

**Religious Archetypes in Contemporary Post-Apocalyptic Fiction:
The Flood, The Demon and The Rapture in Secular Context**

by

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my wife, Jacklyn, who, through her love and support helped me achieve my education goals culminating with this work. I would also like to mention that it is her skill as an English teacher that helped me to refine the text into a much more readable and effective text through her editorial assistance. I would also like to mention my instructors at Heritage University, especially those on my Thesis Committee, Dr. Loren Schmidt, Professor Ann Olson and Dr. Matthew Burns who made my education experience fun and challenging. Thank you all.

Abstract

For the past seventy years there has been a rising popularity of a genre of Science Fiction known as Post-Apocalyptic literature. This genre creates an end time event, usually one that decimates a large portion of the Earth's population, that leaves behind a small remnant to struggle for survival. In this genre, there are three archetypes, The Flood, The Rapture and The Demon, which are used by authors as literary devices to create stories of depth and complexity. Biblical archetypes are well established in American culture, since it is predominantly Christian. These themes, therefore, are recognizable and understood on an emotional and subconscious level, thus creating an effective backdrop for Post-Apocalyptic stories and novels.

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Review of Literature

Introduction

Considering the state of social upheaval and fear in the late Twentieth Century, it is perhaps no wonder that there was a proliferation of Post-Apocalyptic (PA) fiction and, as a result, literature of analysis as well. As the post-World War II phenomenon of nuclear devastation, PA fiction gave way to more varied and exotic methods of destruction. Critics became more focused on the themes and issues that were raised by these texts. For the purposes of this thesis, in general, and this Review of Literature in specific, I have looked at contemporary pieces of literature and critical works that constrain themselves to the 80's and 90's with a few pieces preceding this time period and a few postdating it for comparison/contrast purposes. My thesis studies the religious themes that exist within contemporary PA works and focusses on three in particular; the image of Flood, Demon and Rapture. The purpose behind the thesis is to study how these themes, or archetypes, are used in the PA genre to create conflict and fear in characters and how they are used to manipulate the psyches and emotions of readers. For my purposes, I have studied the following pieces of criticism and applied to them a classification system so as to contain them in neat vessels for comparison. *Through my research I found little direct study that addressed the exact biblical themes above*, but there were, to varying degrees, works that touched on aspects of the PA genre as it relates to critical apocalyptic Biblical and religious themes.

Critical Review Categories

The following four categories were used to determine how I would interrelate the criticisms to each other. I will group the pieces into these categories for comparison and contrast to one another and comparison and applicability to my work as a whole:

Thematic Studies: Critical works that are related to the larger themes of Post-Apocalyptic thought and its Biblical connections and implications.

Genre Studies: These are pieces of criticism that look at the various fictive genres which have Post-Apocalyptic/Biblical concepts as a major theme in their story. These contain a variety and abundance of information which must be allowed a maximum grade on the scale.

Author Studies: Critical works that study specific authors within the themes of Post-Apocalyptic and Religious ideas within the construct of 100% applicability to my thesis; religious themes of the Flood, the Demon and/or the Rapture are studied and applied directly to contemporary Post-Apocalyptic literature.

Title Studies: Critical works that focus their attention on a specific piece of fiction that is Post-Apocalyptic in nature and has a significant amount of biblical thematic material within it.

Thematic Criticism

This section includes the largest selection of material as compared to the other three categories. I was able to find due to the fact that the PA genre, combined with Biblical themes, permeates all branches of art and literature. For this section, I took a representative cross section of works that deal with apocalypticism in a thematic sense where fiction was not necessarily a constraining factor.

The most important title in this section is the seminal work of apocalyptic criticism, *New Worlds for Old*, by David Ketterer. This piece, written in 1974, is one of the first major studies on the idea of Apocalyptic Literature in general and the Science Fiction genre in specific. This work is quoted and referenced by many of the texts that I use for this paper and is considered a foundation work for PA literary studies. The majority of the book deals with specific authors and the apocalyptic themes that crop up throughout these works. Poe, LeGuin, Vonnegut and Melville are studied with an eye for how these authors utilize apocalyptic themes to manipulate their stories. For my thesis, however, the first section of this book is the most helpful in determining the roots of apocalypticism in American literature and how the genesis happened to germinate a modern literary phenomenon.

