

Apocalypse And After: Fictional Representations

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Abstract: Post-apocalyptic fiction presents different models after civilization tries to rebuild itself from ground zero. There are chiefly two protos – a savage after world or an idyllic Utopia through the rudiments of technologies and cultural vestiges. The memory of mass destruction of human population is manifest in the various legends, folklore and myths throughout the world. The widespread presence of these stories also in tribal cultures proves that such an event must have taken place in pre-history. There are also geological evidences unearthed by scientists to establish the veracity of the event. The present Post-apocalyptic fiction draws from these sources and examines the spatial and temporal propensities of man, nature and technology in the future world *vis-à-vis* one another. Authors have taken up these relationships in their fictional accounts and projected the possibilities of life after the cataclysmic happening.

Keywords: Post-apocalyptic, nature, technology, anthropocentric, neoteric context.

Introduction: Post-apocalyptic fiction is narrative literature by way of imagined traversing of the geological and biological apocope in anthropocentric terms. That the world has existed in the past and will continue beyond human beings in the future is an anxiety prompting authors and dark prophets to announce that the human habitat will be destroyed by amoral technological transgression. The agent of destruction will be either a naive or a vindictive Nature. Naive, because the major geological conversions do not postulate human approbation; vindictive, with the assumption that callous civilizational activities will have precipitated the swell of destruction, leading to a restructuring of new communities in terms of art, socialization and science with an initial but infixed emblem of harmony as the survivors will most probably be the cultured leftovers of a ravaged world:

Although writers of these texts also examined the present to determine whether or not current afflictions were fulfilments of past apocalyptic prophecies, they generally concentrated on the future – the overthrow of evil, the coming of a messianic figure, and the establishment of the Kingdom of God and of eternal peace and righteousness. (*Encyclopaedia of Literature*, 60)

Argument: The auguries of the imagined doom are discernible - the Chernobyl nuclear mishap, the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, the Sendai meltdown, the hair-raising videos of the 2011 tsunami gobbling up houses and ships and automobiles, and the series of earthquakes

hitting the Japan isles and the mainland - each of these cataclysmic events has made man jittery enough to ponder over the alternatives to save his race. What once appeared improbable and embossed only in religious texts, folk lore and legends, has suddenly attained palpable proportions. There is no gainsaying the fact that the legends and lore around the globe have spoken of the apprehension in various tongues and tones. There is a constant presence of the deluge or the Great Flood in the myths and legends of almost all civilizations and religions. There are also tangible proofs in the form of geological studies and historiographical evidence. One of these is the fragment of a clay tablet from Assyria. A part of the library of Ashurbanipal at Nivenh, it mentions the story of the Great Flood that is also corroborated through the canonical literature of all the major religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism etc. The last Great Flood has been mentioned in the tribal stories too of different countries. Such stories range throughout the world. (**Table 1**) :

EUROPE -	Greek, Roman, Celtic, Welsh, Lithuanian, German Turkish, Vogul
NEAR EAST -	Egyptian, Persian, Sumerian, Assyrian, Hebrew, Koranic, Babylonian Chaldean Zoroastrian
AFRICA-	Pygmy, Kikuyu, Tanzanian, Ekoi, Efik-Ibibo, Mandingo, Bachokwe (southern Zaire), Bena-Lulua (Congo River, southeast Zaire), Bakongo (west Zaire), Lower Congo, Komililo, Nandi, Cameroon, Kwaya (Lake Victoria)
FAR EAST -	Hindu, Bhil (central India), Kamar (Raipur District, Central India), Ho (North east India), Lepcha (Sikkim), Tibet, Assam, Kamchadale (northeast Siberia), Mongolia, China, Korea, Andaman Islands (Bay of Bengal), Chingpaw (Upper Burma), Kammu (northern Thailand), Ami (eastern Taiwan), Ifugao (Philippines), Batak (Sumatra), Dyak (Borneo)
AUSTRALASIA & PACIFIC ISLANDS -	Valman (northern New Guinea), Papua New Guinea, Australian, Arnhem Land (Northern Territory), Gumatj (Arnhem Land), Western Australia, Victoria, Southeast Australian, Maori (New Zealand), Palau Islands (Micronesia), Fiji, Samoa, Mangaia (Cook Islands), Tahiti
NORTH & CENTRAL AMERICA -	Netsilik Eskimo, Norton Sound Eskimo, Innuvit, Hareskin (Alaska), Kaska (Northern inland British Columbia), Skagit (Washington), Joshua (southern Oregon), Shasta, Pomo (north central California), Salinan (California), Luiseno (Southern California), Blackfoot (Alberta and Montana), Chippewa (Ontario, Minnesota, Wisconsin), Cheyenne (Minnesota), Lakota, Choctaw (Mississippi), Navajo (Four Corners area), Hopi, Jicarilla Apache (north-eastern New Mexico), Yaqui (Sonoran, Northern Mexico), Toltec (Mexico), Maya (southern Mexico and Guatemala), Nicaragua
SOUTH AMERICA -	Quechua, Inca (Peru), Toba (Northern Argentina), Chiriguano (southeast Bolivia), Araucania (coastal Chile)

