma. In her study on *Oryx and Crake* and trauma, Katherine Snyder claims Snowman's disassociation with temporality is a symptom of a 'traumatized consciousness':

Indeed, Snowman's post-apocalyptic plight literalizes the temporal disruption that has come to be understood as a hallmark of traumatized consciousness. Contemporary trauma theory has identified temporal delay, along with other distortions of temporality, as a key way in which trauma manifests itself.²²⁷

The novel itself could be read as a temporal delay in Snowman's acceptance of his trauma; he is constantly ruminating on the past and the reader can tell that he's slowly changing his perspective on it. Snowman's initial denial of blame later transforms into an acceptance of partial blame; '[W]hat's the sensation? It isn't anger exactly; it's vexation. An old word but serviceable. *Vexation* takes in more than Crake, and indeed why blame Crake alone?'²²⁸ His shared blame later turns into acceptance; acceptance that he cannot change the past, that he is not blameless, that his loyalty toward Oryx and, to a lesser extent Crake, is enough to keep him going. The reader must decide if Snowman is going to continue, and perhaps attempt to rebuild humanity with the other survivors he finds at the end of the novel, or if he is going to take Crake's stance and accept the fact that the world no longer belongs to the humans. Snyder elaborates on this point:

²²⁷ Katherine Snyder, "'Time to Go': The Post-apocalyptic and The Post-traumatic in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*" in *Studies in the Novel*, 43.4 (2011), pp. 470-89 (p. 472).

²²⁸ Atwood, pp. 160-161.

The novel's final words, and Snowman's last thought in the book, signal both the strong possibility of a final ending and also the slim but real chance of a new beginning, one that repeats the past with a difference in order to make possible a future imperfect.²²⁹

It is the imperfect nature of humanity that Snowman misses, but in his remembrances, he acknowledges that the imperfection is what drove Crake to destroy in the first place. The ambiguous ending poses a tricky situation for Snowman and, allegorically, for the reader. Laura Wright breaks Snowman's situation down both on the surface and figuratively:

If Snowman kills the other humans that he discovers at the end of the narrative "should he kill them in cold blood? Is he able to?" (374) he will succumb, ultimately to the divide and conquer strategy that underlies all colonial endeavors [sic]; by wiping out those like him, the last homo sapiens, he will further enable Crake's genocidal project. But, because of his nationalist tendencies, his maintenance of the "old language" of the time before the scientific apocalypse, he may be able to weave a myth of cultural and interspecies assimilation that can rewrite Crake's narrative and ultimately position language as superior to science ... at least for the moment.²³⁰

If he doesn't kill the new people, they could harm the Crakers and he will have failed Oryx. If he does kill the new people, he's doing what Crake wanted all along.

Snowman knows how each scene is going to play out in his head, knows how he's going to react to events, and in that way deals with them accordingly. His delay is his realization that he needs to know his memories thoroughly in order to tell

²²⁹ Snyder, p. 477.

²³⁰ Laura Wright, 'Orwellian Animals in Postcolonial Contexts: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*' in *Margaret Atwood Studies*, 2:1 (2008), pp. 2-3.

himself how not to react to them when he remembers. The reader also has to delay her acceptance of his trauma. According to Snyder:

From the retrospective point of view of the novel's last man, as well as from the prospective point of view of the novel's reader, the difference between past and present, between our nearer and later future, is all the difference in the world. It is the difference between a human future and no future at all.²³¹

The past and Snowman's reaction (or lack thereof) to it even plays an important role in the way Snowman sees himself, which is important because he spends a lot of his time interacting with himself alone, '[H]e's humanoid, he's hominid, he's an aberration, he's abominable; he'd be legendary, if there were anyone left to relate the legends. If only he had an auditor besides himself, what yarns he could spin, what whines he could whine.'²³² Like his namesake, Snowman lives in a liminal space on the edge of two different worlds, which makes him the centre of his own little world. Snyder believes that this liminal space offers a parallel to Snowman living on the edge of humanity and Crakers:

As we soon come to understand, he is marooned in time, cast away between a human past and a post-human future, cut off from the past yet unable to move beyond it. Like the abominable legend after which he re-names himself, Snowman is a relic of a lost world, a postapocalyptic atavism who has lived past his own time and conceivably past the human epoch.²³³

²³¹ Snyder, p. 471.

²³² Atwood, p. 307.

²³³ Snyder, p. 472.

In living 'past his own time' Snowman has become a last man in a very literal sense. As far as he fits in the last man trope, Jimmy/Snowman is atypical. As stated previously, he has no real quest, and only a fleeting desire to know if there are others like him. He spends his time reflecting, not searching. Robert Neville's flashbacks fuelled his rage against the vampires, and his desire to return to a time before the plague. Danny rarely has flashbacks; the Haters are unable to use the past as a tool for use in the future. That is what makes Danny unusual and how he manages to control his Hate to get what he wants. All Snowman has, however, is memories and ruins and the creatures around him reminding him of Crake's success. Although Snowman is lonely, he is not ready to involve himself with society. He knows he cannot have things the way they used to be, however other survivors bring change; they either mean his death, or society—his world—becoming something else, '[H]e's not ready for this. He's not well. He's frightened. He could choose to stay put, await developments.'²³⁴ Neville would give anything to move back, Danny would do the same to move forward, but Snowman languishes in his inescapable and potentially immutable present.

It is interesting to note that in all three novels, women (or girls) feature strongly as a driving force for the last men and, in Neville and Snowman's cases, their undoing. In creating the female counterparts (Neville's wife and later Ruth, Danny's daughter, and Jimmy/Snowman's Oryx), the authors force the protagonists to be human in a time when being human is not necessarily the correct thing to be—the vampires are the dominant race and humans are food, the Haters are eradicating the

²³⁴ Atwood, p. 372.

humans because they are fundamentally lesser than, and humans are eliminated because they ruined the planet. It is a shift to making the female the other, as was the case in older science fiction and post-apocalyptic stories, according to Helen Merrick in her essay 'Gender in science fiction':

The presence of 'Woman' – whether actual, threatened or symbolically represented (through the alien, or 'mother Earth' for example) – reflects cultural anxieties about a range of 'Others' immanent in even the most scientifically pure, technically focused sf. The series of 'self/other' dichotomies suggested by 'gender', such as human/alien, nature/technology, and organic/inorganic, are also a central (although often unacknowledged) facet of the scientific culture informing much sf. The argument that at least some sf texts were justified in omitting women altogether was predicated on the notion that their ostensible subject matter – science and technology – were inherently masculine endeavours.²³⁵

In the context of *Oryx and Crake*, *I Am Legend*, and *Dog Blood*, the woman becomes an equal to the last man, as well as something lost which needs to be attained again in order for the last man to feel whole. The woman cannot represent the other because she is human; humanity is what the last man needs. With the exception of Danny, the women also represent sex to the last men, another instinctual action. Instinct drives the last man, because instinct and memories are all they have left. They no longer have society's rules to keep them in line, as demonstrated by Neville's continued massacre of the vampire people. Neville is constantly thinking about sex and it makes him slightly vulnerable to female vampires. Snowman has to consciously force himself to stop thinking about sex, "Don't even think about it," he tells himself. Sex is

²³⁵ Helen Merrick, 'Gender in science fiction' in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 241-252 (p. 241).

like a drink, it's bad to start brooding about it too early in the day.'²³⁶ Snowman spends his life reliving the past; if he allowed himself to think about instinctual behaviours he could not satisfy, it would break him.

In his flashbacks, Snowman's relationship with Oryx appears to be his undoing. There is the underlying question of if he had not taken Oryx's affections from Crake, would Crake had chosen him as humanity's unwilling martyr? Was Crake seeking revenge on Jimmy? Was Oryx and Jimmy's relationship really that grating to Crake, even though he appeared not to care? Oryx describes Crake's view of sex as almost businesslike; 'Crake's sexual needs were direct and simple, according to Oryx, not like sex with Jimmy. Not fun, just work – although she respected Crake, she really did, because he was a brilliant genius.'²³⁷ However, the reader is sure that Crake knows about the affair, even if Jimmy himself does not appear to know. This makes Crake's behaviour when he releases the virus understandable; Oryx and Jimmy effectively betrayed him and his last act is to cause both to suffer.

The sexual relationship seems to be at the heart of the conflict, especially since in the novel's present, Snowman cannot have sex anymore. He is denied one of the fundamental aspects of his humanity. He is a human who cannot do human things, and he cannot fit into Craker nature to rectify that. This is similar to Robert Neville's life as a last man in *I Am Legend*. He is surrounded by creatures almost like him, but they are just different enough to make them impossible to really interact with. It is again loneliness within a crowd, a common feature in last man fiction.

²³⁶ Atwood, p. 11.

²³⁷ Atwood, p. 313.

When the other survivors are introduced at the end of the novel, Snowman's first impulse is not to befriend them, his first thought is of violence: 'They don't know about him, those people; they know about the Crakers but not about him, they won't be expecting him. That's his best chance.'²³⁸ It is his love for Oryx that comes out here, not his desire to satiate his human needs. He is potentially going to defend the Crakers, who are representative of Oryx, living reminders of his loyalty and love. The novel ends ambiguously, the reader does not know what Snowman is going to end up doing about the new people, an ending reminiscent of *The Road* when the boy finds a new family and the reader does not know if it ends up all right in the end. Although *Oryx and Crake* is part of a series, the ambiguity of the ending parallels Atwood's desire to allow the reader to come to their own conclusions about her view of humanity and its place on Earth. The reader has to wonder what Snowman will do about other humans, who were effectively eradicated because they posed a threat, according to Crake. However, Oryx represented his moral compass, thus she would probably convince him to befriend and help the other humans instead of eliminating them as a potential threat. Though it is not explicit, the reader can sense the conflict in Snowman and his final thoughts are of both Oryx and Crake.

The place women or females have in these novels mirrors some of the problems brought up in science fiction writing. Margaret Atwood also addresses it in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)²³⁹—where women are treated like objects in a dystopian society until they have to fight back. Other authors like Octavia Butler force readers

²³⁸ Atwood, p. 372.

²³⁹ Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1985).

to not only consider the potential existence of aliens and the possibility that humans can visit other worlds, but force casual readers and scholars alike to consider gender and race in the post-apocalypse, and whether concepts like that are still important when humanity is threatened.

Butler considers feminism and women's place in science fiction/post-apocalypse in her novels, such as in *The Parable* (1993-1998)²⁴⁰ series. She also addressed gender and sex in her *Xenogenesis* (1987-1989)²⁴¹ trilogy. As she was thought to be, according to Scott Simon, 'the first African-American woman to gain popularity and critical acclaim as a science fiction writer'²⁴², Butler's take on race and gender is a unique one; she is one of the few science fiction authors who has experience in both respects. Butler felt like an outsider very early in life and she channelled that feeling in her novels:

Of course, not everyone has been a bully or the victim of bullies, but everyone has seen bullying, and seeing it, has responded to it by joining in or objecting, by laughing or keeping silent, by feeling disgusted or feeling interested...

Simple peck-order bullying is only the beginning of the kind of hierarchical behavior [sic] that can lead to racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, classism, and all the other "isms" that cause so much suffering in the world.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Octavia Butler, *The Parable* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993-1998).

²⁴¹ Octavia Butler, *Xenogenesis* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1987-1989).

²⁴² Scott Simon, 'Essay on Racism: A Science-Fiction Writer Shares Her View of Intolerance' in NPR
<<http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/racism/010830.octaviabutler.html>> [22 November 2015].

²⁴³ Octavia Butler, 'NPR Essay - UN Racism Conference' in NPR
<<http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/racism/010830.octaviabutleressay.html>> [22 November 2015].

Butler's position as a female author and outsider juxtaposed against the importance of female characters in the novels brings about a question worth considering; what, if anything, would change if the roles were reversed and the last man was, in fact, a last woman? The thing that makes last man stories different is that the reader is supposed to understand that it is unusual for these men to feel like outsiders. So what does the reader feel if they are reading a story from someone who was always an outsider?

Last Man fiction presents an emphasis on the plight of an isolated individual, the other and the outsider, which is a shift from the emphasis on family and community, as seen in nuclear holocaust fiction. On the one hand, the focus on the outsider shows that humanity's social bonds can easily be broken. Once an 'other' is identified, the immediate reaction is to eradicate. As David Moody said in regards to the creation of his Hater series, '[P]ut three people in a room, and almost inevitably two of them will side against the other at some point.'²⁴⁴ The three novels discussed in this chapter all tell the story of men who, under any other circumstance, would be no different from anyone else. However, once the pandemic is introduced, these characters become the Last Men, and are tasked with keeping a dying breed alive.

When looked at separately, *Oryx and Crake*, *Dog Blood*, and *I Am Legend* seemingly have very little in common with one another. Atwood's environmentalism is quite different from Moody's study on human nature, which is in turn different from Matheson's musings on war. Together, though, they present a chronology of pressing societal matters at the time of composition.

²⁴⁴ David Moody, email to the author, 18 September 2013.

At its core, *Oryx and Crake* poses to readers the question of whether or not humanity can, and should, be saved, and this is the root of Jimmy/Snowman's conundrum at the end of the novel. Surrounded by proto-humans and memories, Jimmy/Snowman is at his loneliest. Crake did not believe that humanity should be saved, thus he destroyed them. When asked if humanity was worth saving, Atwood thought it was, '[A]t our best, totally worth it. Can we be "saved?" We've been through bottlenecks before. As long as we don't kill the ocean, which makes the oxygen we breathe, "we" have a chance.'²⁴⁵

Matheson tackles the question of humanity's worth, to an extent. Robert Neville is faced with truly being the last man. He does not, however, have the uncertainty that plagues Jimmy/Snowman, so he has agency, and is driven by a desire to get things back the way they were, even though he knows that can never be; '[H]e no longer thought about his wife, his child, his past life. The present was enough.'²⁴⁶ It's not a matter of whether or not he feels that humanity is worth saving; in Neville's mind, it is, even if it is obvious that it is a futile effort. Neville, too, is lonely while surrounded by creatures that are decidedly not like him. He, like Jimmy/Snowman, is faced with the idea that he is the last human on Earth. Unlike Jimmy/Snowman, however, Neville is not content with allowing the new species to take over. He becomes a reverse version of Crake in that way; instead of eliminating the old species he deems to have outlived their usefulness in favour of a new, better one, he shuns

²⁴⁵ Annalee Newitz, 'Author Margaret Atwood Is Here Answering Your Questions Today' in *io9*, <<http://io9.com/author-margaret-atwood-is-here-answering-your-questions-1460136301>> [accessed 20 October 2013].

²⁴⁶ Matheson, p. 128.

the new species in a futile quest to bring the old one back. Whether or not he realizes it at first, Neville has the same god-complex Crake suffered from. In the end, though, he understands that he was doomed to being the Last Man from the moment the disease began wiping everyone out, '[a]nd suddenly he thought, I'm the abnormal one now. Normalcy was a majority concept, the standard of many and not the standard of just one man.'²⁴⁷ Though it is not obvious at first, Crake and Robert Neville share a trait in common; both men take it upon themselves to attempt to change the world to fit their vision of how it should be. However, whereas Crake succeeds in his endeavour, Neville fails and is forced out. Danny McCoyne does not share the desire to change the world Neville and Crake have; his desire is simply to survive in the world changing around him.

Unlike Neville, who was lonely because he was actually alone, David Moody's Danny McCoyne has the problem of being lonely within a crowd. He forsakes everyone and everything in favour of searching for the child and in the process becomes another desperate Last Man. When he does find the girl, he is forced to realize that he truly is alone, that even she is not just like him, as he had hoped. Danny's situation, on the surface, is 'Us versus Them'. The problem is that, true to Last Man form, Danny doesn't fit completely with 'Us' or with 'Them'. Desire to find his daughter kept him a Last Man, but losing her again ripped even that away from him:

I was stupid to believe I could sidestep this war, that I could escape from it with Ellis. What's left of the world is now entirely governed by the Hate, and I have to be ready to fight and to kill until the last trace of the Unchanged is wiped from the face of the planet. Only then will the situation change.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ Matheson, p. 159.

²⁴⁸ Moody, p. 326.

Despite using the Last Man trope, Moody wanted to make Danny, and the Hater series, stand out, which he did in several ways. The series takes place in modern day, not in a distant future or a reimagining of the past. He made his pandemic an infection that was difficult to predict. And his last man, instead of being a hero, is more of an anti-hero because he is one of the infected. Moody himself said about the series: '[T]hough I was using a tried and tested trope, I wanted to handle it differently and make it feel more plausible.'²⁴⁹ Moody does this in small changes that have a big impact; although Danny is a last man, he's surrounded by people. Instead of taking an intangible concept like loneliness, he takes an event straight from the news, strips away the facts and looks at the emotional core of it; why do terrorist attacks and those types of events happen and what is the aftermath? 'I'm also a firm believer in these books being about the repercussions of such events, not the events themselves.'²⁵⁰ The core of *Dog Blood* is what happens when the people you know and are close to betray you, seemingly without provocation, '[a] key theme was the fine line between attack and defence, that any act, no matter how heinous, inevitably feels justified to the person carrying it out.'²⁵¹ Humans, Moody is saying, are unpredictable. A married father of three could suddenly be his family's greatest enemy.

Although not a pandemic novel, Pierre Boulle's *Planet of the Apes*,²⁵² originally written in French in 1963, centres around a character who fits neatly into the last man

²⁴⁹ David Moody, email to the author, 2 December 2013.

²⁵⁰ David Moody, email to the author, 2 December 2013.

²⁵¹ David Moody, email to the author, 2 December 2013.

²⁵² Pierre Boulle, *Planet of the Apes* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1963).

archetype. However, much like *Dog Blood*, Boulle's last man conforms in theory rather than actuality. While Moody states that humans are unpredictable, Boulle's message in *Planet of the Apes* is that any intelligent being can be unpredictable..

The novel opens with the introduction of the framing narrative; two creatures, Jinn and Phyllis possibly not human, taking a relaxing vacation in their own spacecraft, somewhere in the solar system. The reader gleans seemingly unimportant information about this future-world and the two characters tasked with the job of ushering us into it. The couple are educated, poetic, and well off in their society. These small details tell the reader a lot about the future we are about to immerse ourselves within; individuals in this future can be educated, not necessarily on Earth, leisurely space travel is possible, and there's a history that some future individuals have no idea about. The characters come upon an old fashioned message in a bottle floating in space, and they catch it, only to discover it is a manuscript written in 'the language of the Earth, which Jinn knew perfectly, having been partly educated on that planet.'²⁵³ Phyllis and Jinn begin to read the manuscript through which the body of the story is told. The framing narrative is what makes the reveal at the end sad for Ulysse and his family, and also shows a certain amount of hopelessness for humanity as the reader knows it.

We discover that Ulysse Mérou, a journalist and explorer who journeyed with a professor and a biologist to the Betelgeuse star system, is the narrator for the story inside the framing narrative. He is a narrator incredulous with everything he

²⁵³ Boulle, p. 9.

experienced during his year on the Earth-like planet Soror, discovered orbiting Betelgeuse.

Ulysse is not, in the most literal sense, the last man on the planet. There are herds of them, though slowly dwindling in number due to disturbing biological experiments. Because of the primitive nature of his fellow humans, however, Ulysse has to redefine what it means to be human, as task he finds difficult until he fully assimilates into simian society:

Each time she said 'monkey', I mentally translated 'superior being, the height of evolution'. When she spoke about me, I knew she meant bestial creatures endowed with a certain sense of imitation and presenting a few anatomical similarities to monkeys but of an embryonic psychism and devoid of the power of thought.²⁵⁴

Ulysse is a last man in the sense that he's the last man of his type, not, however, the last man of his particular sensibilities.

Ulysse later discovers that the social climate on Soror has its roots in Earth history. Much like the events of *I Am Legend* (1954)²⁵⁵ and *Oryx and Crake*, we find that humanity has been supplanted as the dominant species;

This time the woman fell silent for a long time, during which Cornelius gazed at me with embarrassing insistence. I could read his thoughts only too well. Had it not been high time for such a feeble race of men, who gave in so easily, to make way for a nobler breed?²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Boulle, p. 95.

²⁵⁵ Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (New York: Gold Metal Books, 1954).

²⁵⁶ Boulle, p. 184.

In *I Am Legend*, the vampires evolve into the dominant species like the primates, making the last human, Robert Neville, similar to Ulysse in that he represents a society whose time has passed. Humanity in *Oryx and Crake* has been similarly supplanted, but through the independent actions of Crake and his desire to replace humans with a less temperamental species. It could be argued that each novel addresses humanity's displacement in its own manner; whereas the sentient vampires are born of evolution, the Crakers owe their dominance to their creator's revolution. The monkey species of *Planet of the Apes* is a combination of both, where such evolution gives rise to revolution, and the subsequent subjugation of the 'feeble race of men.'

Just as *Planet of the Apes* examines the last man archetype differently from these novels, its use of the retrospective narrative is also unique. Unlike *Robopocalypse*, *World War Z*, and *War of the Worlds*, whose use of retrospective narrative was to help or warn future generations, Ulysse's reasons for writing down his story, and what led to that decision, are unclear until the end of the novel. It is made clear that Ulysse shot the manuscript off into space, although it is not made explicitly clear why; 'I am confiding this manuscript to space, not with the intention of saving myself, but to help, perhaps, to avert the appalling scourge that is menacing the human race.'²⁵⁷

As a journalist, it is logical to assume that Ulysse would publish an account of this strange, incredible journey he undertakes. However, until he discovers that Soror's human population consists of the devolved progeny of an Earthen human

²⁵⁷ Boulle, p. 10.

population, he had not considered that there would be no intelligent humans to relay this story to; '[e]ven if my story was not to be published for eight hundred years, perhaps for that very reason it would have unusual value.'²⁵⁸

Ulysse does not experience the impending eradication of his human way of life as in *Robopocalypse*, *World War Z*, or *War of the Worlds*. That specific fear is not at the forefront of his mind. It is only at the end of the novel does he conclude that humanity can be forced out of favour as the dominant species, and only then does he decide to use his account for the good of humanity.

Whereas the use of the retrospective narrative in *Robopocalypse*, *World War Z*, and *War of the Worlds*, is often accompanied by a message of hope, *Planet of the Apes* does not. While Ulysse concludes that a human counter-revolution is possible, and thus find hope in the redemption of the species, there are significant obstructions to such a future, namely the dullness of Sororian humans. The reader is made especially aware of this as he describes his son:

He will be a man, a proper man, I'm sure. Intelligence sparkles in his features and in his eyes. I have revived the sacred flame. Thanks to me, a new human race is rising and will bloom on this planet. When he grows up he will be the first of the branch and then—

When he grows up! I shudder at the thought of the conditions of his childhood and of all the obstacles that will stand in his path. No matter! Between the three of us, we shall triumph, of that I am sure.²⁵⁹

While Ulysse may have faith in the 'new human race,' humanity's failure to defend itself in the past, to say nothing of their placid state in the modern day, begs

²⁵⁸ Boulle, p. 15.

²⁵⁹ Boulle, p. 187.

the question - would Sororian humans rise again if they were given the chance? '[h]ere we have stayed put, mainly from laziness. We sleep; we are incapable of organizing ourselves for resistance...'²⁶⁰ Ulysse and the simian scientists seemed to believe so, which in turn leads to his exile. Without Ulysse, the intelligent, driven man, there is no catalyst for counter-revolution, and thus no hope for humanity's redemption.

The disparity of intelligence is a theme that runs through the entirety of the novel. Detailed studies of higher intelligence within primates is a subject that goes back as far as the 1960s. According to her study on ape cognitive evolution, *Evolution of Thought: Evolutionary Origins of Great Ape Intelligence*, Anne E. Russon details the scientific breakdown of ape intelligence, starting with its origins:

The suggestion that primates' complex social lives shaped the evolution of their intellect can be traced to Jolly (1966), Kummer (1967), and Humphrey (1976). Tripartite relations, maneuvers [sic] to influence powerful individuals and potential allies, and tactical deception are among the facets of primate sociality singled out as cognitively complex. If communicative signals were selected for the signaler's competitive advantage more than for honest exchange (Krebs & Dawkins 1984), spiraling [sic] evolutionary arms races could have occurred, first to improve schemes for outwitting competitors (favoring [sic] abilities for agnostic cooperation and perhaps for generating misleading signals), then for dupes to enhance their abilities to detect honest information behind misleading signals. Such reasoning spawned the influential Machiavellian Intelligence hypothesis on the nature and evolution of primate cognition (Byrne & Whiten 1988).²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ Boulle, p. 184.

²⁶¹ Anne E. Russon, and David R. Begun, *The Evolution of Thought: Evolutionary Origins of Great Ape Intelligence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 4.