Next, the book that explores PA thematic structures in American society, but only touches on its literary form, is James Berger's *After the End*. This work studies the traumatic effects of apocalypse in a historical context focusing on two particular events, the Holocaust and America during the Reagan Presidency. Berger sees apocalyptic themes as being inclusive of everyday events in that they involve any such time where an overwhelming societal or cultural change brings about the end of an era, or a way of life, for a large segment of the population. Berger discusses the language of rhetorical modes used during these times as well as the traumas

that occur for the individuals who experience them. The first section of this book, which discusses the language of the post-apocalypse and the various traumas that are induced, is used for a better understanding of the effect's "an ending" has on individuals and groups.

Stephanie Turner's article, "Imagining a Cloned Messiah," brings into the discussion the "End of Time" fiction trend of messianic cloning in the late 90's through the early 2000's. Turner's assertion, that the possible overflow of human scientific capacity, specifically in the realm of cloning, was a logical progression for Science Fiction literary culture during this time in America. This subgenre is just another method by which authors can utilize Biblical material and religious themes to engage readers and manipulate their preconceived notions of how we think about literature and how those images and emotions can be utilized to effect story telling. As a predominantly Christian society, Americans have a lot of fears and taboos wrapped up in religious culture. These are apparent in a plethora of works which utilize the idea of cloning Christ and the implication this has on society and end time theory. Though the specific messianic theme is not studied in my material, the parallels are undeniable and help to support the larger view of biblical thematic insemination of post-apocalyptic materials.

While looking for relevant materials, I also wanted to include material on the societal beliefs and mores concerning apocalypticism and how religiosity might affect those structures. Daniel Wojcik's article, "Embracing Doomsday," was the best example of the way faith and apocalyptic belief were comingled during the post-World War II era when PA thought and literature were emerging as a popular literary form. His article discusses how prophetic beliefs, subsequent Rapture and Christ's return, effected the method by which people deal with impending doomsday and how the apocryphal events of the end times, as outlined in the Book of Revelation, began to permeate western culture to a degree never before seen. This piece was

instrumental in helping me understand the psyche behind the usage of Biblical devices in the PA literary genre.

Lastly, there are two articles that were very effective at discussing pestilence as a sub theme in PA fiction, as well as which themes of “survival” exist within the PA genre. Elana Gomel, “The Plague of Utopias” is excellent source material as it also discusses the concept of pestilence and plague as a method for flood destruction, which is germane to my study. The entire premise of PA fiction exists within the construct of survival in Mitch Broderick’s article, “Surviving Armageddon.” This piece looks at the literary significance and the effects following global and species wide devastation.

Genre Criticism

Perhaps the best location of source material from which I will draw to prove my hypothesis and support my arguments is genre criticism. This section deals with the specific genre of Post-Apocalyptic fiction and contains three excellent books and four critical essays that discuss the specific genre and the impact of Biblical themes on authors and readers.

Imagining Apocalypse, edited by David Seed, is a collection of critical works by a variety of authors that look at Apocalyptic Fiction from H.G. Wells through the proliferation of the atomic age and into contemporary writings. Two essays that are of particular interest are “Acts of God,” by Robert Crossley and “Rewriting the Christian Apocalypse as a Science Fiction Event,” by Edward James. Both of these pieces have a high relevancy factor for my own work.

The second book, *Apocalypse and Science Fiction*, by Frederick Kreuziger, covers the gamut of the Science Fiction genre working from the outside in, culminating in a chapter that discusses “The Horizon of Theology” in relation to the apocalyptic. This work discusses the theological implications of the PA genre as a fundamental work, on which I will build my more

specific discussion of religious elements, in seven specific texts. Kreuziger attributes much of his core ideas to David Ketterer and his book which was reviewed earlier.

The third book, *Apocalyptic Patterns in Twentieth-Century Fiction*, by David J. Leigh, could have been included in the author specific section of this review, however, due to the abundance of material, and the overall structure of the book and its focus on fiction as a whole, I found it more prudent to include it in this section. This work starts off with definitions and framework discussions on eschatology, apocalyptic themes and theological frameworks, then moves into a discussion of fiction as a device for these themes before doing an exhaustive textual analysis within the construct of specific authors' works which include; Pynchon, DeLillo, Hoban, Zebrowski and Updike, to name a few. With an abundance of material for my arguments in the introduction and initial chapters, the bulk of the material, however, does not concern the specific imagery or themes that I have written about or the authors I have studied.