Evidently, human race has encountered such a catastrophe in the pre-history, a deluge that had threatened to wipe out a particular, a prototype civilization. It is an individual conjecture that the event took place on some other planet inhabited earlier by human beings and the survivors were put on Earth by the patriarchs of a generation that was

technologically far superior to what we are in our present stage of science. Attempts have been made by geologists, marine biologists, paleo-environmentalists, and anthropologists to secure tangible testimony of a flood on this planet too; some have corroborated it, and some have disputed it. A paper contradicting such an event was published by the National Geographic; the essence of the paper is that the flood which occurred due to a rise in the water levels of the Black Sea some 9,400 years ago, was not as devastating as mentioned in the legends. But in a feud between objectivity and creative imagination, the latter always wins through artistic and literary license.

Several scientific expeditions have also taken place to determine whether the deluge was as real and as comprehensive as narrated in the legends and the lore. (Related: Noah's Flood May Have Triggered European Farming" [November 20, 2007]). A marine geologist, Liviu Giosan, with his colleagues discovered the evidence of coastal dunes and shorelines 120 metres below sea level in one of his expeditions in Black Sea in 1993. They came to the conclusion that the flooding had taken place when a rock barrier between the Mediterranean Sea and the Marmara Sea at Bosphorus gave way, the waters of the former poured into the latter. The Black Sea, in their opinion, was earlier a freshwater lake. Besides, there was the Black Sea Expedition undertaken by Bob Mallard in the year 1998, in which he claimed to have found out structures that matched signs of human dwellings. His expedition in 1999 showed proofs of a flood hitting the underwater shoreline of the Black Sea some 7000 years ago.

In case there was a flood, there must have been an ark, or maybe arks. Scientists have already been trying to find out the remains of the Biblical ark. (**Table 2**):

S.No.	CLAIM BY	YEAR	LOCATION
1.	Dr. Friedrich Parrot	1829	Mount Ararat, Turkey
2.	James Bryce, Professor, Oxford	1876	Mount Ararat, Turkey
3.	Lieutenant Roskovitsky, Russian Imperial Air Force	1916	Mount Ararat, Turkey
4.	Wyatt/Fasold, Turkish Air Force	1959	Mount Ararat, Turkey
5.	Captain Schwinghammer, Russian Imperial Air Force	1960	Mount Ararat, Turkey
6.	Ron Wyatt, Nurse and explorer	1980s	Mount Ararat, Turkey
7.	Bob Cornuke, President of the Bible Archaeology Search and Exploration Institute (BASE)	2006	Al Burz Mountains, Iran
8.	Joint Turkish-Hong Kong Expedition	2007	Mount Ararat, Turkey

Even in India, the story of Manu in Hindu religion suggests that such an occurrence had taken place in the remote past:

Manu, the first human, found a small fish in his wash water. The fish begged protection from the larger fishes, in return for which it would save Manu. Manu kept the fish safe, transferring it to larger and larger reservoirs as it grew, and later the fish saved Manu from a deluge by warning him to build a boat and letting him tie the craft to the fish's horn. The fish led him to a mountain and told Manu to tie the ship's rope to a tree to prevent it from drifting. Manu, alone

of all creatures, survived. He made offerings of clarified butter, sour milk, whey, and curds. From these, a woman arose, calling herself Manu's daughter. Whatever blessings he invoked through her were granted him. Through her, he generated this race. (Gaster 94-95)