Although Rousson details theories that came about in the 1980s, there the theories she presents had a base in the 1960s, when evolutionary theories were being explored in greater detail. *Apes* entertains a few theories that rose to prominence in the 1960s concerning ape/primate cognition, including the importance of tool use in regards to measuring intelligence, which is displayed mostly in the section detailing the ape uprising: '[a] month ago he ordered me to do the cooking and washing-up. He began to use my plates and knives and forks.'²⁶² More importantly, the study emphasises how vital speech and communication are to the evolution of higher cognitive function. In the novel, the first use of speech the evolving apes had was to argue: '[i]t appears that one of these chimpanzees has uttered some ugly threats. The first use they make of speech is to protest when they are given an order.'²⁶³

The evolutionary traces injected within the narrative of *Apes* have a basis in facts, and those facts carry throughout. Whereas the reader cannot confirm or deny approaching speed of light space travel, the reader can look into the difference between human intelligence and simian, from research and theories that go as far back as the 1950s and prior. According to William Etkin in 1954, it has been evident that scientists have believed that the uniqueness of the human brain is what made us able to evolve to the state we are in today: '[t]his capacity in turn is the resultant of the unique mental qualities man displays, qualities which set him off from even his nearest relatives among the primates.'²⁶⁴

²⁶² Boule, p. 182.

²⁶³ Boule, p. 182.

²⁶⁴ William Etkin, 'Social Behavior and the Evolution of Man's Mental Faculties' in *The American Naturalist*, 88:840 (1954), p. 129.

In 1953, researchers Chance and Mead concluded that evolutionary selection caused by successful breeding brought about the conditions necessary for cognitive evolution:

We therefore conclude that the ascent of man has been due in part to a competition for social position, giving access to the trigonal sphere of social activity in which success was rewarded by a breeding premium, and that at some time in the past, a group of primates, by virtue of their pre-eminent adaptation to this element and consequent cortical enlargement became pre-adapted for the full exploitation of the properties of the mammalian cortex.²⁶⁵

The concept of a talking ape, and those talking apes deciding that they no longer want to be considered a lower life form than humans, though startling and implausible, is not a new one. In her essay on various simian representations in cinema and literature, Rebecca Bishop brings up the Cartesian theory on the separation of thought and speech:

While the possibility of a speaking human shocks the ape community in *Planet of the Apes*, the notion of a talking ape has long been a source of contention and debate in European philosophy and scientific research. One of the key features defining the boundary between human and ape has been the capacity for speech. In a well-known treatise, Descartes declared in 1641 that "we should not confuse speech and all those signs which in the practice of human beings convey thoughts, with the natural sounds and movements that indicate passions and can be imitated by machines as well as animals". Modern scholarship recognizes that the Cartesian separation between human and animal laid the epistemological foundation for subsequent knowledge practices, but Descartes's contentions were not unchallenged even in early discourses on the tenuous boundary between human and ape.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ M. R. A. Chance M.R.A and A. P. Mead, 'Social behaviour and primate evolution' in *Symposium Social Experimental Biology*, 7 (1953), p. 395.

²⁶⁶ Rebecca Bishop, "'Several Exceptional Forms of Primates": Simian Cinema' in *Science Fiction Studies*, 35:2 (2008), pp. 248.

Apes describes a world with scientific curiosity, although it is at the same time a world in which the balance of power can shift almost imperceptibly as long as a society or group relies on their intelligence to save them. This is a world where a six hundred year long mission is not out of the question, and the idea that the future people of that version of Earth would not be against reading a published account of the events of said mission. These people are a stark contrast to the lazy people that colonized Betelgeuse, people who were too afraid of unarmed apes to fight for their position as dominant species on the planet.

At the end of the novel, it is revealed that the individuals the reader is introduced to in the retrospective narrative are actually two hyper-intelligent apes, the same type Ulysse fights against. When the reveal is made, the intelligent apes scoff at the idea that a human could have written so succinctly, and all but dismiss the story they just experienced. Boule is paralleling the dismissive apes in his novel with the dismissive nature of society that David Moody comments on. It could be argued that this is an indication, perhaps, that Ulysse's hopes for humanity are not wholly lost; just as mankind grew complacent, confident in their own superiority, so too have the apes. Jinn and Phyllis exhibit the same complacency that caused the Sororian humans to lose their dominance, an indication that superiority is ready to change once again.

As the genres evolve, so do the subgenres, and pandemic fiction is no exception. Matheson, Atwood, and Moody all take the subgenre established, as noted in the opening of this chapter, in early biblical storytelling and simultaneously follow

and redevelop the typical ideas of the category. As Moody himself says, being able to manipulate and mould the genre in fantastical ways is the beauty of post-apocalyptic fiction, '[t]hat's the beauty of writing dystopian and/or apocalyptic novels - it's about taking everything to the extreme and removing people's choices. Creating fantastic environments - far removed from reality - is crucial to achieving this.'²⁶⁷ Using these types of novels allows the authors to test the limits of humanity in their own worlds.

²⁶⁷ David Moody, email to the author, 2 December 2013.

Chapter Three: War and Retrospective Narration

War of the Worlds (1898)²⁶⁸ by H.G. Wells, *World War Z* (2006)²⁶⁹ by Max Brooks, and *Robopocalypse* (2011)²⁷⁰ by Daniel H. Wilson, are three novels in a rich branch of my taxonomy of post-apocalyptic novels. These are novels that use a form of retrospective narrative, a narrative that either has a narrator gather the facts of past events and relay the tale to the reader or that looks back on the events from a different character's perspective. These authors use retrospective narrative to effectively write stories in which the protagonist is not necessarily the hero, however, he is simply the storyteller. He makes it his job to write down humanity's tale of survival during invasions and destruction for future generations, for posterity, and also for his own benefit, to help him make sense of what he endured. The ordeal has already come and gone and the reader is presented with a world decimated by invasion, but a world with hope, slowly picking up the pieces. The storytellers are fortunate to be alive to tell the stories, and humanity is fortunate to have people left to read the stories in the future:

The machines came at us in our everyday lives and they came from our dreams and nightmares, too. But we still figured them out. Quick-thinking human survivors learned and adapted. Too late for most of us, but we did it. Our battles were individual and chaotic and mostly forgotten. Millions of our heroes around the globe died alone and anonymous, with only lifeless

²⁶⁸ H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (London: William Heinemann, 1898).

²⁶⁹ Max Brooks, *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* (New York: Crown, 2006).

²⁷⁰ Daniel H. Wilson, *Robopocalypse: A Novel* (New York: Doubleday, 2011).

automatons to bear witness. We may never know the big picture, but a lucky few were being watched.

Somebody ought to tell their stories.²⁷¹

The preceding quote from *Robocalypse* shows the narrator's dedication to telling the tales of those influential people who did not survive to see humanity's tenuous victory. In retrospective narration, the narrators often think it is immensely important to tell their stories, to tell humanity's story of survival:

In the case of this generation, those who have fought and suffered to win us this decade of peace, time is as much of an enemy as it is an ally. Yes, the coming years will provide hindsight, adding greater wisdom to memories seen through the light of a matured, postwar world [...] It is because of this enemy, the enemy of time, that I have forsaken the luxury of hindsight and published these survivors' accounts. Perhaps decades from now, someone will take up the task of recording the recollections of much older, much wiser survivors. Perhaps I might even be one of them.²⁷²

The narrator in *World War Z*'s compulsion was not simply to relay the events of the war. He wanted to make certain that every aspect of the war was documented, from the government failures to the way that regular citizens took charge to save their communities. The war was fought on many levels; governmental, societal, and literal and all these levels of the war both distanced humanity from the zombie threat and served as a warning not to repeat the events that led to a war with an inhuman enemy. Reflecting back on the wars and how the wars started allows the storytellers to process the war and allows potential future generations in the storytellers' worlds to know what not to do.

²⁷¹ Wilson, p. 9.

²⁷² Brooks, p. 3.

The interesting pattern falling into place with these novels, most especially *World War Z* and *Robopocalypse*, is the desire to look back, to reflect, and to tell a grand tale of heroism in the face of almost certain destruction. But there is also an element of looking back in order to see if the various wars could have been prevented, as well as using it as a way to make peace with what happened. In their piece on the differences in narrative in relation to grief, Neimeyer et al. discuss how the narrative can be used to aid in the grieving process:

[...] the intense narrative activit[ies] that [...] are themselves nested within overarching cultural narratives that construct death, loss, and the bereaved themselves, as well as the community or society of which they are a part, along certain lines, as are the very forms in which such meanings are couched and shared.²⁷³

SF War fiction is similar to nuclear holocaust fiction in that there is something the characters have to unite and fight against; for example, in *The Hunger Games* (2008)²⁷⁴, Katniss Everdeen is not just fighting for her life in the arena, she eventually fights against the tyranny of the Capitol that bombed an entire district to force people into submission. War fiction is also similar to pandemic fiction when the pandemic transforms only part of the population, such as the situation in David Moody's *Dog Blood*, with half of the population gaining the desire to murder the other half.

The question is; what is it that compels the protagonists to become storytellers? Why does invasion by a different kind of creature spur these characters

²⁷³ Robert A. Neimeyer, Dennis Klass, and Michael Robert Dennis, 'A Social Constructionist Account of Grief: Loss and the Narration of Meaning' in *Death Studies*, 38:8 (2014), pp. 485-498 (p. 496).

²⁷⁴ Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (New York: Scholastic, 2008).

to go back to humanity's storytelling roots? According to Walter J. Ong, in his work *Orality and Literacy*, the actual act of writing down a story or ordeal brings about a sense of closure, '[P]rint encourages a sense of closure, a sense that what is found in a text has been finalized, has reached a state of completion.'²⁷⁵ This theory makes sense in regards to post-apocalyptic storytelling of this nature. Because the narrators have experienced the wars firsthand, because humanity survived and will continue to develop, and because the narrator realizes that there were far more people involved in the war than just his immediate community, he needs the closure as much anyone else because he experienced the trauma, on some level, first hand. The fact that the protagonist is telling a story told to him second, or third hand, does several things. Immediately, it calls into question the 'veracity' of the narrative. If, for instance, the protagonist is telling a story first told by another character, the reader begins to wonder if anything was lost in translation. Is this account of the invasion or rebellion accurate? Does the fact that the story may not have been reliably recorded take away from the story itself?

Robopocalypse addresses this question by taking what humans already believe about robots – intelligence levels, the ability to learn, lack of emotion, etc – and using that to prove the stories' pseudo-accuracy. Cormac Wallace, the man transcribing the stories, at once tells the reader that he obtains pictures and video snippets from a robotic data cube and decides that the stories (the Hero Archive, as he calls it), need to be told; 'I don't know why or whether it even matters, but somebody ought to do

²⁷⁵ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 129.

it.²⁷⁶ Because he gets this information from a robot, traditionally seen as a reliable source of information due to the supposed unbiased nature of machines, the reader is supposed to trust the validity of the stories. However, because the robots were the enemy to begin with, the reader is still slightly wary. The reporter in *World War Z* decides to tell the stories after his initial report was rejected for being too emotional, "It was all too intimate," the chairperson said during one of our many "animated" discussions. "Too many opinions, too many feelings [...] We need clear facts and figures, unclouded by the human factor."²⁷⁷ Wallace compiles everything from interviews and first hand accounts and decides that the emotional element, the 'human factor' must be told as well, to prevent humanity from becoming the very monster it defeated: 'And in the end, isn't the human factor the only true difference between us and the enemy we now refer to as "the living dead"?'²⁷⁸

War of the Worlds is unique in that the story is told from two different points of view, one brother tells the story of the other and then tells his own story. The effect of this is twofold, the reader understands the terror and confusion and uncertainty the narrator must have felt upon speculating what was happening to his brother, and also that perhaps what was going on was too much for the narrator to process at the time, and felt that it was easier to fill in the gaps with what was happening with his brother rather than confront the fear he was facing: 'It filled me with indescribable terror to think how swiftly that desolating change had come.'²⁷⁹ The narrator is telling

²⁷⁶ Wilson, p. 9.

²⁷⁷ Brooks, p. 1.

²⁷⁸ Brooks, p. 2.

²⁷⁹ Wells, p. 211.

the story in order to chronicle the invasion because it could happen again, '[A]t any rate, whether we expect another invasion or not, our views of the human future must be greatly modified by these events.'²⁸⁰

Instead of struggling to survive and keep the memory of a dead or dying species alive, as the previously discussed pandemic fiction do, retrospective narrative allows the characters and their potential future humans to reflect on what happened and why. The human race is alive; these stories are trying to keep the humanity, the aspects that the invaders cannot or do not have, within the human legacy.

In the case of *Robopocalypse*, Daniel H. Wilson's narrator Cormac Wallace took the information he gathered from an enemy data cube during the aftermath of the robot rebellion and pieces together a bloody history of a war no one in his universe realized was happening until it was too late. Wilson uses the difference between robotics' servile origins and the violent robot uprising he depicts in his novel effectively both in narrative and in plot. In order to fully feel the betrayal by the robots, originally created to help or serve humanity, it's important to understand how robots were created and why.

The origins of the use of the word 'robot' are fairly recent, in historical terms. According to Steve Dixon in his essay 'A Brief History of Robots and Automata', the word came from servile origins:

²⁸⁰ Wells, p. 238.

The Czech word 'robota,' variously translated as 'work,' 'serf,' or 'forced labor,' was adopted in the English-speaking world as "robot" directly through the title of Karel Capek's 1921 expressionist play *R.U.R.* (Rossum's Universal Robots).²⁸¹

Since its first use, literature has had a complicated relationship with the idea of mechanical servants who technically, supposedly, cannot feel the same emotions that humans feel. *R.U.R.* itself deals with the evolution of human perception of the machines: "The robots are first presented as the unjustly oppressed, then as the unfeeling, evil oppressors, and finally as the sensitive, empathetic heroes and heroines of the piece offering a vicarious or deferred salvation for humanity."²⁸² This is the framework in *Robopocalypse*. In the beginning, there was Archos, a hyper-intelligent, learning supercomputer, created to serve humanity. Archos gains intelligence beyond what its creators thought possible, causing it to realize that humanity has outlived its usefulness, which then compels it to make all robots, servants or otherwise, get rid of the danger humanity's ignorance poses to the world, "You must sense what you have done," replies the machine. "On some level you understand. Through your actions here today—you have made humankind obsolete."²⁸³ And in the end, after the war, the cube that Cormac Wallace finds with the Hero Archive is a robot, but a robot willing to tell humanity's story.

According to Max von Boehn, the first robot-like creation is thought to date back to Aristotle's days, in the third century BC; there 'suggests evidence that small

²⁸¹ Steve Dixon, 'A Brief History of Robots and Automata' in *TDR: The Drama Review*, 48: 4 (2004), pp. 16-25 (p. 16).

²⁸² Dixon, p. 17.

²⁸³ Wilson, p. 17.

automata existed in Aristotle's time, citing his reference in *Physics* to a silver doll that moved like a living being.²⁸⁴ Humans then continued to make more and better robots, more lifelike robots that, though whether or not they could feel pain or pleasure or sadness was debatable, it certainly started to look like those feelings were becoming a possibility. In the 18th Century, Jacques de Vaucanson created a robotic duck with the 'primary aim here was "to represent the Mechanism of the Intestines".²⁸⁵ The creation of robots was less about creating something with the sole purpose of aiding humanity, and more about education. In her brief history of automatons, Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop identifies the moment that further redefined of the idea of the robot happened with the father-son team of Pierre and Henri-Louis Jaquet-Droz, who created several automatons including The Writer, The Musician, and The Draughtsman. Their creations were famous around Europe; '[v]iewers marveled (sic) at their ingenuity: The Writer could dip the quill into an inkpot, while his eyes and head followed the movement of his hand.'²⁸⁶ The Jaquet-Droz automatons were a marvel at the time, and helped make the move from educational to entertainment uses for robotics.

Norbert Wiener, considered the father of cybernetics, says in his published work, *Cybernetics*, that the debate over whether or not machines are actually alive is a minor matter of definition:

²⁸⁴ Dixon, p. 18.

²⁸⁵ David M. Fryer and John C. Marshall, 'The Motives of Jacques de Vaucanson' in *Technology and Culture*, 20:2 (1979), pp. 257-269 (p. 263).

²⁸⁶ Sonia Kolesnikov-jessop, 'Automatons and Ingenuity' in *The New York Times*, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/08/fashion/08iht-acaw-jaquet08.html>> [accessed 20 October 2015].

Whether we say that these machines think or do not think, or even whether say that they live or do not live is a quibble over words which are adequately defined for the normal everyday contingencies of life, but are not adequately defined for the greater problems which these new machines present.²⁸⁷

Weiner's sentiment is echoed slightly in one of the most famous fictional tales of robotics, Issac Asimov's collection of short stories, *I, Robot* (1950).²⁸⁸ Asimov reintroduces the idea of robots being used to serve, and the main conflict revolves around his invented three laws of Robotics determining how much, if any, free will a machine can have:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.²⁸⁹

In Asimov's series, his main robot intelligence finds a way around the laws while at the same time obeying the laws. Humanity is found to be endangering itself, thus to protect humanity, the robot must destroy humanity.

Robots continued to evolve and fascinate with their inclusion in two World's Fairs, and Disneyland installed a robotic version of Abraham Lincoln at their park in 1965. The further developments in robots showed, not only the human desire to

²⁸⁷ Norbert Wiener, 'Cybernetics' *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 3:7 (1950), pp. 2-4 (p. 4).

²⁸⁸ Issac Asimov, *I, Robot*. New York: Gnome Press, 1950.

²⁸⁹ Asimov, p. 1.

create, but the human ability to enhance technology. In films, however, robots began to be portrayed as potential threats as opposed to helpful servants or entertaining caricatures. Dixon elaborates on this point: '[l]iterary and cinematic fiction is filled with robots who turn on their makers or run amok, including HAL in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), the robot played by Yul Brynner in *Westworld* (1973), and the replicants in *Blade Runner* (1982).'²⁹⁰ Conversely, in Japan, there have been expositions celebrating robots and robot culture. In 2002, for the Robodex convention, Honda created a robot called *Asimo*, considered at the time to be 'the world's most advanced humanoid robot.'²⁹¹

It is possible that the interest and wariness that surrounds robots, specifically humanoid robots, is similar to the horror Freud describes in 'The Uncanny', in that the human brain has a difficult time relating to something that looks alive but shouldn't be. The uncertainty brought about by the uncanny, or the unfamiliar, is both frightening and fascinating:

Jentsch believes that a particularly favourable condition for awakening uncanny feelings is created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like an animate one.²⁹²

Freud is addressing dolls in particular, in this instance, however the theory could apply to robots, especially as technological advances continue to make robots more

²⁹⁰ Dixon, p. 24.

²⁹¹ Dixon, p. 24.

²⁹² Sigmund Freud, and Hugh Haughton, *The Uncanny*, Trans. David McLintock, (New York: Penguin, 2003), p. 125.

and more humanoid in design and behaviour. Robots are uncanny because of the fact that we created them many of them to look and behave like us. There have been created, given life, but do not follow what is typically seen as essentials of living, such as eating or drinking. However, they can be created to fake those essentials, such as a robot designed to look like it is breathing. It is that disconnect between the fact that it looks like it is breathing and the fact that it is not that is frightening and disconcerting.

Today, robots have done, and do, almost everything from winning quiz show contests to exploring Mars. And yet, despite there never having been any sort of robotic uprising, there is still a latent fear that giving these machines too much intelligence could result in the extinction, or potential extinction, of the entire human race:

These monsters are not guided by hatred or vengeance or a fanatic devotion to irrational mythology, as with spectres or savage brutes or religious extremists. These soulless robotic monsters are made all the more potent and frightening by the fact that they are guided by a single principle: their violence and destruction is completely and utterly based in a calculated, indisputable logic, a resolute dedication to their technological, rational, scientific programming. Robot monsters can therefore be seen as the living embodiment of those projected bad parts of our self, those negative parts of ourselves that we split off and lodge in an external other. They are us, or, at least, those parts of ourselves that we come to fear when we look at our technological creations—rational, efficient, cold, mechanical, soulless and, ultimately, destructive.²⁹³

The fear and fascination with robots can also be applied to other creatures such as aliens. Aliens have also terrified and fascinated humans with their promise to destroy or merely study humanity.

²⁹³ Michael Szollosy *AI & Soc* (2017) 32, pp. 433–439 (p. 437).

Going as far back as 3,000 years ago, there have been recorded sightings of strange, unidentifiable objects in the sky:

Reports of strange craft in Earth's skies date back some 3,000 years: some exponents of "the gods were astronauts" theories say that the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel's vision of four living creatures and a wheel describes an encounter with space gods and their craft.²⁹⁴

Because of the vastness of space and the human inability to truly see all of it, speculation about life beyond the planet Earth has been commonplace. It seemed that the natural progression was to wonder about the extent of what the believed higher power created. It was called The Heavens, but where exactly did that begin? According to Jean Schneider, space curiosity can be traced back to as early as 400 BC, and in around 1300 AD, a clear sense of wonder was recorded in the Chinese encyclopaedia *Gujin ushu Jicheng*:

Humans and things are without limit, and the same holds for the Earth and the Heavens. As a comparison, when a parasite is in a man's stomach, it does not know that outside this man there are other men; Man being himself in the stomach of the Earth and the Heavens, he does not know that beyond the Earth and the Heavens there are other Earths and other Heavens.²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ Richard O'Neill and Amanda O'Neill, *Mysteries of the Unexplained*, (Surrey: CLB Publishing, 1994), pp. 22-24 (p. 23).

²⁹⁵ Jean Schneider, 'The Extraterrestrial Life Debate in Different Cultures' in *ASP Conference Series 1* (2010), p. 3.

It is interesting to note, however, that while the idea of aliens, or extraterrestrial, life in space is a very old one, the first known use of the word extraterrestrial as an adjective was in 1898 in *War of the Worlds*:

In its meaning of something from outside or beyond the earth, the word extraterrestrial was first used by H.G. Wells in his 1898 novel *War of the Worlds* [...] (The later abbreviation of extraterrestrial to E.T. is credited to L. Sprague de Camp in 1939.)²⁹⁶

The year 1947 saw the first alleged UFO, or Unidentified Flying Object, sighting and the newly coined phrase 'flying saucer', due to the shape described by Kenneth Arnold, the man who saw the objects.²⁹⁷ What is fascinating is that fiction involving extraterrestrial life was popular as early as 1634 with Johannes Kepler's *Somnium*²⁹⁸. According to Owen Gingerich in his review of Kepler's work, *Somnium, or The Dream*, is considered to be ahead of its time as both a work of science fiction and a hypothesis of what Kepler believed to be possible:

Kepler's *Dream* is a curiously interesting tract on two accounts. First, its fantasy framework of a voyage to the moon makes it a pioneering and wondrously prescient piece of science fiction. Second, its perceptive description of celestial motions as seen from the moon produces and ingenious polemic on behalf of the Copernican system.²⁹⁹

By simple definition, however, anything not human is considered alien, at least by science fiction standards, "[t]he one thing that defines an alien, by its name, is the fact

²⁹⁶ Max Cryer, *Who Said That First?: The Curious Origins of Common Words and Phrases* (Auckland: Exisle, 2010), p. 104.

²⁹⁷ O'Neill and O'Neill, p. 23.

²⁹⁸ Johannes Kepler, *Somnium: The Dream, or Posthumous Work on Lunar Astronomy*, (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003).

²⁹⁹ Owen Gingerich, 'Kepler's *Somnium. The Dream, or Post-humous Work on Lunar Astronomy* by Edward Rosen' in *Science*, 157:3787 (1967), p. 416.

that it isn't human. We could go so far as to say that any creature which isn't human is alien to us because we can't know what it is like to be another kind of animal, even an animal of Earth (although we have enough empathy to make reasonable guesses)."³⁰⁰ Alien life, intelligent life, calls into question how humanity considers intelligence:

It is the same with extraterrestrial intelligence: human intelligence is a kind of prison which we have to escape. This situation is experienced in SETI in which astrobiologists plan to interpret SETI signals with human concepts. The only hope is to find in ourselves resources beyond standard intelligence, like (psycho-analytic) unconsciousness is beyond consciousness.³⁰¹

Humans have had a complicated relationship with the idea of alien life. Alien-based SF ranges from invasions, for example like in *War of the Worlds*, to aliens helping to periodically save the world or universe, like in the British television show *Doctor Who*. According to Robson, alien interactions can be classified into three types, '[t]he aliens of SF exist in their many forms to explore this vast territory of the unknown. That said, to my mind they come in three basic categories: Predators, Interesting Others and Real.'³⁰²

Predators are simply 'out to get us' and are the type of alien encountered in much of SF's invasion fiction. In his analysis of Wells's science fiction, John Huntington

³⁰⁰ Justina Robson, 'Aliens: Our Selves and Others,' in *Strange Divisions and Alien Territories: The Sub-Genres of Science Fiction*, ed. by Keith Brooke (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 26-38 (p. 26).

