

Major Themes in Post-Apocalyptic British Fiction

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Post-Apocalyptic Science Fiction is a genre which involves global catastrophe risk. This kind of literature narrates an apocalyptic event typically being climactic which may be either natural such as runaway climatic change or manmade such as nuclear warfare, or medical such as spread of virus or plague, or imaginative such as zombie apocalypse or alien invasion. Environmental degradation is the deterioration of the environment through depletion of resources such as air, water and soil; the destruction of ecosystems; habitat destruction; the extinction of wildlife and pollution. **Climate fiction**, or climate change fiction, popularly abbreviated as cli-fi, modeled after sci-fi) is the literature that deals with global warming and climate extremities. Not necessarily speculative in nature, works of cli-fi may take place in our world in the near future.

Numerous societies, including the Babylonian and Judaic, had produced apocalyptic literature and

mythology which dealt with the end of the world and of human society. Some epics written around 2000 BC, tell about a myth where the angry gods send floods to punish humanity, but the intervention of the gods save them. In the Hindu Dharmasastra, the apocalyptic deluge plays a prominent part. According to the Matsya Purana, the Matsya avatar of Lord Vishnu, informed the King Manu of an all-destructive deluge which would be coming very soon. The King was advised to build a huge boat (ark) which housed his family, nine types of seeds, pairs of all animals and the Saptarishis to repopulate the Earth, after the deluge would end and the oceans and seas would recede. At the time of deluge, Vishnu appeared as a horned fish and Shesha appeared as a rope, with which Vaivasvata Manu fastened the boat to the horn of the fish. Variants of this story also appear in Buddhist and Jain scriptures. The scriptural story of Noah and his Ark describes the end of a corrupt civilization

and its replacement with a remade world. Noah is assigned the task to build the Ark and save the life forms so as to reestablish a new post-flood world. Even in Quran, a similar story about the Genesis flood narrative is found, where the Islamic counterpart of Noah, Nuh builds the ark and rebuilds humanity.

Post-apocalyptic stories often take place in a non-technological future world, or a world where only scattered elements of society and technology remain. Other themes may be cybernetic revolt, divine judgment, ecological collapse, pandemic, resource depletion, supernatural phenomena, technological singularity, or some other general disaster. To study the themes of this genre, it is important to understand the differences between these sub-genres. There are three main 'bleak future' narratives: dystopian, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic. Dystopias are set in a fully functioning but malevolent society. Though the conditions are awful there are institutions such as medicine and finance that can be recognized. Apocalyptic stories are set during a major disaster such as an earthquake or alien invasion. The disaster is almost always averted in these films and

society continues. Post-apocalyptic stories are set after an apocalyptic event. There is no structure and no society. Humanity has returned to a more primitive and brutal mode of existence. There are differences in the themes too. Apocalyptic literature is about humanity uniting to use our best resources and innovation to overcome an external threat as in **Independence Day** (1996) and **Armageddon** (1998). These books have very pro-technology themes, since that is often humanity's best chance of survival.

In contrast, post-apocalyptic works are generally driven by anti-technology, anti-urban, and anti-modernity themes. The premise of these stories is that the modern world became so corrupted due to technological advancement and growing materialism that it destroyed itself. This leads to a second chance to build a pastoral utopia. Post-apocalyptic fiction takes the world back to a state of primitivism where life is arduous and strenuous without gadgets and machines. But the endings of these novels suggest the ideal scenario is to stay in one of the three main categories: a natural paradise, a pastoral farming community, and a small self sustaining town.

All three of these environments have several qualities in common: they are based on a rural way of life, they are small in area and limited in population numbers and most importantly, they are only sustainable if rebuilding is curtailed. This new way of life seems to be a perfect refuge from the threats and fears posed by both the post-apocalyptic wasteland and the failures on modern life. These utopias are quite short lived as they naturally grow and return to technology and cities which they initially rejected and held responsible for their destruction.

The Post Apocalyptic Literature came into being in 1947, with the publication of Joseph Ward Moore's **Greener Than You Think**. The novel is a bitter reflection of human civilization in a scathing manner often approaching absurdity. With his Swiftian sense of comedy, Moore blends gallows humour with fantasy and the absurd. The novel is a cynical satire on the intervention of man in nature. Mans hunger for excessively fast and unnatural growth of grass with magical growth formula and hence ending the world hunger. This formula sets in a chain reaction since some important point has been overlooked. The grass starts erupting upwards at an excessive

speed and incapacitates men who come to mow it. The unkillable grass renders even the military powerless.