Lastly, for further material for cross genre comparison, I have included five analytic essays on different literary and artistic formats so as to have a good understanding of the breadth and scope of Post-Apocalyptic themes as it crosses genre lines. Roger Gilbert's "Awash with Angeles" is a treatise on the prevalence of angelic imagery in poetry and prose during the decade of the 80's. Mas'ud Zavarzadeh studied the apocalyptic relationship of prose in his article "The Apocalyptic Fact and the Eclipse of Fiction in Recent Prose Narratives." Also included is a series of articles and interviews by modern Science Fiction writers discussing the wealth of PA topics in a 1988 Symposium on the emerging concept of Cyberpunk. This work was accumulated and composed by Larry McCaffery and Veronica Hollinger's piece on "Contemporary Trends in Science Fiction Criticism." This work helped me organize ideas and process much of the information I found. Lastly, Nathan Scott, Jr.'s "New Heav'ns, New Earth"

is another early piece, which is a nice companion to the Ketterer book and covers many of the same themes accompanying the genre.

Author Criticism

During my research, there were two pieces I found, and included, that were directly tied to authors I was studying within the greater portion of this thesis material. Due to their overwhelming popularity, it is not surprising that someone has studied the works of Stephen King and Margaret Atwood in relation to their post-apocalyptic vision.

James Egan, in his article entitled “Apocalypticism in the Fiction of Stephen King,” discusses the works of *Carrie*, *The Mist* and, a work that I reviewed as well, *The Stand*. Egan does a thorough job of discussing the themes of apocalypse and religion in the character of Carrie, and his discourse on the Biblical allegory that exists throughout *The Stand* was informative. This helped me further develop my own thesis on this text. He does not, however discuss the particular archetypes of the Flood, Demon or Rapture, but as background material it was a helpful piece.

Janet Larson discusses at length the prophetic language in Margaret Atwood’s works which helped me to fully understand the apocalyptic and religious vision from which she writes. Though I do not use the texts Larson describes in her article on the “Future of Prophecy,” it is important to understand Atwood in a broader context as her beliefs and writing techniques can be seen in the *MaddAdam Trilogy* books which I include in my study.

Another larger work that I use for critical source material, is the Lois Parkinson Zamora book, *Writing the Apocalypse*. Zamora studies the historical vision and eschatological themes in three authors from the United States and three from Latin America. This is not in the least bit surprising as religious themes play an integral role in the culture and subsequent fiction from

Latin America. In specific, Zamora looks at the Latin authors Julio Cortazar, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Carlos Fuentes as well as the American authors Thomas Pynchon, John Barth and Walker Percy. This work is critical to my thesis in that it studies the wider implications of PA literature across cultural lines, but still maintains the connection of the Biblical relevance within the larger construct of these authors' works.

In order to make sure I looked at as much variety and diversity within the construct of Biblical themes in PA literature, I also included two critical essays that discussed authors who were not of western hemispherical origin. I found an excellent article on the works of the Russian Anatoli Kim by Harry Walsh, which studied the apocalyptic vision of Russians within the context of the Book of Revelation as it relates to the Eastern Orthodox Church. Lastly, another essay by Richard Priebe on the "Demonic Imagery and the Apocalyptic Vision in the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah," studies the works of the native of Ghana who graduated from Harvard. This critical essay shows how an African, who was educated in the west, brings a unique perspective to the PA genre.

Title Specific Criticism

The first step in researching textual criticism for my thesis included a search for source material on any of the titles that are specific to my work. With the exception of a portion of the Egan piece, which was reviewed above, there were no other works concerning the titles contained within my thesis. The following four pieces of critical theory are included as representative pieces to show how criticism is treated for other titles included in the PA literary genre. These four texts also include some aspects of religious context which the authors explored for their works.

The best piece I found concerning the Flood theme is an article which analyzes the aptly named novel *The Flood* written by Maggie Gee. Sarah Dillon wrote “Imagining Apocalypse: Maggie Gee’s ‘The Flood’” to explore the idea of the Flood as a device for fear in a post 9/11 world. I also explore the use of the Flood theme, though not as it pertains to water, as Dillon does. She asserts that Gee uses the device as a way to deal with an uncertain future where catastrophic events are larger and beyond the control of societies as a whole. It is the lack of control for events that are global in scope that makes the flood a good device to study the fear of catastrophe on individuals and characters.