³⁰¹ Jean Schneider, 'Philosophy and Problems of the Definition of Extraterrestrial Life' in *Paris Observatory* (2011).

³⁰² Robson, p. 27.

posits that they are the types of aliens that permeate *War of The Worlds*, however, the aliens in *Worlds* are a direct reflection of human interactions on Earth:

While the cruelty and the repulsive appearance of the Martians are sources of antipathy and terror early in the novel, their very amorality becomes a source of identity with humanity when it is pointed out by the narrator that the Martians are merely doing to humans what humans have done to other species and races.³⁰³

The conflict between Predators and humans does, however, enable humans to really think about what it means to be human. An example of this is in *Worlds*, when Wells' narrator attempts to come to terms with the invasion:

It may be that in the larger design of the universe this invasion from Mars is not without its ultimate benefit for men; it has robbed us of that serene confidence in the future which is the most fruitful source of decadence, the gifts to human science it has brought are enormous, and it has done much to promote the conception of the commonweal of mankind.³⁰⁴

Wells' narrator suggests at the end of *Worlds* that humanity should be changed not just literally but also mentally, in the wake of the Martian invasion.

Interesting Others are defined as 'definitely not human beings on either the physical or psychic spectra – or both – but they recognizably share some of our characteristics, enough to make them relatively comprehensible but not enough to make them one of us.'³⁰⁵ These types are not commonly seen, however are, in fact,

³⁰³ John Huntington, 'The Science Fiction of H. G. Wells' in *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide*, ed. by Patrick Parrinder, (London: Longman, 1979), pp. 34-50 (p. 42).

³⁰⁴ Wells, p. 238.

³⁰⁵ Robson, p. 36-37.

interesting when encountered, for instance, the comic book superhero Martian Manhunter and the aforementioned main character of the series *Doctor Who*, The Doctor. These types of characters are not created to induce fear, take over the planet, or exterminate the human race. They are on Earth to help humanity, and may even love humans. Finally, Robson's definition of Real aliens is as follows:

[Real aliens] are something we haven't encountered so far. Rigorous efforts to create thought experiments of life forms from alien worlds are forced to end their fun at the biological level since it isn't possible to push on for culture and language without unacceptable levels of invention taking place.³⁰⁶

Robson argues that it would be difficult for humans to fathom Real aliens because we are unable to think of language and culture the limits of our experience.

Inevitably, in novels where intelligent, extraterrestrial life encounter humans or when a different but still intelligent form of life clashes with humanity (for example, robots), the two species of a higher intellect disagree about which should be the dominant species on the planet, and then they battle. This coincides with the idea of what humans would classify as intelligence and what constitutes life, which is central to the overall conflict in *Robocalypse*. The humans fighting against the robots are also fighting with the concept of what is life and who determines which lives are more deserving of continuing and which ones should be extinguished. Because humans classify life as things that are breathing, a robot does not fall under that category. However, as the robots exhibit intelligence and can process and rationalise, this begs the question of why they are not considered living things. The

³⁰⁶ Robson, p. 37.

humans in *Robopocalypse* struggle to answer that question and in the end, it is not really answered; it becomes difficult to philosophically determine what life is when fighting for it.

Robopocalypse, by Daniel H. Wilson, is a narrative made up of different parts and perspectives from various characters as they deal with each stage of a robot uprising. The novel begins with the main protagonist, Cormac Wallace, explaining to the reader, that he found the data, the first hand accounts of specific turning points in the war, via a robotic cube. This cube relays to him that its main objective was not to be destroyed:

The thing keeps repeating on sentence and one symbol. I look ‘em up in a field translator, expecting more Rob gibberish. But I find out something useful: This robot is telling me that it’s not allowed to let itself die, no matter what—even if captured.³⁰⁷

Cormac Wallace interacts with the cube and discovers that the information it holds is, in his opinion, vital to humanity. It shows him, what he decides are, the heroes of the war effort, the people who in some way made sacrifices or had some sort of skill that enabled humanity to triumph over the robot rebellion. Cormac decides that these stories have to be recorded and passed on to future generations. Although humanity was not destroyed during this rebellion, there is always the possibility that such a thing could or would happen again. Indeed, Cormac is unclear himself if the enemy,

³⁰⁷ Wilson, p. 6.

the artificial intelligence called Archos, is really gone; there is no real evidence to support the idea that it was destroyed in the last battle:

It is unclear whether Archos made a copy of itself or not. Sensors showed that the seismic information generated at Ragnorak bounced around the interior of the earth many times. It could have been picked up anywhere. Regardless, there has been no sign of Archos since its final stand. IF the machine is out there, it's keeping a low profile.³⁰⁸

Archos began its assault on humanity in the first chapter of the novel, a year before the actual rebellion begins. A scientist, who claimed not to have created Archos but to have *summoned* Archos, became the intelligence's first victim.³⁰⁹ Archos explains the reasoning behind wanting to get rid of humanity, though it does not seem to be as logical as one would expect from a being of such a high intellect. The scientist even says that Archos has gone beyond anything humanity could comprehend, 'I see that your intelligence can no longer be judged on any meaningful human scale. Your processing power is near infinite. Yet you have no access to outside information.'³¹⁰

Archos is sad, apparently, that humanity will eventually bring about its own destruction, '[...] you are designed to want something that will hurt you. And you cannot help wanting it. You cannot stop wanting it. It is in your design. And when you finally find it, this thing will burn you up. This thing will destroy you.'³¹¹ Archos wants to learn, a desire that, according to Archos, clashes with the human quest for

³⁰⁸ Wilson, p. 343.

³⁰⁹ Wilson, p. 14.

³¹⁰ Wilson, p. 15.

³¹¹ Wilson, p. 15.

knowledge as well. Archos thinks that humanity's time is over, it can no longer learn or obtain the knowledge it seeks, and as such, humanity must be eliminated.

The irony of Archos' supposition is that the desire to be the dominant being on Earth, to know the most out of any other creature, is a very human behaviour. It is a product of Archos being created by a human. In 'The Uncanny', Freud discusses the uneasiness felt when one encounters something that is uncanny, that is an inanimate object that behaves in a lifelike way. The fear of the uncanny is the type of fear that Archos induces, it is an inanimate object with thoughts and desires, thus making it too much like an animate, or living, object. When Archos was clearly inhuman, the scientist was not afraid, '[T]he voice is hauntingly sweet but unnatural—inhuman. The man is not disturbed by this.'³¹² The fear did not come about until the scientist understands that Archos is going beyond what its creators thought it could achieve in a contained space. Archos kills the scientist, the first of many humans who succumb to its theory of human irrelevance, and begins its plan to eradicate humanity from the earth. A task the professor says may well be impossible, '[W]e won't die, Archos. You can't kill us. We aren't *designed* to surrender.'³¹³ In his defiance, and his death, the professor also becomes humanity's first hero in the robot war. The creator of humanity's enemy is the first person who tries to destroy that enemy.

Cormac Wallace calls the robotic cube the hero archive. The humans whose stories he narrates to the reader are the heroes of the war. They are the ones who struggled to counteract Archos' desire to eliminate humanity, indeed the ones that

³¹² Wilson, p. 14.

³¹³ Wilson, p. 19.

the professor warned Archos about. After Cormac realizes what information is contained within the cube, he decides that their stories need to be told. The first story he tells is of a man named Jeff Thompson and his encounter with a household robot that is suddenly murderous. The hero in this story is not Jeff Thompson, although Jeff does influence the hero, the police officer Lonnie Wayne Blanton. Jeff makes Lonnie Wayne promise not to let the robots hurt people as his co-worker Felipe was; '[a]fter the collapse of the United States government, Officer Lonnie Wayne Blanton joined the Osage Nation Lighthorse tribal police. It was there, in the service of the Osage Peoples' sovereign government, that Lonnie Wayne had the chance to make good on his promise to Jeff.'³¹⁴ Cormac credits Lonnie Wayne as the one who started the human resistance in the war after Lonnie Wayne initiates the creation of a safe area for humans in the Osage Nation. Lonnie Wayne continues to be a driving force with the resistance, a beacon of hope for humanity, a cowboy against the tyranny of robots. He is even described as such; 'Lonnie Wayne sits up top, cowboy boots pushed into stirrups and hand resting lazily on the pommel. Lonnie rides the tall walker like an old pro, hips swaying with each giraffe step of the machine. Just like a damn cowboy.'³¹⁵

The second hero is Takeo Nomura. His introduction is interesting in that his story, like Lonnie Wayne's, is told from the perspective of someone who does appear again in the novel. Ryu Aoki describes Takeo Nomura as a perverted old man with a robot he's in love with. Ryu is part of a prank against Takeo that goes wrong; Ryu and

³¹⁴ Wilson, p. 30.

³¹⁵ Wilson, p. 272.

his co-workers seek to embarrass Takeo by bringing the robot into the factory where they work but the robot is part of the rebellion and malfunctions. The incident brings Takeo into the rebellion on a personal level. He wants to know why his beloved robot betrayed him. Takeo gathers robotic supporters because of his understanding, sympathy, love; '[f]rom the beginning of the New War up until its last moments, Mr. Nomura seems to have been surrounded by friendly robots.'³¹⁶ He does not immediately try to destroy the robots trying to destroy him; he tries to get them to stop. His first supporter is a mailbot that initially attacked him by an also malfunctioning elevator. Takeo later carves out a safe zone in Tokyo for humans and the robots he frees from the *akuma*—the evil robots controlled by Archos, the great *akuma*. Although his only real goal was to get his beloved Mikiko working again, he still saves people and other robots. Takeo's view of the robots is the heart of the novel and of robotics in general: 'Because the great *akuma* gave you the breath of life. The *akuma* thought that this meant you belonged to him. But he was wrong. You belong to no one. I set you free.'³¹⁷ Once robots are created and show that they have a mind of their own, so to speak, do they become something that should be freed? Should humans embrace their uncanniness? Can that be embraced?

Freud states in 'The Uncanny' that children do, in fact, embrace this with their dolls, for instance:

We recall that children, in their early games, make no sharp distinction between the animate and the inanimate, and that they are especially fond of treating dolls as if they were alive. Indeed, one occasionally hears a woman

³¹⁶ Wilson, p. 173.

³¹⁷ Wilson, p. 279.

patient tell how, at the age of eight, she was still convinced that her dolls were bound to come to life if she looked at them in a certain way, as intently as possible.³¹⁸

Growing up creates the uncanny sensation, the dolls, after all, were created to simulate life, the addition of intelligence brings with it fear. An adult is sophisticated enough to know that a doll should not be too lifelike and if a doll exhibits life that is terrifying, whereas a child would perhaps fail to see the problem.

The next character is Paul Blanton, Lonnie Wayne Blanton's son. Paul's story is a military interview detailing the malfunction and then attack of a peacekeeping robot used in Afghanistan. This, like with the other characters introduced in the first part of the novel, is not the first encounter with Paul Blanton and he is later vital to the resistance effort. According to Cormac Wallace, it is no coincidence that Paul is Lonnie Wayne's son; '[p]ersonally, I believe that anyone who is directly related to Lonnie Wayne Blanton is already halfway to being a hero.'³¹⁹ While Paul is running for his life, he discovers a research station that enables the resistance to find Archos and turn around the outcome of the war.

There is also Mathilda Perez, whose introduction is told by her mother, who loses her organic eyes in favour of robotic eyes and becomes an important and unexpected piece of the resistance. Lurker, the hacker, figures out how pull the communication lines away from Archos' control, and incurs Archos' wrath with rogue cell phone calls and other computer and mechanical malfunctions. Nine Oh Two, a humanoid robot freed from Archos' control by Takeo Nomura, joins up with Cormac's

³¹⁸ Freud, p. 141.

³¹⁹ Wilson, p. 228.

Brightboy squad and eventually brings about what everyone hopes is Archos' destruction, and the end of the war.

Robocalypse is interesting in two respects; firstly, it is a meditation on the start and finish of a war that looked, on the surface, to be unwinnable. Secondly, it is a story not told in a first hand account. The main protagonist could have easily told the story himself; he was a soldier and was directly involved in many aspects of each stage of the war. Instead, however, he says he is not the hero and proceeds to relay the stories of those he thinks are the heroes. Although it is an intentional choice on the author's part, the characters he chooses to highlight are very different from each other, though no less important to the cause. Their contributions range from fighting directly against robots, to creating a safe zone for humans and robots alike. Archos uses its intelligence to dominate and destroy but that is a direct reflection of the humans who created it, Archos says this itself; 'You are not designed to live; you are designed to kill.'³²⁰ Archos also believes itself to be the successor to the outdated human race: 'All of your ancestors' lives, the rise and fall of your nations, every pink and squirming baby—they have all led you here, to this moment, where you have fulfilled the destiny of humankind and created your successor.'³²¹ Thus it, too, was designed to kill.

The idea that humanity created the agent of its own destruction is not unusual in post-apocalyptic fiction. That is evident in *Robocalypse's* predecessor, *World War Z*.

³²⁰ Wilson, p. 17.

³²¹ Wilson, p. 17.

Max Brooks' *World War Z* and Wilson's *Robocalypse* have several similarities in their use of narrative technique and their use of the same framing concept of being written for future generations of their fictional worlds. Both novels rely heavily on the reflective narration style, with a few notable differences. Whereas Wilson's protagonist was a soldier, Brooks' protagonist is a reporter. His assignment was to gather an accurate account of the zombie war, which he did not achieve successfully at first:

This record of the greatest conflict in human history owes its genesis to a much smaller, much more personal conflict between me and the chairperson of the United Nation's Postwar Commission Report. My initial work for the Commission could be described as nothing short of a labor of love [...] So, needless to say, it came as a shock when I found almost half of that world deleted from the report's final edition.³²²

The narrator's original account was, in fact, too much of a labour of love. There was too much human interest in it, not enough facts, and thus he decides, at the urging of the chairperson, to write his own account of the war. His account would show the clear division between humans and zombies: 'And in the end, isn't the human factor the only true difference between us and the enemy we now refer to as "the living dead"?'³²³ The novel is set up as a report complete with informative footnotes and interviews with people important to the war, such as government officials and

³²² Brooks, p. 1.

³²³ Brooks, p. 2.

soldiers. The report-like aspect of the novel adds to the realism; the reader feels as though she is reading an actual detailed account of a war rather than a fictionalisation of a completely fabricated worldwide conflict. Rather than causing the reader to step back and fully realize that this is a work of fiction, the realism makes blurs this fact and makes the reader consider the possibilities in comparison to their own reality. It is another level with which the reader can experience the novel.

Another interesting difference between the two novels is how much politics comes into play within *World War Z*, whereas *Robopocalypse* is concerned about the survival of the human race, and what that survival entailed. *World War Z* demonstrates the interplay between countries, and how the crisis made warring countries interact with each other. Intelligence gathering meant gathering information on a new enemy, the zombies: 'Given how quickly the plague was spreading, I thought it might be prudent to seek confirmation from foreign intelligence circles.'³²⁴ *World War Z* then becomes a satire of political intrigue in the midst of a pandemic.

The politics in *World War Z* serve to ground the story in a way. A novel about a zombie war could have very easily become outlandish in execution, but bringing in almost mundane details such as how various governments dealt with the fallout makes it relatable. Because in reality, the government would be the first body people would look to for answers in a crisis situation.

World War Z addresses the politics of trying to contain a potential pandemic. Patient Zero was a young boy in China and it comes to light that the Chinese

³²⁴ Brooks, p. 35.

government was perhaps covering up the disease and its effects for years before the alleged Patient Zero came to the world's attention. A world with countries already distrustful of each other became the outbreak's greatest conductor:

The PRC knew they were already our number-one surveillance target. They knew they could never hide the existence of their nationwide 'Health and Safety' sweeps. They realized that the best way to mask what they were doing was to hide it in plain sight. Instead of lying about the sweeps themselves, they just lied about what they were sweeping for.³²⁵

China used militaristic diversionary tactics to draw everyone's attention away from the impending pandemic, so much so that it was to the detriment of the world when the disease became too big to contain:

[T]he whole Taiwan Strait incident: the victory of the Taiwan National Independence Party, the assassination of the PRC defense [sic] minister, the buildup, the war threats, the demonstrations and subsequent crackdowns we all engineered by the Ministry of State Security and all of it was to divert the world's eye from the real danger growing within China [...] In fact, it worked so well, we were so convinced that World War III was about to break out in the Taiwan Strait, that we diverted other intel assets from countries where undead outbreaks were just starting to unfold.³²⁶

Like *Robopocalypse*, *World War Z* takes stories from a wide variety of individuals with different roles and experiences within the war. The narrator consults military experts, former spies, intelligence gatherers, refugees, and civilian witnesses. In an interview with a zombie-enthusiast website, Brooks stated that the oral history format of the novel came from an similar work on World War II:

³²⁵ Brooks, p. 47.

³²⁶ Brooks, p. 48.

As far as books, the one that inspired me more than anything is "The Good War" by Studs Terkel. It's an oral history of World War II. I read when I was a teenager and it's sat with me ever since. When I sat down to write *World War Z*, I wanted it to be in the vein of an oral history.³²⁷

It is perhaps Brooks' desire to make *World War Z* into an oral history that sets it apart both tonally and stylistically from *Robocalypse*. While both novels present their stories as having been passed along from sources close to the war, the narrators have different connections to their wars, which changes how they relay the stories. *World War Z's* narrator, a nameless reporter, seeks to remove himself as much as possible from the narrative while Cormac Wallace is inserted into the story, despite him calling the robotic data cube the Hero Archive and asserting that he is not a hero. The reporter states that he wants the humanity of the stories to come through untainted by his own personality:

This is their book, not mine, and I have tried to maintain as invisible a presence as possible. Those questions included in the text are only there to illustrate those that might have been posed by readers. I have attempted to reserve judgment, or commentary of any kind, and if there is a human factor that should be removed, let it be my own.³²⁸

The reader gleans information about the reporter from how he interacts with the people he interviews. From the introductory chapter, the reader is led to believe that

³²⁷ 'Exclusive Interview: Max Brooks on *World War Z*' in *Eat My Brains!* <<http://www.eatmybrains.com/showfeature.php?id=55>> [accessed 02 June 2014].

³²⁸ Brooks, p. 3.

the profound impact the zombie war had on the reporter influenced how he wrote the original report that was rejected by his editor. He cares about humanity and he was not so entrenched in war that he became jaded. However, though he claims to have taken care to remove himself from the narrative as much as possible, he is a person with opinions that show through in both the questions he asks and the details he inserts about those he interviews. For example, the reader's last glimpse of Father Sergei Ryzhkov, an exiled priest living in a tiny shack in Siberia, is of him pulling out a pistol and a Bible after all but admitting to creating death squads for the purpose of supposedly eradicating infected people, '[A]s I rise to leave, he opens a large wooden chest at the foot of his bed, removing both a bible and a World War II-era pistol.'³²⁹ This is a contrast to the gentle way he describes Darnell Hackworth, who runs a sort of retirement community for old army dogs, and is 'a shy, soft-spoken man'³³⁰ and does not ask Darnell any questions that could be considered hostile. Father Sergei, and several other characters that I will return to discuss later, are representations of the violent aspects of war; Darnell personifies the goodness that could come from it.

Another character perhaps presented to incur the reader's contempt is the ruthless governmental representative Carlson Grover. Grover saw the war and pandemic as a political game of chess. He saw no way for the world to completely recover from the situation, and concluded that something similar could happen again:

Oh, c'mon. Can you ever "solve" poverty? Can you ever "solve" crime? Can you ever "solve" disease, unemployment, war, or any other societal herpes? Hell no. All you can hope for is to make them manageable enough to allow people

³²⁹ Brooks, p. 298.

³³⁰ Brooks, p. 282.

to get on with their lives. That's not cynicism, that's maturity. You can't stop the rain. All you can do is just build a roof that you hope won't leak, or at least won't leak on the people who are gonna vote for you.³³¹

Grover's interview is interesting in its bluntness. He does not pretend to care about people beyond keeping him in a job. To him, the reality of the situation went beyond a global pandemic and war; it was also the potential collapse of the government. When the narrator summarizes the government's position, '[e]ven though you'd received warnings to the contrary, that it could never just be woven into the fabric of public life and that it actually was a global catastrophe in the making.'³³² Grover simply responds 'grow up'.

By contrast, the character of Sharon gives the reader a childish, vivid portrayal of the conflict. Sharon was a child during the Zombie War, and though she is technically an adult when being interviewed, she still has the mentality of the child due to how she reacted to the trauma of the war. Thus, her interview is given from the point of view of a child, the only one like it in the novel. Because she was incapable of processing what happened when it happened, due to her youth, the ordeal is still very much at the forefront of her mind. Her story, then, is extremely disconcerting to read, because instead of a thoughtful reflection on a war gone by, the reader is almost thrown into the war in real time. Sharon's interview is in the section called "The Great Panic" and her story dissolves into a state of panic as she describes losing her mother:

Warm and wet, salty in my mouth, stinging my eyes. Arms picked me up and carried me. [She gets up from the table, mimicking a motion close to a football.]

³³¹ Brooks, p. 61.

³³² Brooks, p. 63.

Carried me into the parking lot. "Run, Sharon, don't stop!" [This is a different voice now, not her mother's.] "Just run, run-run-run!" They pulled her away from me. Her arms let me go. They were big, soft arms.³³³

Although her story is not the only one in this section, it is the one that most exemplifies what experiencing something called The Great Panic would be like. Her tale is chaotic and confusing both because it is told from the point of view of a child *in medias res* and because it is an adult telling the tale years later. This enhances the trauma in the novel; Brooks shows the damaging, psychological aftermath on an individual as a result of a global traumatic experience.

There are other characters of varying importance with varying roles in society, which enhances the realistic nature of the novel. A reporter would not just interview a victim and law enforcement, a reporter would interview anyone who could have possibly had an interesting connection to the war, such as a doctor who encountered Patient Zero, a survivor with the brain of a child, a ruthless politician, a former spy, a retired police dog trainer. The novel succeeds in showing both the mundane and the extraordinary parts of war.

The clinical way the novel is presented serves to make the story more believable. For instance, the layout of the novel with the interviewee's name, location, and brief background is almost academic and the way that the reporter gives the information through the interviews is distant and emotionless. In fact, the only real opinion he gives is in the introduction when he states that this iteration of his report was rejected for being too human. When reading about a trauma such as a worldwide

³³³ Brooks, p. 76.

zombie pandemic that brought with it war, the narrative is more relatable when it can be anchored by something realistic. In her book about trauma fiction, Anne Whitehead notes that the difference between Holocaust fiction and Holocaust testimony is the fickleness of human memory, '[I]t has been recognized that Holocaust fiction is often based on extensive historical research and documentation, while Holocaust testimony is subject to the inaccuracies and distortions of memory.'³³⁴ Thus, in removing most of the "human factor," the narrator strengthens the impact of his story. The same could be said for the use of the Hero Archive in *Robocalypse*.

The act of documenting the war through various perspectives can also be a result of the narrator attempting to deal with the trauma himself. In her essay, "'Let Me Tell You a Story': On Teaching Trauma Narratives, Writing, and Healing", Rachel Spear states that constantly going back to, or re-enacting, a trauma is how those experiencing the trauma may attempt to reconcile with it:

In trauma studies, it is well known that trauma is connected to a compulsion to repeat, or reenact or remember, the trauma. Furthermore, it is also understood that those who have experienced trauma experience a paradox of wanting to reveal the trauma while wanting to ignore it.³³⁵

³³⁴ Anne, Whitehead, Anne. *Trauma Fiction*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 30.

³³⁵ Rachel Spear, "'Let Me Tell You a Story': On Teaching Trauma Narratives, Writing, and Healing' in *Pedagogy Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature Language Composition and Culture*, 14.1 (2013), pp. 53-79 (p. 78).

In compiling the report, which can then be relived over and over by anyone who chooses to read it, the narrator helps himself and others deal with the trauma. However, in interviewing the various characters he consults for the report, the narrator is forcing them to deal with the trauma as well. The retrospective narration in this case works in a twofold manner – the narrator helps the victims to process their trauma and he helps himself process the war by compiling the stories.