The alarm is so raucous that every year sees the production of films and novels foretelling an imminent end of the planet. The movie, *2012*, presupposes the displacement of the earth's crust and a resulting tsunami that slurps up most of the landmass. However, in the modern world, it was actually Garrett P Serviss who imagined the annihilation of the human world in a similar manner in his work, *The Second Deluge*. In the novel, Cosmo Versál builds a great levium ark and warns the world of another inundation. Terrible things happen and people's scepticism vanishes once they are face to face with the appalling consequences of the disastrous flood. After circumnavigating the earth which is six miles deep under water, they finally find deliverance in a batholite in America:

'They won't, but I must make them,' replied Cosmo Versál. 'Anyhow, I must make a few of the best of them hear me. The fate of a whole race is at stake. If we can save a handful of the best blood and brain of mankind, the world will have a new chance, and perhaps a better and higher race will be the result.'

Most probably, Mary Shelley's novel *The Last Man* is first in the series of post-apocalyptic fiction in English. Written in 1826, it visualizes a world where some kind of plague has almost wiped out humanity. Set in the 21st century Europe, the end of the novel shows the protagonist, Lionel, swimming to the Greek shore through a violent storm. Since then there has been a barrage of such works in English – *After London* (Richard Jeffreys, 1885); *The War of the Worlds* (H G Wells, 1898); *The Scarlet Plague* (**Jack London, 1915**); *People of the Ruins* (**Edward Shanks, 1920**); *The Moon Maid* (Edgar Rice Burrough, 1926); *When Worlds Collide* (**Philip Gordon Wylie & Edwin Balmer, 1933**); *Star Man's Son* (Andre Norton, 1952); *The City of Ember* (Jeanne DuPrau, 2003); *The Road* (Cormac McCarthy, 2006) etc.

Models are suggested in every one of these post-apocalyptic novels; but the core content of each of them is that human intelligence is an adjunct to God's perspicacity and in the face of a wrathful or absent God, man can sustain life on the earth.

Post-apocalyptic fiction does offer ecological models. The argument that fiction is not fact must be rested here because, after all, a majority of the hypotheses have been engendered through a combination of imagination and logical exploration. The models are as follows:

1. A savage after world (In certain fictional accounts)
2. Happy subsistence through alteration and adaptation. (All major religious texts and lore; most of the post-apocalyptic novels)

The proto sequence-of-events can be seen in a book like *The Road*. Written in 2006 by Cormac McCarthy, this book from America is about

nature as an ally. *Ecotopia* (1975) by Ernest Callanbach shows its obsession with such a relationship. The newly seceded country from the USA does not reject outright high technology but consciously selects it to prevent a degradation of lifestyle.

The third bondage is related with man's evolving ken and forces us to re-examine our stance vis-a-vis the infringement of moral principles of coexistence with the tools of development. *The Monkey Wrench Gang* by Edward Abbey is a fine example of man's social and speculative protest against the wasteland created by industrial development. The work concerns the anxieties of George Washington Hayduke who finds the natuescape of his country threatened by industrial progress. Hayduke oversees a radical environmental movement to cleanse the land.

The fourth relationship appears extra-human prima facie but in reality, both these agents are crucial to man's survival. If advanced technology is seen as a monopoly of the human mind, there is also the admission that renaturization will have the better of technology in the penultimate perception and there will be a point in the future timeline when technology will function symmetrically with nature.

Conclusion:

The endgame is that post-apocalyptic fiction presents a neoteric context to the recall and presage of the cataclysmic event. It personates a prevenient alarm, fabricating a narrative imagery of deconstruction followed by a realignment of sensibilities; and in the course, makes the reader aware that the end to civilization is imminent, within imagination and beyond imaginative discursion. The gruesome aesthetic of extirpation and rebuild will persist:

'...the history of the earth was revealed anew each spring in the shapes of the towering cumulus clouds that moved over the country from the north and west'.

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