The Ice People is a 1998 sci-fi novel by Maggie Gee, set in a future world dominated by a new ice age. Global warming is the initial context, where increases in temperature are then followed by the cyclic appearance of an ice age. The novel examines different elements of contemporary society: the fundamental roles and relationships of men and women, sexuality, politics and the issue of global warming.

Surviving Evacuation: Book one: London by Frank Tayell is a post apocalyptic novel about zombies: that is one of the major concerns in modern world. An outbreak has occurred in New York, of what no one's entirely sure. There are zombies on the streets and the numbers of the living is diminishing day by day. The book is like a zombie outbreak story that's been written in a very interesting and fresh style: the diary form. The story itself centers on Bill Wright, a Londoner who broke his leg on the day of the outbreak and is subsequently home-bound. As the man partially behind a childhood friend turned minor politician,

Bill was instrumental in laying the foundations for the Evacuation – the mass movement of every British citizen living inland to the coastal regions. From there small agricultural enclaves would be built to make the British Isles self-sustaining before eventually beginning a push back inland to reclaim territory ceded to the undead. Yet the British public knows nothing of the push to reclaim land. Every night all the news channels keep stating is that there has been no outbreak of the virus in Britain or Ireland owing to the military shooting down every plane and the navy sinking every ship that dares to approach the islands.

This obviously isn't true because Bill can see the undead outside his window. Not many at first, but the numbers ebb and flow as time passes. His friend had sent someone to rescue Bill from his house when he was unable to join the evacuation due to his leg, but with the escort lying dead in the road with a bite mark to his neck Bill makes another plan. Forced to leave the safety of his home he ventures out into the undead wasteland that once was England, where he will discover a horrific secret. The book follows Bill as he tries to make his way through London with a bad leg, very limited

supplies and hordes of the zombies at every turn and, along the way, finding out why the evacuation plans and contingencies failed.

Surviving Evacuation: London is told entirely from Bill's perspective through entries in his diary. This is an effective means of conveying the story. The novel takes the reader through Bill's day-to-day struggles for survival after the outbreak to a far more capable and competent man later.

Flood by Stephen Baxter, published in 2008, is set in England 2016, where the summers are becoming more and wet with each passing year. The sea levels are rising at a catastrophic speed because of the melting ice caps. When the world starts drowning, the race to safe places begins. The novel portrays the current estimates of climate change-related sea level rise- the effects of which are catastrophic, In the opening chapter, four main characters (former USAF Captain Lily Brooke, British military officer Piers Michaelmas, English tourist Helen Gray, and NASA scientist Gary Boyle) are liberated by a private megacorporation called AxysCorp from a Christian extremist Catalonian terrorist bunker in Barcelona in 2016, after five years of

captivity. AxysCorp was hoping to save a fifth prisoner, John Foreshaw, but he was executed minutes before the rescue. Nonetheless, the corporation continues to look after the four hostages and search for Helen's daughter, Grace, who was conceived in captivity by the son of a Saudi royal and taken by his family. Helen befriends Foreign Office official Michael Thurley in the hopes of finding her daughter, and the four rescued hostages make a pact to keep in contact.

At this point, sea level changes have already submerged Tuvalu, a low lying South Pacific island, whose inhabitants have been evacuated to New Zealand. London and Sydney are prone to constant flooding. However, as a tidal surge hits London and Sydney, killing hundreds of thousands in both cities, scientists become aware that this cannot be explained solely by the consequences of climate change. American oceanographer Thandie Jones uncovers the truth – through deep sea diving missions to oceanic ridges and trenches reveal that the seabed has fragmented, and there is turbulence that can only be attributable to the infusion of vast subterranean reservoirs of hitherto

hypothesised but undetected oceanic masses of water.

Over the next three decades, ocean waters rise exponentially and inundate the whole world, as the main characters struggle for survival in a vast and continuously altering environment. At this time, New York City is demolished by an Atlantic tidal wave -with hundreds of thousands killed in New York and the city leveled in the process- and Washington, D.C. is evacuated. For the next twenty years, Denver, Colorado becomes the capital of the steadily diminishing United States, which fragments as individual states assert their own survival needs.

By 2020, much of the eastern coast of the United States is underwater, as well as Sacramento, California, on its western coast. Slowly, the United States is eroded away. By 2034, little of Western Europe, Russia, the Americas, Oceania, and Africa remain above the water. Ark Three sails the global ocean in search for trading and finding higher ground, despite running into skirmishes with pirates. Ark Three heads back out to sea but has nowhere to go, given that the floods are now lapping around the Rocky Mountains. By this time,

over five billion people have perished from the floods. By 2048, the Andes, Rocky Mountains and elsewhere have been submerged. Tibet's regime is no more, and Australia, North America, South America, Africa, and most of Asia except for the highest mountains in the Himalayas have been flooded. The novel ends in 2052, as a group of survivors watch the submergence of the peak of Mount Everest. The post-deluge Earth is now at a new environmental equilibrium, with a vast global storm system that is reminiscent of those on Jupiter and Neptune. Civilization is virtually dead at the novel's end. Survivors continue to exist only on the rafts and some decrepit surviving former navy vessels. The children of the rafts, raised on the water, start building their own aquatic culture. By the end of the novel, extinction seems certain for humanity on Earth.