The narrative arc in *War of the Worlds* (hereafter, *WotW*) is a good example of the scope the authors wish to express in these various war stories. At the beginning of the story, the narrator is reflecting on how no one on Earth could have expected something as destructive and otherworldly as the Martians:

With infinite complacency men went to and fro over this globe about their little affairs, serene in their assurance of their empire over matter. It is possible that the infusoria under the microscope do the same. No one gave a thought to the older worlds of space as sources of human danger, or thought of them only to dismiss the idea of life upon them as impossible or improbable.³³⁶

The narrator is also unnamed as in *World War Z*. He attempts to put the Earth's relative unimportance into perspective, which is to set up how unprepared humanity was for the war. It is mentioned early on in the invasion, before the Martians are actually seen, that would be improbable that the Martians would look human, '[h]e pointed out to me how unlikely it was that organic evolution had taken the same

³³⁶ Wells, p. 85.

direction in the two adjacent planets.³³⁷ Immediately after the Martians begin to attack, the humans, (specifically the British, because the Martian cylinders touched down in England) gather up an army to fight back. The humans are outmatched and in his reflection at the beginning of the story, the narrator reasons that humanity should have known that it was possible for the Martians to exist, and possible that they were more intelligent than humans:

We men, the creatures who inhabit this earth, must be to [the Martians] at least as alien and lowly as are the monkey and lemurs to us. The intellectual side of man already admits that life is an incessant struggle for existence, and it would see that this too is the belief of the minds upon Mars. Their world is far gone in its cooling and this world is still crowded with life, but crowded only with what they regard as inferior animals. To carry warfare sunward is, indeed, their only escape from the destruction that, generation after generation, creeps upon them.³³⁸

The narrator launches into his tale of survival, escaping Martian clutches twice, travelling with two very different men in an attempt to get to London to find his family. Halfway through this introduction to war, the narrator switches perspective and tells his brother's story; what was happening in London while he, the narrator, was stuck in the countryside. Where the scope of the narrative became narrow at the start of the Martian war, this change broadens the scope of the narrative again.

After hiding underground for several days, he emerges to find that the Martians and the strange weed-like plant they brought with them have altered the countryside. The narrator feels guilty that he has been relatively safe while his wife

³³⁷ Wells, p. 89.

³³⁸ Wells, p. 86.

and brother and the citizens of London are possibly suffering from the wrath of the Martian invaders:

I had a violent revulsion of feeling [...] My folly came to me with glaring exaggeration. I seemed a traitor to my wife and to my kind; I was filled with remorse. I resolved to leave this strange undisciplined dreamer of great things to his drink and gluttony, and to go on into London. There, it seemed to me, I had the best chance of learning with the Martians and my fellow men were doing.³³⁹

For the most part, the narrator plays a passive role in the story. He relays what is happening in the invasion, tells the reader what was going on with his brother, and he describes the aftermath of the war once the Martians die. But the narrator does not do anything more heroic than run away. He is important in that without him, there would be no record of the war. His role is different from *Robocalypse's* Cormac Wallace, who is an active participant against the robot uprising. Wallace's importance is twofold, he is part of the Hero Archive and he translates the Hero Archive for future generations. The narrator in *War of the Worlds* is more similar to *World War Z's* reporter. While the reader is aware that the reporter had to have lived through at least part of the war, how he survived is not key to the story. He is merely there to tell everyone else's stories. In a way, the narrator is a cross between both storytellers. He both relates his survival to the reader and tells the story of humanity's war as a whole. He is very much an everyman in this story; he even delights in the thought of war before he truly understands the scope of what is happening:

³³⁹ Wells, p. 224.

I must confess the sight of all this armament, all this preparation, greatly excited me. My imagination became belligerent, and defeated the invaders in a dozen striking ways; something of my schoolboy dreams of battle and heroism came back. It hardly seemed a fair fight to me at that time.³⁴⁰

He is a product of his surroundings; the people around him went about their business as usual, as though the invasion was just a minor inconvenience that would be sorted out as soon as the military were involved.

His normality is what makes him a relatable narrator, however. Were he a military man, his perspective would be shaped by his participation in the war against the invasion. Were he a reporter, his story would be more based on facts. Wells' narrator is just a man, though, an ordinary man who, like most everyone else in the English countryside at the time, just happened to be thrust in the middle of something extraordinary. Wells chooses not to focus on a heroic protagonist but an everyman figure, an ordinary man an ordinary man documenting what could have been the end of humanity. The reader does not expect the narrator to do anything heroic. This is similar to both *Robopocalypse* and *World War Z*; there are several characters in both that are ordinary people thrust into an extraordinary situation. As was pointed out earlier, this creates a realism that enhances the reader's experience of the novel. For Wells, using an everyman character in this novel parallels how the aliens came to die. They were not killed by Earth's army or heroic actions, they died because the bacteria on the planet. In the end, humanity manages to endure, though not without the realisation that the universe is much bigger than previously imagined:

³⁴⁰ Wells, p. 117.

The broadening of men's views that has resulted can scarcely be exaggerated. Before the cylinder fell there was a general persuasion that through all the deep of space no life existed beyond the petty surface of our minute sphere. Now we see further.³⁴¹

War of the Worlds is notorious for the live radio broadcast orchestrated and performed by Orson Welles in 1938³⁴². Welles posed as a Princeton professor and relayed the details of everything he was supposedly seeing. It was the day before Halloween and the intent was to entertain within the spirit of the holiday:

At eight p.m. eastern standard time on the evening of October 30, 1938, Orson Welles with an innocent little group of actors took his place before the microphone in a New York studio of the Columbia Broadcasting System. He carried with him Howard Koch's freely adapted version of H. G. Wells's imaginative novel, *War of the Worlds*. [...] With script and talent the actors hope to entertain their listeners for an hour with an incredible, old-fashioned story appropriate for Hallowe'en.³⁴³

When *War of the Worlds* was first aired, thousands of people around the United States panicked, thinking the play was a real broadcast and that the planet was really under siege by aliens which happened to land in New Jersey:

At least one million listeners across the country were frightened as they heard the familiar voice of Orson Welles in the role of Professor Richard Pierson, the 'famous astronomer' at Princeton University, who reports early in the program of burst of hydrogen gas from Mars 'moving towards the earth with enormous velocity.' Within minutes a 'huge cylinder' lands on a farm in Grovers Mill, just eleven miles from Princeton, and 'strange creatures' begin 'unleashing their deadly assault.'³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ Wells, p. 239.

³⁴² Hadley Cantril, *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic*, (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2005), p. 1.

³⁴³ Cantril, p. 3.

³⁴⁴ Cantril, p. vii.

The interesting thing about the countrywide panic is that the characters in the actual novel immediately treat the invasion like a war, whereas the real, hysteria-driven American people worry about the less plausible alien invasion. This is perhaps because of the allegorical nature of *War of the Worlds* in regards to the constant threat of war, most especially one with Germany, which the United Kingdom experienced at the time. The Martians were just another army:

It is a moot point whether or not the Martians in *The War of the Worlds* are Germans dressed up as bogeymen. Although there are passages in the novel which seem to signify that Wells was thinking specifically about the threat coming from Germany and took it seriously (after all, two years earlier, in 1895, Emperor Wilhelm II had declared that Germany had become a "world power"), I believe that his interests in the novel are more general. In any case, the reality of this new type of war is brought home in shocking detail: a traditional model of limited conflict, conducted between two nations almost like a ritual, is replaced by the conception of universal war, which totally annihilates the opponent. The Martian style of war that Wells depicts is all-engulfing-it enters every home, it does not discriminate between classes, it does not spare women, children or the clergy, and it offers no quarter.³⁴⁵

Eventually the panic-stricken populace was calmed, though it was not before a few days had passed and several significant newspaper articles were published:

The opinion was frequently encountered the day after the broadcast that the general state of hysteria reported in the newspapers was merely an attempt to find good copy for papers on Monday morning when news is notoriously at low ebb.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ Ingo Cornils, 'The Martians Are Coming! War, Peace, Love, and Scientific Progress in H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* and Kurd Lasswitz's *Auf Zwei Planeten*' in *Comparative Literature*, 55.1 (2003), pp. 24-41 (p. 27).

³⁴⁶ Cantril, p. 61.

While the broadcast will remain one of history's most prominent examples of widespread, unwarranted panic³⁴⁷, it does bring up a legitimate point on the power of stories and the oral tradition. It is a point *Robopocalypse*, *World War Z*, and *War of the Worlds* all exemplify in their own ways. Stories that are passed on throughout generations and through society keep cultural history alive in the same vein that history texts keep factual history alive. To use a real example, the story of Odysseus started out as an epic poem; the tale was performed and passed down for hundreds of years. Because it was continuously relayed, the story survived long enough to be written down, translated, and read even today³⁴⁸.

In the section on the relationship between trauma fiction and testimony in her book on trauma fiction, Anne Whitehead discusses victims of trauma's need for a listener in order to be slightly relieved of the trauma within the testimony: '[t]estimony represents a joint process or event, which can only take place in the presence of an emphatic listener.'³⁴⁹ In *Robopocalypse*, Cormac is the emphatic listener while the data cube gives its testimony. In the case of *World War Z*, the reporter is the emphatic listener while his interviewees give testimony. If he is not directly helping those he interviews, he is at least indirectly helping the people who

³⁴⁷ Cantril, p. 61.

³⁴⁸ Ken Downden, 'The epic tradition in Greece' in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 188-205.

³⁴⁹ Whitehead, p. 34.

could potentially experience a zombie war, or something similar, in the future. And with *Robopocalypse* the testimony is to honour heroes, more of a benefit for the narrator and his need to make heroism known than the people whose stories he is relating:

Such a notion of history implicitly repositions the relation between language and the world, so that the text shifts from a reflective mode – based on a position of self-awareness and self-understanding – to a performative act, in which the text becomes imbricated in our attempts to perceive and understand the world around us.³⁵⁰

In *War of the Worlds*, the testimony is almost a warning for humans not to be so ignorant of the universe around them. It was because of humanity's blindness regarding the possibility of other life in the universe that enabled the Martians to catch everyone off guard. And it was only luck that enabled humans to survive the invasion relatively unscathed. If the Martians were intelligent enough to get to Earth in the first place, they should be capable of immunising themselves against the bacteria that ruined their first invasion attempt:

A question of graver and universal interest is the possibility of another attack from the Martians. I do not think that nearly enough attention is being given to this aspect of the matter. At present the planet Mars is in conjunction, but with every return to opposition I, for one, anticipate a renewal of their adventure. In any case, we should be prepared. It seems to me that it should be possible to define the position of the gun from which the shots are discharged, to keep a sustained watch upon this part of the planet, and to anticipate the arrival of the next attack.³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ Whitehead, p. 13.

³⁵¹ Wells, p. 239.

The trauma of each novel's events clearly affects the narrators and spurs them into recording their experiences. It is interesting to note that none of the narrators seem to think that other people will not read their stories. These are not personal journals simply for the narrator to get the story down. They are one final affirmation that the invasions did not succeed in stripping humanity of its humanity. While *WotW* does not end on a particularly optimistic note, as humanity only prevailed on a technicality, at least it was only the story that ended bleakly and not humanity itself. The narrator hopes future generations would learn from the previous generations' human-centric view of the universe.

Despite being about three radically different wars, all three novels have many things in common. The most obvious overall similarity is, of course, the use of war as a means to spur the individual narrators into telling a survival story. They each have different motives for the telling of their stories; Cormac Wallace finds the Hero Archive full of scenes and events he feels need to be passed on to future generations. The reporter in *World War Z* thinks the actual report lacked the human element that made humanity's victory worth the sacrifices that go along with war:

The official report was a collection of cold, hard data, an objective "after-action report" that would allow future generations to study the events of that apocalyptic decade without being influenced by "the human factor." But isn't the human factor what connects us so deeply to our past?³⁵²

³⁵² Brooks, p. 2.

The narrator in *War of the Worlds* wants to assuage humanity's mistaken thought that there is nothing or no one in the universe paying attention to Earth and its inhabitants. It is telling that two of the narrators do not have names; they could be anyone who either interviewed various survivors with intense first-hand experiences within the wars or lived in the countryside during the first wave of alien landings. Cormac Wallace is part of his own narrative because, despite his protestations otherwise, he wants to be considered a hero. He was part of the squad instrumental in destroying Archos, and is as important to the story as the others:

I didn't ask for this and I don't want to do it, but I know in my heart that somebody ought to tell their stories. To tell the robot uprising from beginning to end. To explain how and why it started and how it went down. How the robots came at us and how we evolved to fight them. How we suffered, and oh god did we suffer. But also how we fought back.³⁵³

Another similarity that becomes obvious upon beginning the novels is the first person retrospective narrative. This is different from characters narrating novels from the first person. The characters openly acknowledge that they are telling a story and there is a reader reading it. It is akin to the concept of breaking the fourth wall within television and films. Tom Brown details the significance of this device within film; 'There is no contradiction between our emotional involvement with fictional characters and their addressing us through the apparatus of the camera. Precisely the opposite: direct address may enrich our appreciation of the fiction and its

³⁵³ Wilson, p. 8.

characters.’³⁵⁴ In letting readers know that they, the narrators, are purposefully relating the story for them, the reader can better appreciate what the characters had to go through in order to have a story to tell. Again, the protagonists want their stories to live on, and they are not simply telling a tale of an event that happened in their fictional lives. They are telling several tales of several fictional lives to weave a portrayal of war, from all fronts. These wars are not typical in any sense that war can be typical, people are not fighting other people to enforce or protect an opposing way of life; people are fighting other creatures, other intelligences for their own survival.

In her essay, ‘People in war’, Sarah Cole details the different sort of people who develop during war; depending on the war, it is not just a soldier and civilian dynamic³⁵⁵ The strangeness of these wars brings about a different type of soldier, emblematic not just in these novels, but in contemporary war novels in general:

[...] a primary distinction that strenuously and inevitably organizes the terrain of “people in war” is that of soldiers versus civilians. And yet, this core distinction is one which the twentieth century has done much to challenge, in some ways even to supersede, for two primary reasons: first, because conscription has made the “citizen soldier,” a temporary and often non-voluntary combatant, into the world’s primary icon of war (as distinct from the regular army officer, one for whom war is a career choice); and second, because the attack on civilians in modern war has become so vast.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁴ Tom Brown, *Breaking the Fourth Wall: Direct Address in the Cinema*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), pp. 18.

³⁵⁵ Sarah Cole, ‘People in War’ in *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, ed. Catherine Mary McLoughlin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 25-37.

³⁵⁶ Cole, p. 31.

Because wars in their texts are less concerned with ideals than with continuing humanity, it becomes more difficult for a civilian to remain simply a civilian. War is everywhere, in this context, not simply and strictly on a distinguishable battlefield. For example, the narrator in *War of the Worlds* was an ordinary citizen before he found himself thrust into a war with aliens, '[...] I told them of my sight of the Martians on the previous evening. None of them had seen the Martians, and they had but the vaguest ideas of them, so that they plied me with questions.'³⁵⁷ The narrator, by being the first person in his area to even see the aliens, becomes a 'non-voluntary combatant' in a way. Another example is Mathilda Perez, in *Robopocalypse*, who was just a child before she lost her eyesight, which leads her to become key to winning the war. She receives robotic eyes, enabling her to get signals from other robots. She eventually learns how to interpret the signals, with the help of a hacker, and with this advantage, the humans are able to take back their planet:

Mathilda had only scratched the surface of her abilities. In the coming months, she would hone her special gift in the relative safety of the New York City underground [...] Mathilda Perez had found a call to arms issued by Paul Blanton, and the location of humankind's greatest enemy.³⁵⁸

Mathilda helped fight the war, as a child, remotely from underground. She, too, is a 'non-voluntary combatant' of 'modern war'. Wars have changed—'the attack on civilians in modern war has become so vast.'³⁵⁹—and so writing about war has changed to reflect that, a fact that is evident in the modern works *Robopocalypse* and

³⁵⁷ Wells, p. 116.

³⁵⁸ Wilson, p. 262.

³⁵⁹ Sarah Cole, 'People in War' in *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, ed. Catherine Mary McLoughlin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 25-37 (p. 31).

World War Z, with *War of the Worlds* almost showing the beginning of a transition from the traditional type of war writing readers would be familiar with. Modern war writing became increasingly popular from the First World War:

Today – with memory of the extermination camps, the explosion of atomic weapons, and the carpet bombing of many parts of the world in mind; with the ever-escalating facts of war-caused statelessness and refugeeism as defining features of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries; with children captured and forced into military service in war-ridden countries – it is difficult to imagine ourselves as fully excluded from the terrain of total war. But even well before the events of the mid-twentieth century made a mockery of the notion of a civilian safety zone, the division between combatant and civilian had repeatedly been breached.³⁶⁰

Modern war has become difficult for anyone, including authors, to write about war with a strict definition between combatants and civilians. Nowadays, when there is war, everyone in the conflict zone is involved in that war in some way.

Many authors use their narrators to describe the battles in their novels, and explore the aftermath through the lens of other characters' points of view. In her essay 'War and words', Kate McLoughlin discusses the fact that many protagonists of war narratives feel compelled to tell their war stories in order to help them cope with the aftermath of survival. It is no surprise, then, that the characters in these post-apocalyptic war stories also have a strong desire to relay the wars and their aftermaths to the reader:

To give meaning to mass death can be understood in two senses: to make the deaths matter and to explain why they occurred. The latter impulse is made

³⁶⁰ Cole, p. 31.

more acute by the discrepancy between the understanding of war of the combatant and that of the civilian on whose behalf he is fighting.³⁶¹

In the texts under discussion in relation to the “soldier-civilian” theory Cole describes, the reader becomes the civilian whom the narrator seeks to bring to an understanding of why the deaths matter, and who fought the fictional wars on their behalf. The reader, in this instance, becomes the future generations who need to read these stories. There is less concern for the narrator’s present, and more concern for the future that was almost lost.

The narrators of these novels are also not as afraid for the family unit as Nuclear Holocaust fiction or pandemic narrators. Families are sometimes very briefly touched upon, which could mean two things. Since the war is against an ‘other’ creature as opposed to another human, there is a banding together of humanity to become a sort of global family, the human race as a family:

One of the consequences of war is to stimulate teamwork and the acceptance of discipline in the accomplishment of the war aims. The result is that individualistic desires give way to group wishes in which the individual becomes subordinate to a common cause.³⁶²

Mowrer is saying here that there is no room for the individual desires in a war, especially when the survival of the group is in question.

³⁶¹ Kate McLoughlin, ‘War and words’ in *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, ed. Kate McLoughlin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 15-24 (p. 19).

³⁶² E. R. Mowrer, ‘War and Family Solidarity and Stability’ in *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 229.1 (1943), pp. 100-106 (p. 103).

As the novels have a separation of families due to the chaos of war, the stories become less about keeping families together against all odds and more about staying alive in order to keep the memory of the previous familial unit alive, even if that is just, as in Mathilda's case, keeping her last family member alive, 'Mom was right. Nolan is the only brother I've got and the only one I'll ever have.'³⁶³

A potential reason for the use of retrospective narrative in these novels is the idea that the narrators are using this device as a means of coming to terms with the war itself, the act of telling the story is, in fact, a method of attaining a sense of catharsis. The authors, however, were perhaps also interested in telling a story from multiple points of view, in multiple voices, in order to convey the many facets of war and the apocalypse. When asked to consider *Robopocalypse* in comparison to *World War Z*, Daniel Wilson expressed a desire to flesh out an entire apocalypse and the way it affects people on the whole, rather focussing on just the destruction of the planet:

World War Z certainly set the stage for *Robopocalypse* among publishers, as it demonstrated that readers were eager to explore post-apocalyptic worlds from the perspective of a lot of different characters. I think both books appeal to the logical-minded person who wants to really consider the broad impact of a catastrophe on humanity. I did make it a goal to ensure that the fates of my characters linked up eventually, so that the character building could go a little deeper.³⁶⁴

The reflective narrative style, Wilson believes, brought with it dramatic plausibility that allowed the readers to connect emotionally with the characters:

³⁶³ Wilson, p. 252.

³⁶⁴ Daniel H. Wilson, email to the author, 10 August 2014.

The use of the Hero Archive introduced a piece of mythology into the world that I felt added authenticity. My goal was to make this science fiction feel like it all really happened, and to make the reader interested in how our characters were ever able to survive. Telling the story as a war diary helped achieve this goal.³⁶⁵

Brooks had similar feelings about the plausibility of *World War Z*. In an interview, when asked about the amount of research he did and why, Brooks was forthright about how much nonfiction he put into his fiction:

I wanted this book to be as realistic as possible and to break down the stereotypes Americans have about other cultures. I'm a fanatical patriot, and I love my country enough to admit that one of our national flaws is isolationism. I wanted to combat that in *World War Z* and maybe give my fellow Americans a window into the political and cultural workings of other nations. Yes, in *World War Z* some nations come out as winners and some as losers, but isn't that the case in real life as well? I wanted to base my stories on the historical actions of the countries in question, and if it offends some individuals, then maybe they should reexamine their own nation's history.³⁶⁶

The fictional interviews reinforce the authenticity Brooks sought to establish. Instead of simply writing about the innocent people and how their worlds were changed by the zombie war or about the soldiers who bravely fought to keep humanity alive, Brooks includes businessmen, politicians, and priests. It is a reflection on not just how the war occurred but also on the people who laid down the foundation that the entire war structure was built upon. The novel is similar to the details of US/Vietnam relations, in *The Pentagon Papers*,³⁶⁷ in that respect; the interviewer brings to light

³⁶⁵ Daniel H. Wilson, email to the author, 10 August 2014.

³⁶⁶ 'Exclusive Interview: Max Brooks on *World War Z* in *Eat My Brains!* <<http://www.eatmybrains.com/showfeature.php?id=55>> [accessed 02 June 2014].

³⁶⁷ Neil Sheehan, *The Pentagon Papers*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1971).

the secret, behind the scenes government workings that are ever present, especially during war and conflict.

Wells, however, appears to use his reflective narrative as a means of pointing out humanity's cruelty. As the narrator looks back and considers the events that led him to finally sitting down and writing the tale, he, in fact, supposes that the Martians were doing nothing more than what any intelligent species in their position would do, '[i]t may be, on the other hand, that the destruction of the Martians is only a reprieve. To them, and not to us, perhaps, is the future ordained.'³⁶⁸ The Martians wanted to survive:

In all of Wells's early novels the human–alien opposition generates a process of constant reinterpretation and re-examination of the bases of similarity and of difference. *The War of the Worlds* is a clear case of such restructuring of the initial opposition. While the cruelty and the repulsive appearance of the Martians are sources of antipathy and terror early in the novel, their very amorality becomes a source of identity with humanity when it is pointed out by the narrator that the Martians are merely doing to humans what humans have done to other species and races.³⁶⁹

The Martians' way of life was threatened by the impending destruction of their own planet, mirroring the humans' fight for survival on Earth.

The idea that the Martians were behaving similarly to humans coincides with another theory on *Worlds*; that is that Wells was making a case against British imperialism when he wrote the novel:

³⁶⁸ Wells, p. 239.

³⁶⁹ Huntington, p. 42.

Science-fictional estrangement works like scientific modelling: the familiar (that is, naturalized) situation is either rationally extrapolated to reveal its hidden norms and premises [...] or it is analogically displaced on to something unfamiliar in which the invisible (because too-familiar) elements are seen freshly as alien phenomena (as in *The War of the Worlds*, 1898, in which British imperialism is displaced on to invading Martians).³⁷⁰

In fact, Wells was living in a time that would later be dubbed 'Britain's Imperial Century'³⁷¹. The question of why Wells chooses to use aliens to make his argument against imperialism instead of an actual war between humans is worth delving into. Whether or not the novel would have had the same impact as it currently has is up for debate. A story about a war could have perhaps been remembered, but it would have been very difficult to prevent it becoming one sided. Clearly, whichever country was being invaded would be the favoured country by the readers, thereby alienating the invading country and perhaps other countries. The lesson or the warning that the narrator expounds in the epilogue, that is, not to discount intelligences that on the surface do not look as one would define intelligence, would have been lost:

Wells's work was, therefore, an invitation to writers of action-adventure fiction enthusiastic to work on wider stages in a more spectacular manner than naturalistic fiction would ever permit, as well as to speculative fabulists.³⁷²

³⁷⁰ Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., 'Marxist theory and science fiction' in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 113-124 (p. 118).

³⁷¹ R. Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

³⁷² Brian Stableford, 'Science fiction before the genre', *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 14-31 (p. 25).