The next work concerns one of the more famous and mainstream texts in the PA canon written by Lydia Cooper. As the title of her article “Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative” indicates, Cooper sees this work within a western religious context though one that is mythological rather than Biblical. To Ms. Cooper, this entire story is another method by which the grail story, the quest for unobtainable salvation, is placed within the context of the PA genre. What is critical about Mr. McCarthy’s work and, by extension Cooper’s, is that the traditionally Science Fiction subgenre of Post-Apocalyptic fiction moves into a more mainstream fiction light. With the proliferation of works in a multitude of genres, PA is moving out of the marginal and is starting to gain more attention as a mainstream literary device that can have a complexity of subtext applied to it.

Another powerhouse name in Sci-Fi is Octavia Butler. Cathy Peppers article, “Dialogic Origins and Alien Identities in Butler’s *Xenogenesis*” states that there is a wealth of material concerning the Biblical within the *Xenogenesis* Trilogy. Themes of biblical origin placed within a PA context, again, show how it can help to add substance to an otherwise simple alien conqueror story. Utilizing themes of demons, as applied to the alien’s appearance and actions, as

well as the story of Lilith as the mother of a demonic brood, Peppers discusses the complexity of the interaction between humans and the demon-like Oankali as they struggle to supplant one another while also creating a symbiotic relationship. We see this theme throughout my own studies of demon kind.

Lastly, Marlene Goldman's study of the "Apocalyptic and Prophetic Fictions in *Headhunter*" by Timothy Findley is included. I found this work especially intriguing as it was one of the first to discuss the idea of alternate methods to biblical flood symbolism and pseudo-demonic imagery. Characters in a PA future take on the visage of savage creatures, much like biblical demons in appearance, and "Floods" of horrible virus's run roughshod over the Earth and its populations. In my work, we delve deeper into this idea of alternate flood methods and humankind as demon.

Conclusion

Fortunately, there appears to be an abundance of material surrounding biblical/religious/theological themes in relation to Post-Apocalyptic literature. The genre specific material is accessible and helps in my attempts to support my thesis arguments. It also appears that there is little to no direct work on my specific thesis and chosen texts, which is encouraging. Creating new work in the field and adding to the existing canon of scholarship is, ultimately, every critic's goal.

Thesis Introduction

The end of the world is a terrifying thought, not just in its finality but in the process by which it is achieved. Yet we, as a culture, raised with the fear of nuclear war, societal decimation, hazards from space, or destruction from within the body, also find it strangely fascinating and even a little desirable. How can this be? When faced with the possibility of a painful, soul obliterating death, as well as the eradication of everyone and everything we love and know, how can we possibly find this intriguing? Because it is human nature to question our existence in the first place. Since humankind first looked out into the dark of night, heard what was moving there and feared that they wouldn't wake in the morning, people have faced our frailty and imminent mortality. Yet we endure. It is in that survival, living through terror unimaginable, that we find ourselves strangely aroused by the prospect of everything ending. We are invariably drawn to the prospect of facing everything we fear most and living through it. Able to see the approaching dawn of a new world, simpler and pristine, as Noah glimpsed the top of Ararat, people often dream of a cleansing purge.

I have always loved Post-Apocalyptic literature. It has only been a recent development that I have questioned what it is about this genre that has fascinated me since my early teens. But it is not only me. The idea of Post-Apocalyptic storytelling and fantasizing crosses all boundaries of art and entertainment. It is the essence of *possibility* that makes this genre intriguing to many readers. It is not mere fantasy but rather the foretelling of what tomorrow could bring. As David Ketterer states in his seminal work, *New Worlds for Old*, "Apocalyptic literature is concerned with the creation of others worlds which exist, on a literal level, in a credible relationship (whether on the basis of rational extrapolation and analogy or of religious belief) with the 'real' world, thereby causing a metaphorical destruction of that 'real' world in

the reader's head" (Ketterer 13). This says something about us. Why would we spend billions of our hard earned dollars on books, movies, comics, video games, television shows, plays, songs and even poems if this wasn't, in some way, entertaining for us? While I could spend thousands of pages barely touching the surface of these genres and the underlying themes and psychology that artists and authors use to manipulate the senses and emotions of readers, I focus on the genre and method that is most personal to me, fiction. More specifically, the biblical themes that appear in contemporary Post-Apocalyptic fiction.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good." This is how the Bible, and man's existence, begins. With hope and creation and a simple statement that says that the process and the product are good. No ambiguity, simple concise and elegant. Five pages later, God is ready to scrap the entire experiment and proceeds to hit the Divine reset button, flooding the Earth with 40 days and nights of rain. Thus begins man's relationship with a vengeful reality, fraught with uncertainty and devastation.