Alex Scarrow's **Last Light**, which depicts the crumbling of civilisation due to a worldwide and near-complete loss of access to oil, moves on in the sequel **Afterlight**. It's a very different story to most of its kind and is entertaining as well as thought provoking. The book **Afterlight** opens 10 years after the collapse of civilization. Jennifer Sutherland

and her children are living on a defunct oil rig off the Norfolk coast with about 450 other people. They are largely sustaining themselves with such activities as fishing and vegetable growing and have even managed to produce a little bit of chicken poo-powered electricity although they occasionally head back to shore to forage in the abandoned warehouses and shops for the things they can't provide for themselves. Jenny Sutherland's quiet leadership and her few but strict rules help the community rub along well together and make the best of their situation. Even so, most of them old enough to remember the times before the crash have a yearning for the things they miss – lights, music or other comforts they used to take for granted.

In London meanwhile one of the government's designated emergency centers has also managed to remain functional. There are about 2000 people at the site which is still run by the man who was in charge at the collapse though he is now aided by a group of teenage boys-turned-soldiers who he essentially bribes with privileges like alcohol, computer games and girls to maintain his version of law and order. With a large stockpile of emergency rations this group has not felt the pressing

necessity to become self-sustaining, although an attempt has been made. Interestingly, the strongest characters of the book are women of various ages and backgrounds while most of the male characters in the book are weak and power mad, especially men under 40 are depicted as barely above wild animal on the evolutionary scale. The dependence of human race upon oil and technology has been taken up as the major theme in this novel.

Greybeard is a science fiction novel by British author Brian Aldiss, published in 1964. Set decades after the Earth's population has been sterilised as a result of nuclear bomb tests conducted in Earth's orbit, the book shows a world emptying of humans, with only an ageing, childless population left. The story is mainly told through the eyes of Algernon "Algy" Timberlane with a grey beard, (of the title) and his wife Martha. The novel ends at a hopeful note about one of the old women getting pregnant. This sounds like a miracle of God to save mankind from extinction. The novel stands on the theme of nuclear horrors which is one of the most pressing ideas in modern life.

H.G. Wells, in nineteenth century, wrote several novels that have a post-apocalyptic theme. **The Time Machine** (1895) has the unnamed protagonist traveling to the year 802,701 A.D. this is a post catastrophic world, where civilization has collapsed and humanity has split into two distinct species, the elfin Eloi and the brutal Morlocks. Later in the story, the time traveler moves forward to a dying Earth beneath a swollen, red sun. Similarly, **"The Machine Stops"** a science fiction short story by E. M. Forster is set in a post-apocalyptic world where humanity lives underground and relies on a giant machine to fulfill their needs, predicted new technologies such as instant messaging and the Internet. The story describes a world in which most of the human population has lost the ability to live on the surface of the Earth. Each individual now lives in isolation below ground in a standard 'cell', with all bodily and spiritual needs met by the omnipotent, global Machine. Travel is permitted but unpopular and rarely necessary. Communication is made via a kind of instant messaging or video conferencing machine with which people conduct their only activity: the sharing of ideas and what passes for knowledge.

Those who do not accept the deity of the Machine are viewed as 'unmechanical' and threatened with Homelessness. The Mending Apparatus—the system charged with repairing defects that appear in the Machine proper—has also failed by this time, but concerns about this are dismissed in the context of the supposed omnipotence of the Machine itself. At first, humans accept the deteriorations as the whim of the Machine, to which they are now wholly subservient, but the situation continues to deteriorate, as the knowledge of how to repair the Machine has been lost. Finally, the Machine apocalyptically collapses, bringing 'civilization' down with it. Before they perish, these people realize that Man and his connection to the natural world are what truly matter, and that it will fall to the surface-dwellers who still exist to rebuild the human race and to prevent the mistake of the Machine from being repeated.

It will not be wrong to conclude that the Post Apocalyptic works of fiction not only reveal human perception of the past but also those of the future. The variety of themes in fact represents the variety of risks to human life in modern world. The past experience colour the vision and cast the shadows of the coming catastrophes on the present. Soon

the horrendous web of technical and natural betrayals engulfs humanity leading to the end of the world.

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