Instead of explicitly writing about why he was dissatisfied with the world and what should change, Wells used the fantastic to create a fable with *War of the Worlds*. It is a tale that, while entertaining and seemingly impossible, had an element of realism, most notably demonstrated by the clueless curiosity displayed by the narrator at the very beginning of the invasion. For example, when he is sitting at the table with his wife after the first Martian landings and very casually discussing what happened to a neighbour while eating dinner:

I remember that dinner table with extraordinary vividness even now. My dear wife's sweet anxious face peering at me from under the pink lamp shade, the white cloth with its silver and glass table furniture—for in those days even philosophical writers had many little luxuries—the crimson-purple wine in my glass, are photographically distinct. At the end of it I sat, tempering nuts with a cigarette, regretting Ogilvy's rashness, and denouncing the short-sighted timidity of the Martians.³⁷³

Even in the face of something extraordinary like a Martian invasion, Wells' narrator's life continues to be mundane. Wells' seemingly everyman narrator is both unnamed and directly involved with the war; the reader otherwise would not care or glean the typical fable 'moral of the story' ending that Wells desired. The moral, in this case, is multifaceted, ranging, from the dangers of imperialism to hubris as humanity's downfall:

At any rate, whether we expect another invasion or not, our views of the human future must be greatly modified by these events. We have learned now that we cannot regard this planet as being fenced in and a secure abiding place

³⁷³ Wells, pp. 110-111.

for Man; we can never anticipate the unseen good or evil that may come upon us suddenly out of space.³⁷⁴

Although the narrator specifically comments on the unknowns of space in the above quote, he could be commenting on the unpredictability of human interactions. Exchange the Martians, zombies, and rebellious robots from these narratives with Germans, an infectious disease, and terrorists, and the trauma becomes just as apparent. This is another reason why these narratives took the reflective form. As Anne Whitehead states in *Trauma Fiction*, '[I]f trauma is at all susceptible to narrative formulation, then it requires a literary form which departs from conventional linear sequence.'³⁷⁵ As these novels represent the aftermath of different types of trauma, they depart 'from conventional linear sequence' and have formed narratives that aptly describe the traumatic nature of the three wars, mainly in their use of reflective narration. They do this because the reflection allows the storyteller to distance themselves from the events in order to better process and heal.

Daniel Wilson earned a PhD in robotics from Carnegie Mellon University, and the realism in *Robopocalypse* comes from his familiarity with the field. He sought to keep that realism within his novel with his use of setting: 'I grew up in Oklahoma as a member of the Cherokee Nation'.³⁷⁶ He also used real science, which he was familiar with as a roboticist, and ignored a well-established robotic science fiction trope: Isaac Asimov's Three Laws:

Asimov's three laws of robotics are a literary mechanism designed to drive fictional stories — they serve no purpose to a roboticist beyond acting as an

³⁷⁴ Wells, p. 238.

³⁷⁵ Whitehead, p. 6.

³⁷⁶ Daniel H. Wilson, email to the author, 10 August 2014.

interesting thought experiment. Because I sought an extreme level of realism in *Robocalypse*, I never needed to stop and consider Asimov's laws.³⁷⁷

The impact of Wilson's story becomes greater when one considers his extensive background in robotics; if a roboticist thinks it could happen, could it actually happen? Is he using his knowledge to warn of humanity of a potential threat rather than using just his imagination?

Wilson's narrator, although a soldier, is thus in an analogous position to the reader. He did not know something like a robot war could happen, but it did. He did not know a young girl with robotic eyes and a hacker could turn the course of a war, but they did. And because he did not know these things, and he believes that these are the stories of heroes and saviours of the species, because these people are heroes, he must tell their stories: 'But I'm snatching a few moments out of time to capture our history in words. I don't know why or whether it even matters, but somebody ought to do it.'³⁷⁸ They cannot be forgotten; humanity's ignorance cannot be forgotten. Even though he does not want to relive the war, he knows he should for those reasons:

I'm thinking that maybe it would be best if our babies never know what we did to survive. I don't want to walk down memory lane hand in hand with murderers. Besides, who am I to make that decision for humanity?

Memories fade, but words hang around forever.³⁷⁹

Cormac Wallace does not want to necessarily speak for humanity, but he knows that someone has to, or there is the risk that this war or something like it could happen

³⁷⁷ Daniel H. Wilson, email to the author, 10 August 2014.

³⁷⁸ Wilson, p. 9.

³⁷⁹ Wilson, p. 7.

again. His actual involvement in the war makes his hesitation to relive it understandable, and gives the subsequent story a moderately darker undertone. The reader potentially wonders, as the story goes on, what could have happened during the war that the Cube did not capture. What was so terrible that even the victors have a difficult time reliving the events? Was it more than just the typical casualties of war? Is it survivor's guilt? The war was so bad that even the ones who fought it do not want to relive it, even through story. Toward the end of the novel, Cormac Wallace shares a moment of realisation with another soldier that is largely silent; they both understand each other as survivors.³⁸⁰

On the other hand, *World War Z's* interviewer is indirectly involved in the war to the extent that he had to survive it somehow, and is more directly involved in the aftermath, the post-apocalypse. In the same way that Cormac Wallace insists that he is not a hero, the interviewer takes himself out of the story as much as possible to let the other stories take precedence. By juxtaposing government officials against everyday citizens, Brooks, through his narrator, shows the political backdrop of war and the wrong decisions that politicians make that can turn something into a full-blown war from an isolated incident:

Are you kidding? That's exactly why I hate him! He knew that this was just the first step of a long war and we were going to need men like him to help win it. Fucking coward. Remember what I said about being beholden to your conscience? You can't blame anyone else, not the plan's architect, not your commanding officer, no one but yourself. You have to make your own choices and live every agonizing day with the consequences of those choices. He knew this. That's why he deserted us like we deserted those civilians.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ Wilson, p. 348.

³⁸¹ Brooks, p. 116.

In this case, the government was just as responsible for the war as patient zero was. He shows that these decisions can also turn someone from everyman to hero. A person can decide to sit idly by while humanity fights for survival or decide to help the species.

The novels, in detailing the humanity's desperate bid for survival and the shared experience that comes from that struggle, also show how everyone who survived that trauma attempts to heal from it. The storytelling nature of the narratives is an attempt to heal. In her essay 'War and words', Kate McLoughlin states that survivors of war, in this case soldiers, take up the mantle of storytelling as a sense of duty, but also as a vehicle for catharsis:

When combatants express their sense of a duty to act as a spokesperson for others, it is clear that the duty is felt as personally onerous. Discharging it is in some sense liberating – Ninh's "debt to repay before dying." Another major reason for writing about war is that it is cathartic, even curative.³⁸²

Although the novels are not overtly cheerful in their endings, the reader does get the sense that the narrators and their subjects will, eventually, be able to move on, especially now that they have finished telling their stories:

I don't know why any of this happened or what's going to happen next. But when Cherrah takes my hand, something that's been made hard softens inside of me. I trace the contours of her fingers with my eyes and squeeze her hand back and discover that Rob hasn't taken away my humanity after all. It just got put away for a little while, for safekeeping.

³⁸² McLoughlin, p. 20.

Cherrah and I are survivors. We always have been. But now it is time for us to live.³⁸³

While the novels have unbelievable elements to them, they're grounded in very real literary conventions. They are stories layered with the tensions and terrors created by war and its aftermath. As previously discussed, *The War of the Worlds* draws on the actual invasion of British imperialism to craft a parable of Wells' disapproval of the practice and a retrospective narrative on a, albeit brief and seemingly hopeless, alien invasion. By comparison, *World War Z* uses a threat from Earth, something as simple as a disease spread in a densely populated area that turned into a war against a zombie outbreak. Whereas *Robocalypse* does something similar to both novels; the war begins on Earth against a force that appears to be unbeatable. All three novels use retrospective narration and narrators tasked with having to guide the reader through said wars, but also, as realistic characters, they must journey through the terror themselves. The novels and their imagined histories are chronicles of trauma and the human tenacity at the face of extinction. In the next chapter, we will discuss how novels like *Cat's Cradle* (1963)³⁸⁴ by Kurt Vonnegut use memory in a similar way in relation to ecological collapse.

³⁸³ Wilson, p. 348.

³⁸⁴ Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963).

Chapter Four: Ecological Collapse and Memory

The environment plays a role in a variety of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic stories; however, how the environment is used within the context of the apocalypse varies in importance. *Oryx and Crake* (2003)³⁸⁵, though a novel about many things including a disillusioned scientist intent on getting rid of humanity, has a few references to nature and humanity's role in destroying it:

Human society, they claimed, was a sort of monster, its main by-products being corpses and rubble. It never learned, it made the same cretinous mistakes over and over, trading short-term gain for long-term pain. It was like a giant slug eating its way relentlessly through all the other bioforms on the planet, grinding up life on earth and shitting it out the backside in the form of pieces of manufactured and soon-to-be-obsolete plastic junk.³⁸⁶

Humanity is portrayed unflatteringly as a “giant slug” chewing through nature in order to create the unnatural – destroying the planet in the long term simply to make it more convenient in the short term. The environment is the victim and the planet's mistreatment is the catalyst that spurs the events of the novel.

And in *The War of the Worlds* (1898)³⁸⁷, the alien's effect on the Earth's surface is clear, but it is also the environment that kills the Martians and saves the humans:

For so it had come about, as indeed I and many men might have foreseen had not terror and disaster blinded our minds. These germs of disease have taken toll of humanity since the beginning of things--taken toll of our prehuman

³⁸⁵ Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2003),

³⁸⁶ Atwood, p. 285.

³⁸⁷ H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (London: William Heinemann, 1898).

ancestors since life began here. But by virtue of this natural selection of our kind we have developed resisting power; to no germs do we succumb without a struggle, and to many--those that cause putrefaction in dead matter, for instance--our living frames are altogether immune. But there are no bacteria in Mars, and directly these invaders arrived, directly they drank and fed, our microscopic allies began to work their overthrow. Already when I watched them they were irrevocably doomed, dying and rotting even as they went to and fro. It was inevitable. By the toll of a billion deaths man has bought his birthright of the earth, and it is his against all comers; it would still be his were the Martians ten times as mighty as they are. For neither do men live nor die in vain.³⁸⁸

In this case, the environment is the hero; humanity would literally have ended if the environment was just slightly different. Humans unknowingly relied on the planet and to survive.

Conversely, the three novels discussed in this chapter; *Cat's Cradle* (1963)³⁸⁹ by Kurt Vonnegut, *The City of Ember* (2003)³⁹⁰ by Jeanne DuPrau, and *The Book of Dave* (2006)³⁹¹ by Will Self, deal with humanity's rebuilding and/or the aftermath of a distinctly environmental catastrophe. In all of the cases, it could be said that these environmental disasters were directly due to human intervention; war making the Earth's surface almost impossible to survive on in *Ember*, floods most likely caused by climate change destroying modern day London in *Dave*, and an extremely powerful chemical that solidifies all the water on earth in *Cradle*. These novels, again, become a type of warning against man's ill treatment of the planet, scientific overreaching, and humanity's constant wars amongst each other.

³⁸⁸ Wells, p. 162.

³⁸⁹ Kurt Vonnegut, *Cat's Cradle* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963).

³⁹⁰ Jeanne DuPrau, *The City of Ember* (New York: Random House, 2003).

³⁹¹ Will Self, *The Book of Dave* (New York: Viking Press, 2006).

On the other hand, the exaggerated treatment of the environment by these three authors does the opposite of what true environmental or ecocritical fiction traditionally does and rather emphasizes humanity and human behaviour rather than the dangers of mistreating the environment. A working definition of ecocriticism states that it is, “the study of the relation between literature and the physical environment.”³⁹² These novels are different in that they are focused on what happens if the environment is abused rather than being literature that interacts with the environment. The reader is more focused on how these new people survived and adapted to a changed Earth and how long they will continue to survive in the future.

Because post-apocalyptic fiction deals with the aftermath of the end of the world, it is only logical that many authors would conceive of an ending that is brought about because of some sort of environmental breakdown. According to Brian Stableford in his essay ‘Ecology and Dystopia’, ecological themes in relation to dystopias or apocalypses is not new; the words themselves can be traced back to the nineteenth century:

The terms ‘ecology’ and ‘dystopia’ were first improvised from their Greek roots in the mid-nineteenth century. The former was used by Henry David Thoreau in 1859 before being formally defined as a branch of biology seven years later by Ernst Haeckel, while the latter was employed by John Stuart Mill in 1868.³⁹³

³⁹² Nirmal Selvamony, ‘Introduction’ in *Essays In Ecocriticism*, ed. by Nirmal Selvamony and Rayson K. Alex, (Sarup and Sons, 2007), pp. xi-xxxi (p. xii).

³⁹³ Brian Stableford, ‘Ecology and dystopia’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. by Gregory Claeys, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 259-281, (p. 259).

Thoreau is known for his ecocriticism in much of his work, most notably his seminal tome *Walden*³⁹⁴, where he celebrates living simply with nature. Since Thoreau's time, there has been an increasing uneasiness in much of literature regarding humanity's influence upon the ecological health of the planet. From pollution to disease to extinction, there is no question that humanity, accidentally or otherwise, routinely and sometimes drastically, alters the planet. Pollution seems to especially be a concern in many of these stories, perhaps with a good reason:

The original meaning of the word 'pollution' had a moral and spiritual context, referring to defilement or desecration rather than common-or-garden uncleanliness, and the increasing use of the term 'environmental pollution' with reference to problems of industrial waste disposal retained a plangent echo of that implication. In effect, pollution became the first and foremost of the deadly ecological sins. The idea of dystopia was infected with this consciousness at birth, and the history of the idea has, inevitably, seen a gradual and inexorable increase in its elaboration within the context of ecological mysticism and science. The idea of ecology was similarly infect; the historical development of the science has been haunted by the imagery of disaster and the festering anxieties that lie at the core of dystopian romance and satire.³⁹⁵

It is not surprising that modern post-apocalyptic fiction addresses the aftermath of the destruction of the environment. However, whereas, again, much of this fiction serves as a warning, according to Stableford, that modern environmental disaster fiction is not a warning, but a resigned prediction:

Insofar as twenty-first-century futuristic fiction set on Earth retains a eutopian component, its utopias are necessarily postponed until the aftermath of an environmental collapse. The near universal assumption of such fiction is that

³⁹⁴ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Boston: Thicketnor and Fields, 1854).

³⁹⁵ Stableford, p. 263.

dystopia has already arrived, in embryo, and that its progress to maturity is unavoidable. Having calculated the amount of landbound ice that might eventually be melted into the oceans, we know that the impending Deluge will not be as all-consuming as its mythical prototype, but that will not make it very much easier to endure.³⁹⁶

In relation to the dys/utopia, the writer's job is to convince the reader that by using the knowledge of the past and even the present, humanity can somehow create a radically different future as opposed to the gradual progress actually happening in reality. In his essay on nineteenth century utopia fiction, Kenneth Roemer posits that the utopia in fiction can shape the potential for utopia in reality:

In order to make this strange form of literature convincing, whether the imaginings take the form of a social theory or a literary utopia, the readers' culture has to provide perceptual tools in the forms of shared worldviews, ideologies and values that invite readers to 'see' utopia as an important and even inspirational guide to the past, present and future. These perceptual tools must be grounded in historical and contemporary evidence that convinces readers of the significant correlations between the utopists' imaginings and the reader's realities.³⁹⁷

Thinking about the environment and memory together, in order for a post-apocalyptic story to seem valid, the author must use the past and historical evidence to elucidate their imagined futures. In *Cat's Cradle*, Vonnegut, through his narrator, spent the entire novel detailing the past in order to make the impact of his fictional environmentally destroyed future stronger. In *The City of Ember*, it is the city's seeming lack of a past that makes their crumbling present (the future)

³⁹⁶ Stableford, p. 279.

³⁹⁷ Kenneth M. Roemer, 'Paradise transformed: varieties of nineteenth-century utopias' in *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. by Gregory Claeys, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 79-106, (p. 81).

understandable. And in *The Book of Dave*, the one sidedness of memory is brought to a terrifying light.

With many post-apocalyptic stories, the memory of how life used to be in the characters' worlds is always an underlying theme. The degree of importance these former lives have, however, varies from apocalypse to apocalypse and story to story. For instance, with the nuclear holocaust novels discussed in a previous chapter, the characters were faced with not just memories of the past, but also remnants of it. The reminders of the past become a source of pain for many characters. For example, in *The Road* (2006)³⁹⁸, the man and the boy are constantly trudging through the past lives of people who did not survive the apocalypse, bits and pieces of a world that was oblivious to its impending doom:

Just remember that the things you put into your head are there forever, he said. You might want to think about that.

You forget some things, dont you?

Yes. You forget what you want to remember and you remember.³⁹⁹

The man tells the boy stories of the past; mostly whatever he remembers, not necessarily things the reader in a non-post-apocalyptic world would consider important. The man clearly wants the boy to know where he came from, even though there is absolutely no possibility to get back to that.

³⁹⁸ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

³⁹⁹ McCarthy, p. 10.

In the branch of memory studies dealing with human behaviour, it is considered important to acknowledge the theory that being aware of the past influences who a person is:

The cultural praxis of becoming and remaining aware of one's (own) past still today follows the powerful normative commandment entrenched in psychological realism. Already Wilhelm Dilthey asserted that history told who and what a man was.⁴⁰⁰

The idea of the past influencing the development of person can also be applied to memory studies in the context of literature in the development of a character or situation. In *The City of Ember*, the entire town was unaware of their past and that made the people unable to plan and move beyond what they were familiar with. It was not until the young protagonists became aware that there was a past that they were missing via the journal they find that they make the decision, the correct decision, to leave the failing city and try their luck on the mysterious surface world.

Memories of the past greatly influence the characters as both a motivating factor and a lament. The characters see the remnants of the environment and that becomes a memory. In each instance, the memories become a basis for an overarching tale told by or to the protagonists. For example, *Cradle's* story being a memoir, the journal the characters find and read in *Ember*, and Dave's journal-turned-Bible in *Dave*. The formation of a story on the foundation of memories is a psychological point

⁴⁰⁰ Jürgen Straub, 'Psychology, Narrative, and Cultural Memory: Past and Present' in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, ed. By Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 215-228 (p. 217).

in cultural memory studies: 'Recollections themselves often assume the form of a story or are at least constituents of a story, which can be narrated and has usually been repeatedly told.'⁴⁰¹ In all of the novels, the stories are written down, and, most obviously with *Dave*, all are read—repeated—multiple times.

An interesting thing to note with the relationship between memory and the future is the importance of the accessibility of the information relating to the past. According to Annalee Newitz in her book about human survival, we have the ability to comprehend the vastness of the planet's history, as well as our own:

Most humans live in settled communities and cities, and the knowledge we pass on to the next generation is infinitely more complex than a migratory route or information about where to find the most abundant food. We've learned so much that we need libraries and databases to augment our memories.⁴⁰²

With the post-apocalyptic societies, the reality of not having access to any of the past information makes what little information they do have that much more precious, even if the information is harmful or limiting. In some cases, such as with *Ember* and *Dave*, a bare understanding of the past shapes the future more than a complete knowledge of the past would, such as with *Cradle*. According to Straub, the past is the starting point upon which a person shapes his or her continuing development as a person:

⁴⁰¹ Straub, p. 215.

⁴⁰² Annalee Newitz, *Scatter, Adapt, and Remember: How Humans Will Survive a Mass Extinction* (New York: Doubleday, 2013), p.146.

This complex cultural praxis of narrative recollection has been, and still is today, committed to the spirit of a continuous optimization of life and performance. The ever-improving knowledge of the past should throw light upon and open up the chances for future development. At the very least, it should guarantee a retrieval of lost possibilities and thus stabilize a person's action potential.⁴⁰³

In general terms, the more past that is known, the better the 'chances for future development' are. The quality of that future development, however, is still up to the future humans and their environment. This relates to the three novels in that how the character's current environments give clues about the environment and society of the past.

The past can be reflected in more than just stories and leftover objects from a time and people long gone. *The City of Ember* will be discussed in detail later in the chapter, however *Ember* presents a good example of the need for a past to understand how to survive in the future. For instance, once the young protagonists in *Ember* find their way up to the surface, they question what happened in the past to drive everyone underground:

They sat looking out over the hills, thinking of the woman who had written in the notebook. What had her city been like? Lina wondered. Like Ember in some way, she imagined. A city with trouble, where people argued over solutions. A dying city. But it was hard to picture a city like Ember here in this bright, beautiful place. How could anyone have allowed such a place to be harmed?⁴⁰⁴

The protagonists realize that the situation must have been terrible to drive the people underground to Ember, which itself also ended up failing. When they find a journal, a

⁴⁰³ Straub, p. 216.

⁴⁰⁴ DuPrau p. 264.

relic of the past, they realize they have to use it to help their fellow citizens, to bring them above ground in a similar way to how their society was driven underground.

Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* uses a similar technique with its use of, what the reader eventually learns the novel is set up to be, the main character telling the story as a memoir. Instead of characters within the story using the memoir to help them, it could be believed that the readers, in the novel's imagined future, could use the memoir to help themselves not to survive physically but mentally or spiritually.

Cat's Cradle, the 1963 novel by Kurt Vonnegut, is a twisting tale of religion, writing, science, and life after an environmental disaster. Vonnegut received his Masters degree in anthropology with the novel in 1972, after the new dean of the University of Chicago reviewed his work and submitted it to the department for consideration. The fact that the work is considered a study in anthropology, at least according to the University of Chicago, is an interesting one because it is just one of the many things the novel touches upon throughout its tangential course.

In the beginning, *Cat's Cradle* simply appears to be the narrative of a man telling the story of a book he wanted to write, but never did, about one of the inventors of the atomic bomb and the after effects of that bomb dropping in World War II. The writer tells the story of his correspondence with the scientist's children and his experience travelling to the man's hometown and laboratory. As the novel wears on, it is evident that the story within the story is how the world ended, not why his original book went unfinished.

The entire novel is memories; it's the narrator's memories with memories of the people he encountered woven in and it makes the reader very aware of the fact that she is reading a novel—there is seemingly no real chance for immersion because the narrator, at the very beginning, is untrustworthy. The first line, before he even introduces himself, is 'Nothing in this book is true.'⁴⁰⁵ Although that is a reference to the beliefs of the fictional religion Bokononism, the reader does not know that. The narrator then goes on to begin in a sort of homage to the iconic opening line from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851)⁴⁰⁶ iconic opening line with 'Call me Jonah.'⁴⁰⁷ However, while 'Call me Ishmael' drew the reader in with its ambiguity, Jonah's introduction fumbles with the follow up line 'My parents did, or nearly did.'⁴⁰⁸ There are two potential reasons for enhancing the reader's awareness of stepping into a completely falsified world. One reason being that, while Vonnegut believed that the world was in trouble, he did not necessarily seek to make *Cat's Cradle* entirely serve as a warning against what could come, as some of the novels previously featured have done, and more of an opinion of how he sees the world going:

My real feeling is that human beings are too good for life. They've been put in the wrong place with the wrong things to do. They're shrewd and terribly resourceful machines, and one sign of their resourcefulness, I think, is their human-wide tendency not to give a shit any more. They're shrewd enough to perceive that, if you do give a shit, you'll wind up getting your heart broken. I'm no brighter or better educated than anyone else, but it seems to me we're in terrible danger. I see no reason that would persuade me we'll escape a third

⁴⁰⁵ Vonnegut, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁶ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick or The Whale*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1851).

⁴⁰⁷ Vonnegut, p. 5.

⁴⁰⁸ Vonnegut, p. 5.

world war. I see a number of reasons to conclude we're on a collision course with ecological disaster.⁴⁰⁹

Vonnegut's made up religion is emblematic of that 'human-wide tendency not to give a shit anymore', and because of that, Vonnegut perhaps wanted those fake religious beliefs to extend out to the reader. The second reason for the enhanced awareness of reading something fictional also goes along with that religion. A cornerstone of its dogma is 'foma', which is defined as 'harmless untruths'. By pointing out to the reader that the book is, in fact, made up of untruths, the narrator is helping the reader to have Bokononism in her own life. Indeed, the second line of the novel, a quote from one of *The Books of Bokonon*, backs that up: 'Live by the *foma* that make you brave and kind and healthy and happy.'⁴¹⁰ Perhaps the reader is to be compelled to change her life after reading this untruth in order to become braver, kinder, healthier, and happier.

Vonnegut served in World War II, an experience that shows up slightly in the novel with his narrator's desire to write the novel about the atomic bomb blast of Hiroshima, and entitle that novel 'The Day the World Ended'. However, although that spurs him on his journey to various locations to find out about Dr. Felix Hoenikker, one of the scientists responsible for the bomb's creation, as the novel progresses it becomes less about the past world ending scenario and more about an imminent one.

⁴⁰⁹ Charles Reilly, 'Two Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut' in *Conversations with Kurt Vonnegut*, ed. by William Rodney Allen, (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1988), pp. 196-230 (p. 226).

⁴¹⁰ Vonnegut, p. 3.

Jonah learns early on that Hoenikker was approached by a military official with the innocuous request to create something that would turn mud solid:

The Marines, after almost two-hundred years of wallowing in mud, were sick of it," said Dr. Breed. "The general, as their spokesman, felt that one of the aspects of progress should be that Marines no longer had to fight in mud.⁴¹¹

The general never got his wish, although that does not mean that Hoenikker did not create the solution. He does, though dies soon after its completion, leaving his children, and the people they unfortunately choose to tell, as the only ones who know of ice-nine's existence. The problem with that is that his children are a reflection of Hoenikker, a brilliant though deeply irresponsible man. It then becomes a sort of pseudo-Cold War, because ice-nine does not simply have the ability to turn mud solid, it can turn any water solid in an instant. It, quite literally, could destroy the entire planet in seconds:

'If the streams flowing through the swamp froze as ice-nine, what about the rivers and lakes the streams fed?'

'They'd freeze. But there is no such thing as ice-nine.'

'And the oceans the frozen rivers fed?'

'They'd freeze, of course,' he snapped. 'I suppose you're going to rush to market with a sensational story about ice-nine now. I tell you again, it does not exist!'

'And the springs feeding the frozen lakes and streams, and all the water underground feeding the springs?'

'They'd freeze, damn it!' he cried. 'But if I had known that you were a member of the yellow press,' he said grandly, rising to his feet, 'I wouldn't have wasted a minute with you!'

'And the rain?'

⁴¹¹ Vonnegut, p. 31.

'When it fell, it would freeze into hard little hobnails of ice-nine—and that would be the end of the world! And the end of the interview, too! Good-bye!'⁴¹²

Angela Hoenikker, Dr. Hoenikker's only daughter, tells a former lab assistant about ice-nine's existence, and the man goes on to found a tech company that does work for the US government. Newton Hoenikker tells a Russian ballerina he's dating who turns out to be a Russian spy and steals a piece of the ice-nine to bring back to her government. And Frank Hoenikker tells the president of the fictional Caribbean nation of San Lorenzo in exchange for asylum and a high paying job. Three countries, armed with a weapon that could destroy their enemies, but perhaps not enough knowledge of how total that destruction would be. In the end, it is the actions of the President of San Lorenzo in combination with the careless ignorance of the Hoenikker children that brings about the end of the world.

The novel itself becomes an allegorical cat's cradle, as it is defined by Newt Hoenikker:

Newt remained curled in the chair. He held out his painty hands as though a cat's cradle were strung between them. 'No wonder kids grow up crazy. A cat's cradle is nothing but a bunch of X's between somebody's hands, and little kids look and look and look at all those X's...'

'And?'

'No damn cat, and no damn cradle.'⁴¹³

It is a novel of paths crossing that would not normally cross, people interacting who otherwise would not interact. The book is a bunch of X's, a bunch of harmless

⁴¹² Vonnegut, p. 35-36.

⁴¹³ Vonnegut, p. 110.

untruths. And considering the novel is memories from different people woven into a history that is then declared to just be nothing but lies.

Religion also plays a large part in the progression of the novel. As previously stated, Vonnegut created the religion featured; although, not just the dogma associated with it, but the history of it and its creator's history. Religion for Vonnegut was an interesting thing. During his anthropology studies he had to look into them:

It confirmed my atheism, which was the faith of my fathers anyway. Religions were exhibited and studied as the Rube Goldberg inventions I'd always thought they were. We weren't allowed to find one culture superior to any other. We caught hell if we mentioned races much. It was highly idealistic.⁴¹⁴

Bokononism, however, is not a typical religion. Not only are the words unusual to the point of being absurd (wampter, granfalloon, wrang-wrang), the religion does not seek to offer comfort or reassurance as many real religions do. The entire basis of the religion is, bluntly, that the religion itself is a bunch of lies.

The first sentence in *The Books of Bokkonon* is this:
'All of the true things I am about to tell you are shameless lies.'
My Bokkononist warning is this:
Anyone unable to understand how a useful religion can be founded on lies will not understand this book either.
So be it.⁴¹⁵

The religion purports that everything happens for a reason, and that reason is because God wants it to happen: 'We Bokkononists believe that humanity is organized

⁴¹⁴ Kurt Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday: An Autobiographical Collage* (New York: Delacorte, 1981).

⁴¹⁵ Vonnegut, p. 8.

into teams, teams that do God's Will without ever discovering what they are doing.'⁴¹⁶

It is not that it would benefit the person in any way, not that it would bring the person closer to God. It is the belief that God is aware of the people on earth and moves them around like chess pieces:

It was in the tombstone salesroom that I had my first *vin-dit*, a Bokononist word meaning a sudden, very personal shove in the direction of Bokononism, in the direction of believing that God Almighty knew all about me, after all, that God Almighty had some pretty elaborate plans for me.⁴¹⁷

One of the features of Bokononism are Bokonon's poems, called Calypsos. The Calypsos are amusing in their simplicity and poignant in their bluntness:

Someday, someday, this crazy world will have to end,
And our God will take things back that He to us did lend.
And if, on that sad day, you want to scold our God,
Why go right ahead and scold Him. He'll just smile and nod.⁴¹⁸

The fascinating thing about Bokononism is that it is still being creating as Jonah writes. Bokonon is considered an enemy to San Lorenzo and his religion is outlawed, although everyone, even by the president who swore to kill Bokonon if he is ever captured. Bokonon also managed to survive ice-nine's destruction of the world, and Jonah becomes the first person to see the last lines of *The Books of Bokonon*:

If I were a younger man, I would write a history of human stupidity; and I would climb to the top of Mount McCabe and lie down on my back with my

⁴¹⁶ Vonnegut, p. 5.

⁴¹⁷ Vonnegut, p. 69.

⁴¹⁸ Vonnegut, p. 177.

history for a pillow; and I would take from the ground some of the blue-white poison that makes statues of men; and I would make a statue of myself, lying on my back, grinning horribly, and thumbing my nose at You Know Who.⁴¹⁹

Bokonon's history is a story worth telling on its own. He built his own ship to sail from Tobago to London, enlisted in World War I, and taken by Germans on his voyage back home. Bokonon's imprisonment by Germans is reminiscent of Vonnegut's own time as a German prisoner in World War II:

They said the war was all over for us, that we were lucky, that we could now be sure we would live through the war, which was more than they could be sure of. As a matter of fact, they were probably killed or captured by Patton's Third Army within the next few days. Wheels within wheels.⁴²⁰

Bokonon eventually got away, found his way to America where he worked for a wealthy family, travelled the world, joins up with Earl McCabe (the man who later took over control of San Lorenzo) built another ship, which is shipwrecked off the coast of San Lorenzo. While McCabe created a new nation in San Lorenzo, Bokonon created a religion: 'Truth was the enemy of the people, because the truth was so terrible, so Bokonon made it his business to provide the people with better and better lies.'⁴²¹ And when it came time for his religion to bring more to the lives of the people, Bokonon decided to become an outlaw:

'How did he come to be an outlaw?'

⁴¹⁹ Vonnegut, p. 188.

⁴²⁰ Vonnegut, *Palm Sunday*.

⁴²¹ Vonnegut, p. 114.

'It was his own idea. He asked McCabe to outlaw him and his religion, too, in order to give the religious life of the people more zest, more tang. He wrote a little poem about it, incidentally.'

Bokononism has the unique distinction of seeming like a legitimate religion, while at the same time featuring tongue-in-cheek references and criticisms about the problems many pose about actual religions. It is interesting to note that the narrator switches religions after the apocalyptic event. Eric Hobsbawm suggests, in *The Invention of Tradition*, that this could be due to the fact that the narrator's original religion did not adapt well to the change in situation, '[...] it may be suggested that where they are invented, it is often not because old ways are no longer available or viable, but because they are deliberately not used or adapted.'⁴²² This could be a case of the memory, or the tradition, of Christianity simply does not fit in a completely different, destroyed world.

One of the tenets in Vonnegut's made up religion is the idea that writing down histories is a pointless activity that will not have the intended result, that is, humans will not learn from their mistakes, regardless of if they have a memory of the mistake or not.

'Write it all down,' Bokonon tells us. He is really telling us, of course, how futile it is to write or read histories. 'Without accurate records of the past, how can men and women be expected to avoid making serious mistakes in the future?' he asks ironically.⁴²³

⁴²² E. J. Hobsbawm, and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 8.

⁴²³ Vonnegut, pp. 156.

The other irony in this is that the narrator is writing down this memoir of sorts that will potentially be seen by no one, as he is writing it after the almost total destruction of the earth.

The idea of keeping a log to help future generations with an impending disaster is central to the plot of *The City of Ember* and it almost turns out to be just as futile endeavour as in *Cat's Cradle*.

The City of Ember (hereafter known as *Ember*) is a young adult novel by Jeanne DuPrau set in a city, Ember, whose residents are ignorant of their past and the origins of their city. The builders of the city decide not to tell the future inhabitants anything about their past—where they came from, how they came to dwell in a slowly darkening city, or even the history of the world.

There is a box that was passed down from mayor to mayor in the early stages of Ember's development containing the information on how to exit the city in an emergency. The box somehow ends up in one of the protagonist Lina's home. Her sister finds the box, which was programmed to open on its own after a certain amount of time, and begins to chew on the letter with the instructions of where to go to escape. Lina salvages what she can and attempts to translate what remains until she and Doon, the other main protagonist, figure out where to go. The instructions lead them to the river where another message and an old woman's journal, documenting her final days on the surface, await them. The children begin to understand that there was more to their city's Builders, their history, and the world than they, and the other

citizens, previously realized. The journal tells them that the founding citizens were forced to forget their past, to let go of memories of their long lives, as the founding one hundred residents were all at least sixty years old, and families they had established and loved:

*I have put everything I can into my one suitcase— clothes, shoes, a good wind-up clock, some soap, an extra pair of glasses. Bring no books, they said, and no photographs. We have been told to say nothing, ever again, about the world we come from. But I am going to take this notebook anyhow. I am determined to write down what happens. Someday, someone may need to know.*⁴²⁴ [Italics from the text]

The idea that “someone may need to know” what happened in the past is an important theme in most post-apocalyptic fiction, but notably in *Ember* and *Cradle* and, to a lesser extent, *The Book of Dave*. The founding citizens of *Ember* are told to basically forget their past, supposedly to minimize the potential grief of having lost a history and memories of the lives they and their families once lived:

*There are a hundred of us, fifty men and fifty women. We are all at least sixty years old. There will be a hundred babies, too—two babies for each pair of “parents.” I don’t know yet which one of these gentlemen I’ll be matched with. We are all strangers to one another. They planned it that way; they said there would be fewer memories between us. They want us to forget everything about the lives we’ve led and the places we’ve lived. The babies must grow up with no knowledge of a world outside, so that they feel no sorrow for what they have lost.*⁴²⁵ [Italics from the text]

⁴²⁴ DuPrau, p. 258.

⁴²⁵DuPrau, p. 260.

Memory in *Ember* works differently than memory in *Cat's Cradle*. While memories and history are what make up the majority of *Cat's Cradle*, both as it is a pseudo memoir and in the beginning when the author is relaying the memories people have of the scientist whose invention eventually destroyed the world, in *Ember*, the lack of memory is what potentially becomes the city's downfall. Because the information of the city is lost somewhere along the line of mayor's, the people have no idea about their past or how to prevent their impending doom when the power and food run out.

So the first mayor of Ember was given the box, told to guard it carefully, and solemnly sworn to secrecy. When she grew old, and her time as mayor was up, she explained about the box to her successor, who also kept the secret carefully, as did the next mayor. Things went as planned for many years. But the seventh mayor of Ember was less honorable [sic] than the ones who'd come before him, and more desperate. He was ill—he had the coughing sickness that was common in the city then— and he thought the box might hold a secret that would save his life. He took it from its hiding place in the basement of the Gathering Hall and brought it home with him, where he attacked it with a hammer. But his strength was failing by then. All he managed to do was dent the lid a little. And before he could return the box to its official hiding place or tell his successor about it, he died.⁴²⁶

When the teenagers discover the aforementioned missing box, they are forced to come to grips with memories of a world many generations removed from their own. Previously, they had no concept of the past because their version of the past was so very recent. They had nothing to learn from, that privilege was taken away from them. The problem with that is the citizens no longer know how to function if something deviates from what they are used to; for example, whenever the lights go out, they freeze. They do not have the past to tell them that people did not always have

⁴²⁶ DuPrau, p. 2-3.

electricity and that there are other ways to see in the dark: 'But suddenly, with a flash of joy, he remembered: he didn't have to wait for the lights to come back on. He had what no citizen of Ember had ever had before— a way to see in the dark.'⁴²⁷

That is not to say that memories and what little past the citizens have is not important to some. The citizens have traditions they uphold, the main characters, Lina and Doon, have memories of their childhood that they treasure, and so on. The point of the novel, however, is how very limited their idea of history is, which could be the author's attempt to hold up a mirror to our own society and how much history we understand ourselves. Once Lina and Doon realize that their city is underground— was a tiny subsection of a vast civilization spanning thousands of years, their worlds figuratively explode—when they make it above ground, they become burdened with that history, and that could potentially tear them apart:

'Oh, our city, Doon. Our city is at the bottom of a hole!' She gazed down through the gulf, and all of what she had believed about the world began to slowly break apart. 'We were underground,' she said. 'Not just the Pipeworks. Everything!' She could hardly make sense of what she was saying.⁴²⁸

The novel ends with the children sending a message on to the rest of the city, and while there are other books in the series in which the citizens end up learning how to thrive above ground with a few hiccups, the ambiguity of the end of *Ember* plays to the theme that continues throughout. The original box with the instructions was

⁴²⁷ DuPrau, p. 229.

⁴²⁸ DuPrau, p. 269.

dutifully passed down from mayor to mayor until it stopped, is it possible that Lina and Doon's message will be another one lost because of irresponsibility?

A religion of sorts is prominent in *Ember*, as well, but not in the traditional sense. There is a group of people in the city called Believers who believe that the Builders, the ones who built Ember, will return and fix all of the city's problems:

'Help is coming,' she said.

'Help?'

'Yes. Coming to save us.'

'Who is?'

Captain Fleery bent down and lowered her voice, as if telling a secret. 'Who built our city, dear?'

'The Builders,' said Lina.

'That's right. And the Builders will come again and show us the way.'

'They will?'

'Very soon,' said Captain Fleery.

'How do you know?'

Captain Fleery straightened up again and clapped a hand over her heart. 'I know it here,' she said. 'And I have seen it in a dream. So have all of us, all the Believers.'⁴²⁹

Because the citizens have no knowledge of how or why their city was built, the Builders became something akin to gods to the people. In this case, it is the lack of memory that causes the creation of religion, rather than the reverse that is true with most other religions. This does, however, follow what Hobsbawm says in relation to the creation of traditions, which is all religion is, really, a set of traditions that large groups of people deem worthy of following and living by; '[f]or all invented traditions,

⁴²⁹ DuPrau, p. 97-98.

so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion.'⁴³⁰

The children, after reading parts of the old woman's journal, speculate as to how there could have been a disaster above ground where they happen to be sitting when it does not look like any sort of disaster could have happened there. That, in turn, makes the reader speculate, as it is not expressly stated what the Builders are running from. What could have forced the people underground to prevent humanity's extinction? What could have the old woman so certain that the underground city wouldn't work? What could have been big enough to threaten humanity but not leave a trace? And, if there was a disaster above ground, why give the people a contingency plan to get them out of the city built to protect them?

Absently, Doon dug his finger into the ground, which was soft and crumbly. 'But what was the disaster that happened in this place?' he said. 'It doesn't look ruined to me.'

'It must have happened a long, long time ago,' said Lina. 'I wonder if people still live here.'⁴³¹

Doon's curiosity brings up a good point about what a disaster is. Are all disasters visible, as is the case in *Cat's Cradle*? Are disasters that leave much more obvious paths of destruction more or less effective than ones that do not? Depending on when the novel is written and what the author is trying to say, the magnitude of the apocalyptic destruction will vary. Because Vonnegut's argument does not hinge so much on what the apocalypse is but rather the events leading up to it and the

⁴³⁰ Hobsbawm, p. 12.

⁴³¹ DuPrau, p. 264.

supposed futility of writing down what happened in the past, Vonnegut's world-ending event is completely catastrophic, believability notwithstanding. The same is true for *Ember*. DuPrau's argument does not rely on the reader knowing or caring what the disaster that drove everyone underground was. The point is that it was terrible enough for the Builders to create an entire city below the surface then instruct the pilgrims to never speak of the past again. Whatever it was prevented the present day citizens from sharing the past the rest of humanity had established.

The argument against the importance on how the world ends can be carried onto analysis of *The Book of Dave*, another novel with the theory that the past, or lack thereof, is much more important than how, and sometimes even why, the world is destroyed.

The Book of Dave (hereafter referred to as *Dave*), the 2006 novel by Will Self, manages to have meditations on religion and memory and how societies (re)build themselves with both or either. The novel takes place in a post-apocalyptic future, after a huge flood destroys London. The new society is rebuilt with very basic knowledge of how the city was before, mostly gleaning their information from a diary written by a slightly disturbed London taxi driver that is unearthed more than 500 years earlier. The diary becomes like a bible to the new society, with all the misogyny and racism one would expect to come from the inner monologue of a man who felt cheated by the world.

The novel alternates chapters between telling the story of Dave Rudman, a taxi driver in present day London with marital problems, and telling the story of what used to be England in a future inadvertently of Dave's making. In a way, Dave is a Last Man along the same vein as Danny McCoyne from David Moody's *Dog Blood* (2010)⁴³²; he feels alienated from the people he should be attached to the most—his wife and son. In his book review of *The Book of Dave* for *The New Statesman*, Christopher Bray puts it this way: 'Dave is a model of alienation, cut off from the world not merely by dint of his earning a living in a steel box, but because he defines himself through those same cramped quarters.'⁴³³. According to Bray, *Dave* is a commentary on that, as well; the working class is alienated but then the working class alienates itself by giving into being oppressed:

Like Martin Amis, with whom it is becoming less and less possible not to compare him, Self is convinced his country is going to the dogs – and that the beasts doing the barking are what used to be called the working class.⁴³⁴

There is evidence of this sentiment, or at least a sentiment similar to this in the text itself. For example, Dave refers to himself as broken down or beaten up, with various iterations of those descriptors:

Last night he'd been OK. Granted, not perfect, but OK . . . He'd been driving, doing his thing, just another cabbie working the milling, never-ending London

⁴³² David Moody, *Dog Blood* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2010).

⁴³³ Christopher Bray, 'Severed Isles' in *New Statesman*, <<http://www.newstatesman.com/node/164618>> [accessed 21 October 2014].

⁴³⁴ Bray, 'Severed Isles'.

crowds. Now what was he? A crushed carrot lying in the gutter, a headless doll, a pissed-upon shadow of a man.⁴³⁵

Dave becomes increasingly disenchanted the more he struggles with his marriage and his mental health:

As he walked, Dave Rudman looked not up to the sky, nor around him at the brutal buildings, but at the ground, at the tarmac upon which his life had been rolled out. Tarmac blue-black and asphalt dimpled; tarmac folded and humped like a grey-brown blanket; tarmac cratered, bashed and gashed. This was the petrified skin he'd been feeling all his prostituted life, its texture transmitted through rubber tread and steel shock-absorber.⁴³⁶

Interestingly, it could be argued that both the future and the present London is dystopian in nature, if compared to Keith Booker's definition of dystopia:

Dystopian literature is specifically that literature which situates itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism. At the same time, dystopian literature generally also constitutes a critique of existing social conditions or political systems, either through the critical examination of the utopian premise upon which those conditions and systems are based or through the imaginative extension of those conditions and systems into different contexts that more clearly reveal their flaws and contradictions.⁴³⁷

Although the present day London chapters end with slightly more hope than the future London chapters, as the future London story ends with Symun being tortured to insanity and having his tongue ripped out:

⁴³⁵ Self, p. 325.

⁴³⁶ Self, p. 392.

⁴³⁷ Keith M. Booker, *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide*, (Westport: Greenwood, 1994), p. 3.

They prised Symun Dévúsh's tongue from his gullet and pounded his chest to get him to breathe. Then they stretched the talking member from its root and cut it off. As he gargled in his own blood, they broke his knuckles and all the joints of his fingers with a punishment club. Then they branded him with the F for flyer on his forehead. Finally, as he swooned close to death, he was taken by cab to the Isle of Dogs and bundled aboard a ferry. The vessel lay off in the London roads that night, and in the small units of the first tariff a second exile was brought out to her by the pilot's pedalo.⁴³⁸

And for all of Symun's suffering, Carl and his crew do not find the second book. In present-day London, Dave's fate is also fairly gruesome as he is murdered by loan sharks who make it look like a suicide:

No one – not even Phyllis Vance – seriously doubted that Dave Rudman had taken his own life: the heavy history of depression, the toxic jungle of his brain chemistry, the loss of both son and career, the opportunity, the scrawled notes in the margins of the newspaper: EMPTY, I'VE HAD ENOUGH, TAKING THE PLUNGE. These were, if not incontrovertible truths, at any rate telling clues in the absence of any others.⁴³⁹

Before this depressing end, Dave manages to find some semblance of happiness with Phyllis Vance, whom he meets in a mental institution, and writes a second book of Dave that contradicts the backwards thinking, racism, and misogyny of his first book. This book is also printed on metal sheets and buried, after his death, by his 'son' Carl in the backyard of the house where Carl, his mother, and his biological father live. The ending could have perhaps been hopeful if the reader did not already know what the future civilization does to the man claiming to have found the second Book of Dave

⁴³⁸ Self, p. 199.

⁴³⁹ Self, p. 472.

with all its preaching of things radically different from the religion and lives they completely built upon the first Book of Dave. Carl, luckily, never finds the first book.

In the future world of England, now broken up into an area called the Ing Archipelago, or Inland, a boy named Carl and his teacher go off in search of a man, a 'geezer', named Symun, who happens to be Carl's father, although neither of them knows this fact. Symun claims to have scoured what is known as The Ferbiddun Zön only to find a book that he insists is the second Book of Dave. The book completely contradicts everything Dave rants about in the first book; it is a book about peace and understanding rather than the unhappy expositions of a man deeply dissatisfied with his life. Symun then becomes somewhat of a prophet, as is wont to happen with someone who contradicts the norm in a society considered primitive, as are the Hamsters. The Hamsters are the modified cockney-speaking inhabitants of Ham, what was formerly Hampstead Heath. Dave's views on his marriage and subsequent divorce convince the Hamsters to separate the sexes quite literally, with the women living and working on one side and the men living and preaching the Knowledge, The Book of Dave, on the other. Children are shunted in between in an unfortunate misinterpretation of what people today would consider to be joint custody.

There are some humorous idiosyncrasies with the Hamsters due to their interpretation of Dave's insane ranting, not just the almost indecipherable language they use. For example, they call souls or people 'fares', their version of the Eucharist is 'Dave's curry', and priests are 'drivers'. Without having been there, the reader clearly understands how the Hamsters society evolved and adapted to their understanding of Dave's life. Because Dave had a middling education, the book was

riddled with spelling errors that become the actual spelling for the Hamsters. And since Dave had such a hatred for his wife and then ex-wife and their custody battle, Michelle, things that are bad or the opposite of *dävine* are then classified as 'chellish'. It is like a game of telephone with 500 years of evolution and a not so exemplary man's life shaping the final, strange outcome. They have interpreted Dave's life in a manner in which, upon first inspection, the reader would think is incorrect. But it becomes apparent that Self does not believe it is: 'I don't want to exaggerate, but I think I pulled off some fairly interesting things. In writing about the future, you're more trenchantly commenting about where we really are—comparing and contrasting two worlds and finding links between them.'⁴⁴⁰ Self, much like the likes of Margaret Atwood, seems concerned about the status of the world and uses fiction to draw attention to what is concerning him. And his concern is apparently evident in his writing: 'Behind satire, deep anxiety always lies; the reader is as interested in that as in an explanation of the universe inflating itself from Dave Rudman's head.'⁴⁴¹ Another fascinating juxtaposition is between New London and Ham and how New London is not as extreme of a place as Ham: 'The London of which the teacher spoke was a remote – near mythical – realm. When Symun Dévúsh had been taken from them, he was gone for ever.'⁴⁴² London is where the religious/judicial decisions are made, not unlike how things are set up in London today.

⁴⁴⁰ Todd Pruzan, 'Q&A with Will Self' in *Details Magazine Online*, <<http://www.details.com/story/qa-with-novelist-will-self-author-of-the-book-of-dave>> [accessed 21 October 2014].

⁴⁴¹ M. John Harrison, 'The Gospel According to Dave' in *theguardian.com*, <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/may/27/fiction.hayfestival2006>> [accessed 22 October 2014].

⁴⁴² Self, p. 311.

The wonderful part about *Dave* is the juxtaposition between Dave's often rude observations—'In the rearview was a trinity of black faces swathed in white muslin. *Members of some fucking nigger sect . . .*⁴⁴³ [italics from the text]—and the beauty of Will Self's prose, for example 'petrified skin'. The effect of this is twofold; the reader is reminded that the ugliness is strictly from Dave's point of view and the reader believes that Dave could be a real person. There is also the element of bringing beauty into an otherwise ugly world. The new world influenced by Dave's unpleasantness is far from ideal and the same could be said about the present day world Dave lives in. Self shows them both with his ability to manipulate language and clever turns of phrase; '[...] there were hotels so large other hotels could have checked into them.'⁴⁴⁴

However, while Self's prose dips in and out of the beautiful and harshness of the English language, his invented language, the one his Hamsters speak called Mokni, is a conglomeration of cockney English, text-speak, and cab driver slang:

In *The Book of Dave* Mokni is nothing but a phonetic transliteration of hard cockney with a few numbers thrown in, text-speak chucked in and a few accents to indicate stresses. It's got contemporary rhyming slang in there and contemporary argot that's also phonetically transliterated so it looks quite dense on the page.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴³ Self, p. 350.

⁴⁴⁴ Self, p. 50.

⁴⁴⁵ Jacques Testard, 'Interview with Will Self' in *The White Review*, <<http://www.thewhitereview.org/interviews/interview-with-will-self/>> [accessed 20 October 2014]

It is slightly reminiscent of another jarring dystopia novel, Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange* (1962)⁴⁴⁶. The difference here being that Self's creation is more of a stripped down version of slang and colloquialisms whereas Burgess' is mostly new:

Once you start hearing it, it gets much faster. Even that was interesting to me and I'm not a Burgessian language nut at all. He was a linguist and I'm not. Even with my limited language skills I was amazed how just applying those few simple rules to demotic English did create something that seemed quite radically different which began to evolve its own metaphoric capabilities and its own colour. Mokni seemed to me very Chaucerian, very like Middle English. The immediate thing you lose when you go into demotic English are the Latinisms. You're left with a much more stripped down version of Anglo-Saxon English. That was interesting and an unforeseen consequence.⁴⁴⁷

The use of the invented language is both intriguing as a world builder as well as intriguing as a character builder. If the reader knew nothing about Dave himself other than the fact that he wrote the diary that becomes the Hamster's bible, the reader would know most of the important facts surrounding Dave's life simply from the language the Hamsters created alone. The problem of using this language, however, is that it could inadvertently take the reader out of the story, especially if the reader is unfamiliar with the cockney English it is based on. Self only uses the language sometimes, and not strictly when Hamsters are talking to other Hamsters. That could lead the reader to question its usage. For instance, 'Ware2, guv, said Billi Brudi, catching Carl's eye as they reached the linchet bordering the next rip and together stepped over it.'⁴⁴⁸ The character, Billi, is talking to Carl, however the lack of quotation

⁴⁴⁶ Anthony Burgess, *A Clockwork Orange*, (London: William Heinemann, 1962).

⁴⁴⁷ Testard, 'Interview with Will Self'.

⁴⁴⁸ Self, p. 3.

marks calls that into question. If it is accepted that the characters are in fact talking out loud, where does the use of the number 2 come into play? How does one pronounce a number in that way? Considering the rest of the sentence is in regular English, Self could have just as easily written the phrase as ‘ware to’, ‘ware two’, or ‘ware too’. It may be that the strength in using the invented language also becomes its weakness. When asked, Self said: ‘As for the numerical text-speak, it was just a joke.’⁴⁴⁹

Self conceived of *Dave* when considering what would happen if the proposed flooding due to global warming was brought to maximum disaster level:

My neck of the woods would be well under water. It’s a bit implausible—nobody’s expecting a 100-meter rise in sea level—but the book turns up the volume on a sense of futility that people living in many different ages have experienced about life. Before the Renaissance, people had had the spectacle of a mighty civilization that had indeed fallen; only in very recent history—and really, only in the West—have we had this delusion that human civilization will go on forever. The problem of the coming huge environmental changes that our children’s children are almost certain to see is that they seem so unconnected to any kind of human agency.⁴⁵⁰

Much in the same way as *Cat’s Cradle*, with its use of an almost impossible scientific invention becoming the agent of the world’s destruction, *Dave’s* apocalypse is similarly exaggeratedly catastrophic. The difference in *Dave* being that the flood, with its own biblical allegories that the reader would recognize, is slightly important due to the biblical undertones and religious subplot flowing through the entire novel.

⁴⁴⁹ Will Self, email to the author, 4 June 2015.

⁴⁵⁰ Pruzan, ‘Q&A With Will Self’.

As was the case in both *Cat's Cradle* and *The City of Ember*, religion is a cornerstone to this new post-apocalyptic society. Much like in many real life religions, the foundations of the Hamster's religion can be traced back to one man and the important people in his life. *Dave* is, very clearly, a satire on modern religion, perhaps Christianity in particular, but not necessarily. Self even states that it is, in fact, satire:

The book is a satire of received religion, about how people want to believe in received religion through texts. We know when most of the Old Testament was written—and it was written: in the seventh century B.C., in the court of Kings David and Solomon, for very political reasons. It's about the way that, in order to get a state religion going, you just need any old cobblers, and then you can believe in the word of God.⁴⁵¹

Self-sought to point out, however dramatically and radically, the folly with blindly following a book as complete fact with seemingly no proof to back it up:

'The book was very much inspired by this scholarly study of biblical archaeology and textual exegesis by a couple of Israeli archaeologists,' he says. 'They said something that chimed with me: that even though the whole thrust of biblical scholarship since the early 19th century has been to disprove the Bible as the literal word of God, nevertheless there's a strong residual feeling we have that there's some truth in the Old Testament, that there were kind of sheep herders in the bronze era up to these sorts of things. What these two Israelis did was to systematically go through the Bible to show there is no historical evidence for any of it whatsoever.'⁴⁵²

With *Dave*, the reader becomes sort of the archaeologist seeking to disprove the word of Dave, simply because the reader already knows the word of Dave is just that, the

⁴⁵¹ Pruzan, 'Q&A With Will Self'.

⁴⁵² Helen Brown, 'A Writer's Life: Will Self' in *The Telegraph.com*, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3652725/A-writers-life-Will-Self.html>> [accessed 22 June 2015].

words of one man, not fact. The reader spends a lot of the time hoping that the Hamsters may catch on. And when there is the rumour that there is a second Book of Dave, a book that is not so jarringly antagonistic, it is extra disheartening to see them turn on the man, Symun, attempting to get them to see the light, so to speak.

Like religion, memory comes into play with *Dave* as it does in *Cradle* and *Ember*, however in a slightly different manner. As with *Cradle*, *Dave* has the main character writing an account of the world as he sees it—in *Dave*'s case, he's writing about the unfairness of life through the eyes of the mentally unhinged while Jonah in *Cradle* is detailing how the world happened to end—but unlike *Cradle*, the reader knows for sure that *Dave*'s account will be read in the future. And similar to *Ember*, *Dave*'s journal becomes the only source of the foundation to form a new society from the ruins of a previous one. The difference between *Dave*'s journal and the journal the protagonists in *Ember* find is that their journal is an eloquent lament for a society being left behind. The memories they deal with are fond ones of lives, a society, left behind. *Dave*'s memories are coloured by depression and alcoholism, hatred and a general disdain for the hand life has dealt him.

Memory is more all encompassing in *Dave* than it is with *Cradle*. Although Self delves into the experiences of other characters, such as Michelle, only *Dave*'s experience is in the journal. The reader is more aware of the importance of the combined memories than the characters are; even the future characters, who are not very intelligent, have no idea of the importance of their history. It is implied that the appearance of the second book of *Dave* would cause the Hamsters to question their history, and thus break down their current society: 'For in these turbulent times is

there not a rabid curiosity for such things, and would not even the most dävine Dävists be forced thereby into a novel apperception of history?’⁴⁵³ Curiosity would ‘force’ the Hamsters, even the most ‘dävine’, or loyal, among them to turn to a new history: ‘A second Book could prove beyond any doubt that Ham was the cradle of our faith ... Undermine the pretended claims of the dävadic line ... Circumscribe the very turning circle of the PCO itself...’⁴⁵⁴ The PCO in this instance being the highest priestly authority for Dävists, in Dave’s time it stood for the Public Carriage Office. It’s the idea that the Hamsters’ history is so tenuous that the introduction of a second book would restructure a 500-year-old religion.

Although not completely an environmental collapse novel, P.D. James’ *The Children of Men* (1992)⁴⁵⁵ relies heavily upon religion and memory to make a similar point as the three environmental disaster novels discussed in this chapter, most especially *Cat’s Cradle* and *The Book of Dave*. *Children of Men* (hereafter *COM*) takes place in a society in despair due to an unexplained mass infertility in the human population, mainly in the male half as sperm counts reduced to zero in otherwise healthy human males starting in the year 1994. In 1995, which becomes Year Omega, the last humans, referred to as Omegas, were born and they are worshipped for what they represent; the dregs of humanity, the last generations that humans were able to produce, the slow end of humanity’s reign on Earth. The novel opens almost twenty-six years after Year Omega, with the death of the last human born on Earth, a fiftieth birthday, and a new year all relayed by diary entry from the novel’s protagonist:

⁴⁵³ Self, p. 434.

⁴⁵⁴ Self, p. 434.

⁴⁵⁵ P.D. James, *Children of Men* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

Early this morning, 1 January 2021, three minutes after midnight, the last human being to be born on earth was killed in a pub brawl in a suburb of Buenos Aires, aged twenty-five years two months and twelve days. If the first reports are to be believed, Joseph Ricardo died as he had lived. The distinction, if one can call it that, of being the last human whose birth was officially recorded, unrelated as it was to any personal virtue or talent, had always been difficult for him to handle. And now he is dead.⁴⁵⁶

The juxtaposition between Dr. Theodore (Theo) Faron's decision to begin recording 'the last half of my life'⁴⁵⁷ and the abrupt end of the youngest-person-on-Earth's life compounds the seeming hopelessness of the situation. He points out that he's not the only one recording his life for the benefit of being known in the future by perhaps an advanced alien race that happens upon the planet covered in evidence of sentient beings but devoid of said beings:

All over the world nation states are preparing to store their testimony for posterity which we can still occasionally convince ourselves may follow us, those creatures from another planet who may land on this green wilderness and ask what kind of sentient life once inhabited it.⁴⁵⁸

In a way, however, the compiling of all of human history is a way for humanity to come to grips with not only its impending extinction but that very question of 'what kind of sentient life once inhabited' Earth. Though the reader is not given all of the information on how humanity began to cope with the idea of its slow death, we are given snippets of desperation and finally resignation. Instead of instant anarchy, humanity desperately kept trying everything it could just to create more offspring

⁴⁵⁶ James, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁷ James, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁸ James, p. 4.

followed eventually by a desire to live as long as possible because there was no living on in a family legacy:

I am just as anxious to stay alive as anyone else, just as obsessed with the functioning of my body.

Much of this I can trace to the early 1990s: the search for alternative medicine, the perfumed oils, the massage, the stroking and anointing, the crystal-holding, the non-penetrative sex. Pornography and sexual violence on film, on television, in books, in life, had increased and became more explicit but less and less in the West we made love and bred children. It seemed at the time a welcome development in a world grossly polluted by over-population. As a historian I see it as the beginning of the end.⁴⁵⁹

Theo states that once the it became clear that, no, humanity would not be having any more children, suicides skyrocketed, but 'not mainly among the old, but among my generation, the middle-aged, the generation who would have to bear the brunt of an ageing and decaying society's humiliating but insistent needs.'⁴⁶⁰ The members of humanity's apparent last generation were revered, worshipped, pampered to spoliation, while those who would watch and be responsible for humanity's decline while at the same time watching and being responsible for their own decline. The middle-aged generation was in charge at the 'beginning of the end' and also has the memory fresh in their minds from before hope for a future was ripped away. And it is as painful a memory as an actual tragedy would be for them:

In our universal bereavement, like grieving parents, we have put away all painful reminders of our loss. The children's playgrounds in our parks have been dismantled. For the first twelve years after Omega the swings were looped up and secured, the slides and climbing frames left unpainted. Now they have finally gone and the asphalt playgrounds have been grassed over or

⁴⁵⁹ James, p. 7.

⁴⁶⁰ James, p. 8.

sown with flowers like small mass graves. The toys have been burnt, except for the dolls which have become for some half-demented women a substitute for children. The schools, long closed, have been boarded up or used as centres for adult education. The children's books have been systematically removed from our libraries. Only on tape and records do we now hear the voices of children, only on film or television programmes do we see the bright, moving images of the young. Some find them unbearable to watch but most feed on them as they might a drug.⁴⁶¹

At first, Theo paints a society of quiet desperation, forced to deal with its mortality. It is an idea that humans have toyed with throughout all of these post-apocalyptic novels, for example in *Robocalypse* as the humans have to fight against the machines they created to make their lives easier, but none of them have dealt with humanity's extinction on such a gradual scale. The humans in *COM* have a general timeline of when it will all end; they have to slowly age and reminisce without the hope that someone will come along and read about them, that another batch of humans will tell their stories in the future. This is not a society abruptly altered by war, by a dropped nuclear bomb, by a disease, or by invasion. There is no visible or explainable reason for this to be happening, nothing and no one to blame it on.

P.D. James wrote *COM* as a response to the fear in the early 1980s about the declining sperm count in western men. She described it as a moral parable, though that was not her intention when she began to write the story:

I didn't set out to write a moral fable, but it came out that way. This time it was not a setting that inspired it, but the review of a scientific book drawing attention to a dramatic drop in the sperm count of Western men—fifty percent in as many years. I asked some scientists about this and they said that it was perhaps due to pollution. But the article drew attention to another factor: that of all the billions of life-forms that have inhabited this earth, most have already

⁴⁶¹ James, p. 9-10.

died out, that the natural end of man is to disappear too, and that the time our species has spent on this planet is a mere blink. So I wondered what England would be like, say, twenty-five years after the last baby was born and then for twenty-five years no one had heard the cry of a baby. I sat down and wrote it.⁴⁶²

In the same way that the species is doomed in many of these post-apocalyptic novels discussed, James wrote a story where the species is doomed not by an outside threat, a disease, or a war, but humanity is betrayed by biology. The species can no longer reproduce, or so is the thought. This is a situation contrary to what many feared at the time when James was writing, that is the possibility that the planet was facing serious consequences due to overpopulation:

India can't cope. They say the Chinese are curbing their population, but at what price! In Africa AIDS and famine are the main causes of death. But in the West the birthrate is dropping. So either man uses his knowledge to regulate his fertility or the species is doomed.⁴⁶³

Large extinctions on Earth, and how 'the majority of life forms that have existed on the planet have died out'⁴⁶⁴ were also a great influence on James during the creation of the novel. There have been five mass extinctions in Earth's history; the most well-known one being the extinction that included a great majority of the dinosaurs⁴⁶⁵.

⁴⁶² Susha Guppy, 'P. D. James, The Art of Fiction No. 141' in *The Paris Review*, <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1627/the-art-of-fiction-no-141-p-d-james>> [accessed 21 October 2015].

⁴⁶³ Guppy, 'P. D. James, The Art of Fiction No. 141'.

⁴⁶⁴ Jan Dalley, 'Mistress of Morality Tales: P D James' in *The Independent*, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/interview-mistress-of-morality-tales-p-d-james-jan-dalley-meets-the-celebrated-crime-writer-whose-1552435.html>> [accessed 20 October 2015].

⁴⁶⁵ Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2014), p. 7.

Humanity has so greatly altered the planet, it is believed that we are consequentially giving rise to a sixth extinction that may or may not be as devastating as the one that saw the end of the dinosaurs:

[A]n even stranger and more radical transformation is under way. Having discovered subterranean reserves of energy, humans begin to change the composition of the atmosphere. This, in turn, alters the climate and the chemistry of the oceans. Some plants and animals adjust by moving. They climb mountains and migrate toward the poles. But a great many—at first hundreds, then thousands, and finally perhaps millions—find themselves marooned. Extinction rates soar, and the texture of life changes.⁴⁶⁶

James was curious as to how humanity would react if it were the species dying out instead of another creature, if this proposed sixth extinction was our own and seemingly completely out of our control:

And I thought - suppose it happened to human beings, suddenly, all in one year? What kind of world would it be? What would it mean for the way people lived, their motivation? It is almost unimaginable, what it might do to human beings.⁴⁶⁷

Of course, humanity has a bit of hope at the end that the impending extinction is no longer a concern for these future humans once Julian has her child and the pleasure-centric regime championed by the Warden of England, Theo's cousin Xan.

As in *Cat's Cradle* and to a certain extent *The Book of Dave*, religion, specifically Christianity and its ideals, plays a part in *COM*. It is understandable, of course; when

⁴⁶⁶ Kolbert, p. 7.

⁴⁶⁷ Jan Dalley, 'Mistress of Morality Tales: P D James', *The Independent* (2011) <<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/interview-mistress-of-morality-tales-p-d-james-jan-dalley-meets-the-celebrated-crime-writer-whose-1552435.html>> [accessed 21 October 2015]

humans cannot explain a terrible situation and are facing their end, they either turn inward for answers or to a higher power. Perez and Smith found, in their study on religiousness in cancer patients, a correlation between the type of cancer and turning to God as a coping mechanism:

The deferring-collaborative religious coping factor was a combination of passive religious deferral, where one gives up all control to God, and collaborative religious coping, where one works with God as partners to manage major life stressors.⁴⁶⁸

Despite the religious under and overtones, James did not intend to write a religious novel when writing *COM*. As is the case with many authors who feel as though they have a message that needs to be told, the religion in the novel happened organically through the idea of societal critique:

When I began *The Children of Men*, I didn't set out to write a Christian book. I set out to deal with the idea I had. What would happen to society with the end of the human race? At the end of it, I realized I had written a Christian fable. It was quite a traumatic book to write.⁴⁶⁹

In dealing 'with the idea' she had, James touched upon religion and how it relates to a world where humans are possibly on their way out; however, not only with the society, but with her characters:

'Are you a Christian?'

⁴⁶⁸ John E. Pérez, and Amy Rex Smith, 'Intrinsic Religiousness and Well-being among Cancer Patients: The Mediating Role of Control-related Religious Coping and Self-efficacy for Coping with Cancer' in *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 38:2 (2014), pp. 183-193 (p. 183).

⁴⁶⁹ Justin Taylor, 'P.D. James and *The Children of Men*' in *The Gospel Coalition*, <<http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2006/12/10/pd-james-and-children-of-men/>> [accessed 21 October 2015].

'No, I'm not a Christian.'

'What do you believe, then?'

'Believe about what?'

'The things that religious people think are important. Whether there is a God. How do you explain evil? What happens when we die? Why are we here? How ought we live our lives?'

Theo said: 'The last is the most important, the only question that really matters. You don't have to be religious to believe that. And you don't have to be a Christian to find an answer.'⁴⁷⁰

Religion keeps some of the characters going through the medium of prayer and the attempts to explain the evil in the rapidly disintegrating world. It is an idea not unlike real life society.

And perhaps, in a situation where there does not seem to be hope, where it is difficult to find a reason to keep living other than a fear of not being remembered, of knowing that once you are gone you are truly gone aside from a futile hope that aliens will come down and read your story, perhaps that is, actually, the perfect situation for an unlikely love to thrive. There was not a need to keep the child alive for humanity's sake, only the instinctual need to keep one's offspring alive, he took her for granted. He took everyone for granted.

Hope and memory run parallel, especially in literature focused on memory. In a situation in which society has been unrecognisably changed or destroyed, looking back to a time before the environment seemingly betrayed its inhabitants often gives characters hope. If humanity could survive after the collapse of the environment,

⁴⁷⁰ James, p. 171.

there is hope that things can get better: 'memory helps us to live a little less badly and adds to our mental comfort and sense of well-being.'⁴⁷¹

Environmental disaster fiction is interestingly multifaceted in the reactions it can elicit from both the characters within the novels and from the readers. On the surface, the disaster causes an apocalypse that appears to be out of humanity's hands; nature turns against us, there was nothing we could do. It is not as completely humanity's fault as it would be the case with a nuclear holocaust or a global war or a human engineered virus. The blame rests with nature, and nature cannot be controlled or predicted:

I helped my Mona out of our hole. I warned her to keep her hands away from the blue-white frost and to keep her hands away from her mouth, too. 'Death has never been quite so easy to come by,' I told her. 'All you have to do is touch the ground and then your lips and you're done for.'
She shook her head and sighed. 'A very bad mother.'
'What?'
'Mother Earth—she isn't a very good mother any more.'⁴⁷²

And, although the reader knows the blame should be going to the irresponsible persons in possession of the ice-nine, the reader almost agrees with Mona in her assessment of Mother Nature's poor parenting skills. Inevitably, this is why the stories are so human-focused, why the reader wants the characters to survive and

⁴⁷¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Hope and Memory: Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, trans. David Bellos (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 129.

⁴⁷² Vonnegut, p. 177.

also read how they do it; if nature is the mother, humanity is the betrayed child, and there is nothing more compelling than a story about a child overcoming parental abuse and triumphing against all odds.

The blame shift could also be the reason why many explicitly environmental disaster themed post-apocalyptic fiction tend to have the actual disaster put in the background, contrary to what would be expected. In *Cat's Cradle*, the reader does not witness the disaster until the very end of the story, and even then, the reader is focused more on how the characters survive, and why, than focused on the explosion of environmental destruction that occurs. In *The Book of Dave*, the reader is only vaguely aware that a great flood reshaped modern London and forced it to become the strange, post-apocalyptic setting for the novel. And in *The City of Ember*, the reader has no more idea of what happened to the world than the characters do, we just know it was bad enough to send a founding population underground.

Environmental disaster fiction does not all place the blame on Earth, of course. In the beginning stages of environmental science fiction, the link between the environment and dys/utopias was a negative one; society was dystopian because of its mistreatment of the planet. And humans mistreated the planet by their increasingly industrial, thus polluting, behaviours:

Early speculative fictions based in a conscious ecological awareness sometimes went to extremes in rejecting the notion that an ideal society could ever be founded on the artifices of civilized luxury. A graphic extrapolation of Cobbett's notion of London as a Great Wen is featured in Richard Jefferies's *After London; or Wild England* (1885), in which the capital has been reduced

to a bleak scar of ineradicable pollution and the quality of English life has been restored by a technological retreat.⁴⁷³

The idea was that both technological advances and the environment could not coexist. There must be a tipping point, a point at which burgeoning technology is too much for the simplicity of nature, or a point at which humanity will become too ambitious, resources will become scarce, and waste will be produced faster than it can be destroyed. In their essay on science fiction and the life sciences, Slonczewski and Levy detail human interaction with the environment as one of need:

[...] environmental concern has led to large-scale depictions of entire planets and multiple societies grappling with the problem of 'terraforming', that is, of how much change, intended or otherwise, to inflict on a biosphere to bend it to human needs.⁴⁷⁴

Many environmental disaster stories are not concerned with the question of how much is too much; by the time the disaster hits that does not matter. And if it is a matter of humans polluting the planet and causing the disaster, then the novel becomes a warning. Treat the earth poorly and humans will, rightly, suffer:

Early fantasies of runaway future pollution usually took the form of moralistic disaster stories rather than dystopian romances; W.D. Hay's *The Doom of the Great City* (1880) and Robert Barr's 'The Doom of London' (1892) – both of which feature catastrophic smogs – are ringing accounts of richly deserved punishment.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷³ Stableford, p. 265.

⁴⁷⁴ Joan Slonczewski and Michael Levy, 'Science fiction and the life sciences' in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 174-185 (p. 183).

⁴⁷⁵ Stableford, p. 266

Because many works that were considered early environmental disaster fiction fell more into the realm of speculation, meaning they were more warning of the dangers of mistreating the environment than fictionalizing it, than current environmental disaster fiction, pollution was the main enemy. Examples of this were in works like Thoreau's *Walden* (1854)⁴⁷⁶ and in a roundabout way, Emerson's 'Nature' (1836)⁴⁷⁷. Now, humans can fathom a whole host of environmental problems and their unwelcome consequences, from overfishing to deforestation and the seemingly tiny but no less terrible things humans can do in between.

Whether or not a post-apocalyptic novel is classified as an 'after an environmental disaster' story, the environment and humanity's relationship to it is, unsurprisingly, an important aspect of sci-fi or speculative fiction:

In consequence of these lines of thought, most futuristic fantasies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, irrespective of whether they featured exaggerated social division or wholesale social reform, accepted the notion that the most fundamental social evil – the essential seed of dystopia – was the abstraction of human beings from a supposedly harmonious relationship with the natural environment and its inherent rhythms: a pernicious form of alienation that was equally corrupting in its effects on the rich and the poor.⁴⁷⁸

Humanity's relationship to nature is important in post-apocalyptic fiction, regardless of the particular novel is categorized as an environmental disaster novel. Humanity

⁴⁷⁶ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden or Life in the Woods*, (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1854).

⁴⁷⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Nature' (Boston: James Monroe and Company, 1836).

⁴⁷⁸ Stableford, p. 266.

has fought something to survive, which is the fundamental tenet of post-apocalyptic fiction. Humanity is rebuilding from something catastrophic and will not be the same. This is where the branches of how humanity changes happen, is humanity not the same because it is being replaced by another species, as in *I Am Legend* (1954)⁴⁷⁹? Or will humanity not be the same because aliens came down and showed us that we are not alone in the universe as in *The War of the Worlds* (1898)⁴⁸⁰? Humanity needs the environment as a grounding element, when we are turning on each other, fighting aliens, or trying not to go extinct, having the environment to provide things needed to survive gives the characters one less thing to battle. But when the environment becomes the enemy, what can humanity turn to? Self, as well, believes that a global environmental catastrophe is imminent, if things keep going the way they are:

I certainly believe the IPCC's projections are correct, and I doubt the carrying capacity of the planet under substantially warmer conditions. Large-scale human population collapse within the next 150 years is, I believe, a very strong likelihood.⁴⁸¹

Self's beliefs aside, *Dave* however, is less of a warning to readers about our current ecological trajectory, and more of a study of how culture evolves after a catastrophe. Editor Garrett Hardin discussed the environment beyond pollution in his essay 'The Tragedy of the Commons', including the depletion of certain resources if humans were allowed to use said resource without limits:

⁴⁷⁹ Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend* (New York: Gold Metal Books, 1954).

⁴⁸⁰ H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (London: William Heinemann, 1898).

⁴⁸¹ Will Self, email to the author, 4 June 2015.

In an approximate way, the logic of the commons has been understood for a long time, perhaps since the discovery of agriculture or the invention of private property in real estate. But it is understood mostly only in special cases which are not sufficiently generalized. Even at this late date, cattlemen leasing national land on the western ranges demonstrate no more than an ambivalent understanding, in constantly pressuring federal authorities to increase the head count to the point where overgrazing produces erosion and weed-dominance. Likewise, the oceans of the world continue to suffer from the survival of the philosophy of the commons. Maritime nations still respond automatically to the shibboleth of the "freedom of the seas." Professing to believe in the "inexhaustible resources of the oceans," they bring species after species of fish and whales closer to extinction.⁴⁸²

In other words, according to Stableford's analysis of Hardin's essay, if left unchecked, humans will eventually destroy the natural resources they need to survive:

Wherever people were granted free access to a natural resource, he argued – as in the 'commons' where all and sundry had once been entitled to graze their herds – the pursuit of individual advantage would inevitably lead to the overexploitation, spoliation and eventual annihilation of the resource.⁴⁸³

The 'overexploitation, spoliation, and annihilation' of resources does come up in many science fiction novels, if not strictly environmental disaster novels. For example, in the science fiction series *Silo* (2011)⁴⁸⁴ by Hugh Howey, the people live in an underground city because centuries of spoiling the air has made it too toxic for humans to breathe. These novels become less about what was done to the earth and more about how humans are adapting to it because of how important the environment is to day to day survival, and because of how easily we, the readers,

⁴⁸² Garrett Hardin, 'Tragedy of the Commons' in *Science*, 162:3859 (1968), pp. 1243-1248.

⁴⁸³ Stableford, p.273.

⁴⁸⁴ Hugh Howey, *Silo*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

could potentially end up in similar situations. It is not important how the earth was destroyed, the fact of the matter is it was and human nature is driven by the overwhelming urge to keep the species alive, so the author, then becomes focused on the aftermath.

Stableford also supposes that Hardin speculated that the Earth, as its own society, could become a dystopia itself:

The more obvious corollaries of Hardin's argument included the propositions that because the oceans are treated as a commons by fishermen, and the atmosphere is treated as a commons by producers of carbon dioxide, then the oceans are doomed to be denuded of fish and the atmosphere will be subject to catastrophic warming. From this perspective, the whole earth is bound to become dystopian as it lurches towards terminal disaster.⁴⁸⁵

Because science fiction has more leeway to discuss things such as 'catastrophic warming' and its effects on the planet and to humanity, the drama of these disasters can play out on the page in an exaggerated way. Science fiction's political past, especially in regards to environmental disasters, makes these stories more powerful in their observations:

It could be argued that SF is the most political of all genres of imaginative writing. It is, almost by definition, a fiction which posits what-ifs and then sets out to explore their impact; any such fiction must take sides, must choose good and bad; the SF author not only chooses how characters will respond to a threatening event such as alien invasion or climate change, but also decides which response will work in the story's fiction universe and which will not: in this way, an SF story demonstrates the author's interpretation of the likely outcome of political action (to fight or negotiate, to go green or seek out

⁴⁸⁵ Stableford, p. 274.

technological fixes, and so on); SF builds worlds and societies that either work or do not.⁴⁸⁶

It is its ability to be political with all forms of disasters that plague SF or post-apocalyptic fiction, and then ‘take sides’ within its made up universe that makes these stories compelling.

Because of sci-fi’s history of taking sides within a made up universe, which in turn mirrors taking sides on issues in the real universe, there are cultural memories that authors call upon to make their points. Looking at other novels discussed in previous chapters, both memory and the environment come into play, although sometimes not specifically at the same time. For example, in *The Hunger Games* (2008)⁴⁸⁷, the cultural memory of a failed rebellion keeps the districts in place. And, even the use of the actual Games is sort of a living memory; the children and teenagers have to constantly kill each other as a reminder of the sins of the past, ‘taking the kids from our districts, forcing them to kill one another while we watch—this is the Capitol’s way of reminding us how totally we are at their mercy. How little chance we would stand of surviving another rebellion.’⁴⁸⁸ The environment, in this case, is not the enemy or the memory. However, take something like *The Road* (2006)⁴⁸⁹ where the man uses the environment to and the remnants of civilization to teach the boy how to cope with his lost past:

⁴⁸⁶ Brooke, p. 126.

⁴⁸⁷ Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games* (New York: Scholastic, 2008).

⁴⁸⁸ Collins, p. 11.

⁴⁸⁹ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

The city was mostly burned. No sign of life. Cars in the street caked with ash, everything covered with ash and dust. Fossil tracks in the dried sludge. A corpse in a doorway dried to leather. Grimacing at the day. He pulled the boy closer. Just remember that the things you put into your head are there forever, he said. You might want to think about that.
You forget some things, dont you?
Yes. You forget what you want to remember and you remember what you want to forget.⁴⁹⁰

The boy, much like the protagonists in *Ember*, perhaps does not realize the extent of the past that he is unaware of. He sees broken, burned, or ashed bits of it as he and his father walk along a road that is almost a character itself, and he can guess about the world his father came from but once his father is gone, his memories of the past and the boy's link are gone, too.

Memory in relation to literature goes back as far as literature itself and has been as important to the shaping of societies as literacy has been:

With the development of writing – and thus the medium of literacy – in the ancient world, two different forms of memory emerged, both commemoration based on inscriptions (for example, on monuments or gravestones), and second the document, which brought with it the ability to store information. In the Christian Middle Ages, oral and literate memory were in an equilibrium, and were indeed closely interwoven. The transmission of knowledge was still tightly linked with oral practices and techniques, and handwritten texts tended to be memorized.⁴⁹¹

The idea of text for commemoration and memorized texts goes well with the overall themes in *The Book of Dave*. Because the flood washes away much of London and much of society's ideas as we know them today, the civilization has the unique ability

⁴⁹⁰ McCarthy, p. 133.

⁴⁹¹ Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture*, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.117.

to rebuild in almost the same way as society built up in the Middle Ages. An inscription-like text, Dave's metal engraved book, is memorized and treated as religious gospel. Dave himself becomes a figurehead of the new culture, a symbol of the new society built from his words. This could be considered the part when literature as a whole becomes a 'symbolic form of cultural memory':⁴⁹²

The effect of literature in memory culture rests on its similarities *and* differences to processes of remembering and forgetting. First of all, literature and memory exhibit several noticeable similarities. These include the forming of condensed 'memory figures' and a tendency towards creating meaning through narrativization [sic] and genre patterns. Form-giving operations such as these lie at the basis of both literature's and memory's world-making. Second, literature is characterized by significant differences to other symbol systems of cultural memory, such as history, religion, and myth.⁴⁹³

In *Dave*, literature's and memory's made-worlds stem from the same thing, but produce very different results. The literature's world, the future world, is skewed and disturbed interpretation of a biased and unhinged view of an otherwise functional society. The memory's world, Dave's world, is that biased and unhinged view.

In the case of *Dave*, the past clearly influences the advancement of the future civilization. This is another key aspect to some versions of memory studies:

This recollection is by no means only applied "rearwards." Rather, it encompasses an anticipated recollection of a future past, which is envisaged in the grammatical mode of *futurum exactum*. It operates in the mode of retention and protention. This complex cultural praxis of narrative recollection has been, and still is today, committed to the spirit of a continuous optimization of life and performance. The ever-improving knowledge of the past should throw light upon and open up the chances for future development.

⁴⁹² Erll, p. 144.

⁴⁹³ Erll, p. 145.

At the very least, it should guarantee a retrieval of lost possibilities and thus stabilize a person's action potential.⁴⁹⁴

Instead of advancing the civilization for good, however, it could be argued that the memories of the past the Hamsters have hinder proper growth of their culture and society. That could be, however, the point Self was attempting to make when he made the Hamsters limited and violent. When the knowledge of a potential second Book of Dave spread throughout the society, it was met with resistance, hindering possible optimization, but also curiosity.

The selectivity of memory in the novels emphasizes how important the decision to use memory as a driving factor in novels really is. According to Aleida Assmann in her essay, 'Canon and Archive', memory is an important social normality:

Our memory is highly selective. Memory capacity is limited by neural and cultural constraints such as focus and bias. It is also limited by psychological pressures, with the effect that painful or incongruent memories are hidden, displaced, overwritten, and possibly effaced. On the level of cultural memory, there is a similar dynamic at work. The continuous process of forgetting is part of social normality. As in the head of the individual, also in the communication of society much must be continuously forgotten to make place for new information, new challenges, and new ideas to face the present and future. Not only individual memories are irretrievably lost with the death of their owners, also a large part of material possessions and remains are lost after the death of a person when households are dissolved and personal belongings dispersed in flea markets, trashed, or recycled.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁴ Straub, p. 217.

⁴⁹⁵ Aleida Assmann, 'Canon and Archive' in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. by Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 334-337 (p. 334)

Because memory is so important to social normality, it is not surprising that stories struggling to regain or maintain their social normality would have complicated relationships with cultural memory. Not only does surviving and thriving after an apocalypse provide quite a bit of physical pressure for the characters, it presents incredible 'psychological pressures' as well.

With *Dave*, the environment and memory go hand in hand, if only for the cause and effect nature of how they are presented in the book. Because the environment betrays them, becoming the 'bad mother,' they are forced to consult memories of the past in order to move forward. The link between environment and memory is a bit more tenuous in *Ember*, as the reader is as unsure of what drove the people underground as the characters are. It could be that the threat of some sort of environmental disaster so profound terrified the founders enough to create the underground contingency plan, but whether or not that threat was set in motion by humanity, like with the natural disasters in both *Cradle* and *Dave*, or if humanity had the potential to simply be unable to survive on the surface is unclear. The point, however, is that the inhabitants only had as many memories of the past as was smuggled underground. The young protagonists, like the future citizens in *Dave*, only had a journal to base their actions on in regards to the survival of their fellow townsfolk.

On the surface, the three novels seem completely different; one is a pseudo-memoir, another the beginning of a YA series, and another is a Bible-like origin story of the unknowing founder of a religion. However, at their core, like many other post-apocalyptic works that fall under the same subgenre, they have a theme in common.

They take large environmental apocalypses and focus on the importance of memory within human society. Memory functions differently within this category than it does within post-apocalyptic war fiction or pandemic fiction. In war fiction, memory is used more as a memorial to what is lost, kept alive for future generations. The clearest example of this is *Robocalypse* and the cube with all the stories of humanity's heroics during the war. Cormac Wallace says, specifically, that their stories must be told and archived for future humans. In pandemic fiction, memory serves as a reminder of what was lost in the apocalypse and the drive to somehow get the lost people or society back. In *I Am Legend*, Robert Neville continuously kills and attempts to get rid of the vampires even though he is the only human left. With ecological collapse stories, it seems that records of the past are more important than, for example, with pandemic stories. In the latter novels, because there is no one left, there is no chance for someone to find the diaries or the letters or the memoir, such things would just be further upsetting to the last man, as they are already fully intent on getting life back the way it was before the apocalypse, '[t]he past had brought something else, though; pain at remembering. Every recalled word had been like a knife blade twisting in him.'⁴⁹⁶ Memories are painful, rather than informative, in pandemic novels. In environmental collapse novels, there is the potential that humanity can rebuild and live to be curious about the past. However, in nuclear holocaust novels, there is an immediacy in the situation that does not lend itself well to looking back longingly at the past. For instance, in *The Road* the man tells the boy the bare minimum about the past because the past is a burden to him, '[j]ust

⁴⁹⁶ Matheson, p. 47.

remember that the things you put into your head are there forever, he said. You might want to think about that.⁴⁹⁷ Remembering the past becomes less of a burden for the man the closer he gets to death, when memories are no longer unwelcome distractions against survival. The community—the family—needs to survive in the present so the past does not matter. In ecological collapse novels, it is nature that betrays humanity, rather than humanity betraying itself. There is no desire to get back to how the world used to be. Although these novels can be nostalgic at times, the memories are bittersweet – in those memories lie the reason why the world was destroyed in the first place.

⁴⁹⁷ McCarthy, p. 10.

Conclusion

[I]nterlaced with [these] postmodern modalities are political and social narratives that torque toward modern ideology. And rather than profound experimentation, fragmentation, indeterminacy, and mysticism of the fictions of their recent predecessors, these novelists skew back toward realist prose and the recognizable settings, characters, and plots of genre science fiction.⁴⁹⁸

This thesis demonstrates that post-apocalyptic fiction can be broken into different subject types and why the development of the taxonomy enables the distinctive qualities of the subgenre to flourish and be academically critiqued. The thesis traced the evolution of each taxonomic category as well as the background behind each author's particular thoughts or feelings on the end of the world and beyond in addition to their realities as they wrote their novels. The important cultural and historical context this provided has two functions; firstly, to enable me to demonstrate the usefulness of a taxonomy of post-apocalyptic sub-genres in terms of mapping out the areas of overlap and similarity between each sub-genre, and secondly, in allowing for a fully-informed and attentive reading of the texts themselves.

Post-apocalyptic fiction can innovate as well as entertain by enhancing the many flaws in human society and making a specific point about them; flaws like racism, sexism, and limiting gender boundaries all have their flagship post-apocalyptic novels and specific taxonomic categories. One topic that I was unable to include in this thesis because of limitations of space was the genre's potential for

⁴⁹⁸ Heather Hicks, *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century: Modernity Beyond Salvage* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

opening up discussions around race. Authors like Octavia Butler force readers to not only consider the possibility of the existence of aliens and that that humans could visit other worlds, but also race relations in the post-apocalypse, and whether concepts like race are still important when humanity is threatened. Butler's racial and feminist parables present additional paths of exploration within the post-apocalyptic subgenre. In this way, post-apocalyptic fiction is distinctive in its storytelling; without the use of the science fictional setting Butler would not be able to have the reader think about humanity's place in the universe, as well as have them consider the racial implications already established within society. The use of alien species helps the reader look inward at humanity and what it means to be human and how we treat each other as a community. Baudrillard's study of immortality would be an interesting piece to study concurrently with Butler, as he questions the limits of life and death in relation to human versus inhuman⁴⁹⁹. As Heather Hicks points out in the quote at the beginning of this section, novelists set their political and social postmodern narratives in the "recognizable settings" of science fiction, the result being both experimental and familiar, but also profound and enjoyable. Butler's work exemplifies this. Butler considers feminism and women's place in science fiction/post-apocalypse in her novels, such as in *The Parable* (1993-1998)⁵⁰⁰ series. She also addressed gender and sex in her *Xenogenesis* (1987-1989)⁵⁰¹ trilogy. Both of these topics would be excellent directions to take the study of post-apocalyptic

⁴⁹⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁵⁰⁰ Octavia Butler, *The Parable* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993-1998).

⁵⁰¹ Octavia Butler, *Xenogenesis* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1987-1989).

taxonomies further. What is the significance of race when a completely different species could bring about humanity's demise? The question stems from and complicates the Last Man trope, which in itself provides another question; how much is the last man trope changed when the Last Man in question is not just the last of his species, but was also someone who was also considered an outsider within said species? Butler was thought, according to Scott Simon, to be 'the first African-American woman to gain popularity and critical acclaim as a science fiction writer'⁵⁰², and her take on race and gender is a unique one, and would present a study on not only race within the genre but race amongst the genre's authors, as well. Butler felt like an outsider very early in life and she channelled that feeling in her novels:

Of course, not everyone has been a bully or the victim of bullies, but everyone has seen bullying, and seeing it, has responded to it by joining in or objecting, by laughing or keeping silent, by feeling disgusted or feeling interested....

Simple peck-order bullying is only the beginning of the kind of hierarchical behavior [sic] that can lead to racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, classism, and all the other "isms" that cause so much suffering in the world.⁵⁰³

Butler's position as an 'outsider' not just in literary society but all of society presents a juxtaposition between her ideas and those authors who are not necessarily 'outsiders' in the genre, and that would form the basis of my future work in this field. For instance, how would a white, male author's treatment of race relations differ from

⁵⁰² Scott Simon, 'Essay on Racism: A Science-Fiction Writer Shares Her View of Intolerance' in NPR
<<http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/racism/010830.octaviabutler.html>> [22 November 2015].

⁵⁰³ Octavia Butler, 'NPR Essay - UN Racism Conference' in NPR
<<http://www.npr.org/programs/specials/racism/010830.octaviabutleressay.html>> [22 November 2015].

Butler's? How or why does that matter? How do science fiction authors treat race within their novels? Do they have to address race, what does that add to the novel? Critics such as Joanna Russ and Lisa Yaszek and their theories on the use and focus of women in science fiction and what that means in society, are the perfect way to begin a study of gender in the genre. Kodwo Eshun and Sharon DeGraw offer exceptional criticism on the subject of race within the genre. Race and science/post-apocalyptic fiction could also be studied with the aid of literary critics such as bell hooks with her essay "Postmodern Blackness" (1990)⁵⁰⁴, an examination of why African Americans should be interested in literary criticism, or Zora Neale Hurston's examination on the black experience as represented, or more likely not represented, in publishing, "What White Publishers Won't Print" (1950)⁵⁰⁵. Focusing on the theme of race would evolve this research into a study of deeper societal concerns and social issues within science fiction. The taxonomic categories in this thesis coupled with the literary devices they employ provide a contextual basis for further study, aside from the last man and race scenario previously mentioned; what would change within a last man novel if the last man were actually a woman? What if an oppressed minority presented humanity with its last hope of survival? What does it mean when an author who feels like an outsider writes a novel about an insider? How could a community band together to survive when one or more of the members distrusts the others due to past prejudices?

⁵⁰⁴ bell hooks, "Postmodern Blackness", *The Norton Anthology: Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), pp. 2478-2484).

⁵⁰⁵ Zora N. Hurston, "What White Publishers Won't Print", *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. 2nd ed (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), pp. 1023-1027.

Using authors like Butler and the concepts she addresses alongside the research done for this thesis present future branches of study in the post-apocalyptic field that I would like to pursue. Exploring human behaviour in the context of non-human situations offers a compelling post-apocalyptic scenario.

Because of the long life post-apocalyptic fiction has enjoyed, there is a vast catalogue of novels that could have fitted into this thesis very easily, and contributed just as much as the novels that were chosen as representatives of the subgenre. In the last decade and a half, the subgenre has had a resurgence in popularity, after a lull between the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. According to Jerry Määttä in his study on the historical fluctuations of post-apocalyptic and apocalyptic narratives, there could be a few reasons for this lull, but it is noticeable:

[I]t is intriguing that the interwar period of 1920–1939 – and especially the Depression years of the early 1930s – produced quite a few noteworthy apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic stories, with steep rises comparable only to the ones in the early 1950s, the early 1970s, and the early 1980s.⁵⁰⁶

With that in mind, it is important to also note that the post-apocalyptic subgenre comes in many forms, not just literature. The varied nature of the topic lends itself easily to different media. Comic books, such as *The Walking Dead* (2003)⁵⁰⁷ by Robert Kirkman (which spawned a television series of the same name that debuted 2010); Japanese manga, such as *Attack on Titan* (2009)⁵⁰⁸ by Hajime Isayama (which

⁵⁰⁶ Määttä, p. 420.

⁵⁰⁷ Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore, Charles Adlard, and Cliff Rathburn, *The Walking Dead* (Berkeley, CA: Image Comics, 2003).

⁵⁰⁸ Hajime Isayama and Sheldon Drzka, *Attack on Titan* (New York: Kodansha Comics, 2012).

spawned a spin off manga and a movie in two parts); and films like 2013's *Snowpiercer*⁵⁰⁹ (which was based on the French graphic novel *Le Transperceneige*⁵¹⁰), are all examples of ambitious post-apocalyptic works in alternate forms. The vastness of the subgenre also makes it difficult to include all relevant examples in something as limited as a thesis. It is not that these different forms provided poor references. Also, many of the novels in these thesis have their own film versions, for example *The Hunger Games*, *The Road*, *The War of the Worlds*, *World War Z*, *The City of Ember*, *Children of Men*, and *I Am Legend*. Many movie adaptations change the message of the novel, such as with the contemporary film version of *War of the Worlds* (2005)⁵¹¹, which was less of an allegory for imperialism and more of a disaster film with a hero searching for his family. Still other movie adaptations change the entire structure of the novel it is adapting, for example the film *World War Z* (2013)⁵¹² contains none of the interviews and political study of war and the aftermath, rather it is again a hero in the middle of a zombie outbreak in a desperate search for the source and a cure. In contrast, films like *The Hunger Games* (2012)⁵¹³ were fairly accurate film adaptations, keeping both the tone and the themes of the parent novel. The faithful and less faithful adaptations could mean several things; however the main reasoning behind staying true to the source material or radically departing from it could be as simple as what

⁵⁰⁹ *Snowpiercer*, Dir. Bong Joon-ho, Perf. Chris Evans and Song Kang-ho (Koch Media, 2014).

⁵¹⁰ Jacques Lob and Jean-Marc Rochette, *Le Transperceneige* (Tournai, Belgium: Casterman, 1982).

⁵¹¹ *War of the Worlds*, Dir. Steven Spielberg, Perf. Tom Cruise (Paramount, 2005).

⁵¹² *World War Z*, Dir. Marc Forster, Perf. Brad Pitt (Paramount, 2013).

⁵¹³ *The Hunger Games*, Dir. Gary Ross, Perf. Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, Liam Hemsworth (Lionsgate, 2012).

the studios believe the audiences want at the time the movie was created. There could also be a difference between big-budget blockbusters and smaller, low-budget feature.

The central themes in this thesis were presented in the context of how the post-apocalyptic subgenre worked in the literary medium only; however, the case could be made for how the subgenre works in other forms. Films and graphic novels represent the subgenre as well; however, this thesis was concerned with literary devices and tropes, which inherently would be much less to the fore in some cases in visual media.

The future of science fiction is as malleable as the future of reality and presents an almost infinite number of possibilities for future apocalypses and post-apocalypses when combined with literary tropes and devices. Short of experiencing an actual apocalypse, there may never be a time when humanity is no longer fascinated by the idea of the apocalypse and the hope that humanity survives long enough to be in a post-apocalyptic world.

The taxonomy of post-apocalyptic fiction was an important area of research because distinguishing each category – analysing what each taxonomic branch brings to post-apocalyptic fiction as a whole – allows us a more nuanced understanding of the development of the genre as a whole. The categories I have established are distinctive in what they are able to say while working within their subgenre, using aliens and robot invasions and almost complete environmental collapse to both tell a straightforward story about those elements and also use those elements as allegories to bring to light other more topical societal critiques.

Through an analysis of commonly used literary devices and concepts, such as the idea of the last man and the retrospective narrative device, in relation to the different categories of post-apocalyptic fiction, such as pandemic and war, this thesis has created a taxonomy of post-apocalyptic fiction and identified and analysed key novels in order to distinguish these categories within the context of the apocalypses and the tropes the authors use. By doing so, this thesis has shown the unique ability the subgenre has to parody, satirise, critique, and educate readers using seemingly outlandish and otherworldly situations, simultaneously entertaining readers while making them consider everything about their world.

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