One Thousand pages later and 6,000, supposed, years of history and human complexity, and God is ready to scrap the whole thing once more. This time, however, he seems to give mankind a proverbial release valve, through the mechanism of Rapture, by which they may yet save their immortal souls. Not a bad deal, if you are among the chosen. But being one of 144,000 people, those taken up, on a planet of more than 7 billion are slim odds by any measure. More reason to be terrified. But, if you are not one of the .00002% saved by God's promise, you are just another statistic that must face the onslaught of beast and demon that will be set forth to torment you throughout the seven year tribulation. This is the well of fear from which Post-

Apocalyptic authors have to draw. A deep and complex well, ingrained in our cultural DNA by millions of years of dark nights and growls from the bushes.

There have been many works of scholarship that have connected the apocalyptic patterns of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, to every form of fiction that man has ever written. Post-Apocalyptic fiction is a direct descendant of that literary tradition, created as a method for secular authors to explore the greater themes of biblical destruction, anti-hero and salvation without delving into religious dogma. The why and wherefores of these other topics are for another time and paper. There are three distinct methods, however, that foster emotional response within the PA genre that I find are perfect devices by which authors can tap into the well of fear residing in the psyche of the western reader. These devices, or archetypes, generate tension and excitement through their familiarity. We see that authors use these three distinct methods, individually or in concert, to create emotionality so as to help define and solidify the idea that the world is ending and it is not going to go “quietly into that goodnight.” It is a recovery from this fear and tension, an enduring against Godlike odds, and an ultimate recovery that makes this genre so popular. Though humans are almost completely annihilated, they persevere.

God destroys the Earth once by flood, but as He states in Genesis, never would He do so by water again. But that is not to say that a flood of another type could not be used to bring about the destruction of the wicked on this Earth. Another method that the Bible uses to determine the possible fate of people who reside in God’s grace on a hostile Earth is that, before the end, and as a harbinger of it, the righteous will be taken up in Rapture. This is to save them from the apocalyptic tribulation that awaits the wicked remnant, a life of suffering that will occur after the Rapture. Lastly, I look at the concept of the Beast, in the form of the Demon, as it

applies to a terror device with this genre of fiction. Whether that be devil or demon, the concept of a supernatural entity, always with decidedly human traits, helps to wreak havoc upon the inhabitants of Earth so as to extradite the suffering of God's forsaken children.

What is meant by Post-Apocalyptic? As a sub-genre of science fiction, the majority of Post-Apocalyptic fiction, or PA as I will henceforth refer to it, takes place in a near future during a time of turmoil. The reason that the proximity to current times is so important is that PA literature relies heavily on current issues of societal strife from which to draw its source material for the methods of destruction. This clear and present danger often helps to amplify the preeminence of the fear experienced. The method of the apocalypse is varied and has changed throughout its literary life.

There are three large and distinct time periods that PA fiction falls into and, for my purposes, I constrain my discussion to the last of these three. The first modern PA fiction is generally thought to be Mary Shelly's *The Last Man*. She established the genre with a character who finds himself as the last man living within a depopulated London following an unspecified event. It is critical to note that the PA genre is mostly focused upon life after an end time event, hence the "post" portion of the title. While the method of destruction and death is varied and exciting, usually the end event happens within the first 20% of the book and the remaining portion deals with the fallout and the ways in which people deal with the destruction, loss and ultimate recovery, if there is one.

The pieces that pre-date World War II are rudimentary examples of the genre, but are necessary stepping stones in the development of studies in human suffering and the psychological effects of mass death, of existing alone or in a small population following the event. The next big segment of the PA genre falls in the post WWII era, circa 1945 through the

ending days of the Cold War around 1980. As many would notice, with the bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the world was introduced to a new method of warfare and destruction that was without parallel in pre-modern times. Now, man could kill millions and obliterate cities in a single stroke. Never have so few been able to destroy so many in so little time with so little effort. These events, and the subsequent nuclear arms race, brought to the forefront of every world citizen's mind, that there was a very real and tangible possibility and probability that we would destroy ourselves in a fiery Armageddon. It was a dark and stormy 35 years. It was also during this time that the space race took off and man began to look beyond Earth and found new possibilities as well as new and frightening chances for being wiped out. We find that the majority of PA fiction was created with the premise that the end of the world would come in the fire of nuclear holocaust or from the infiltration and decimation by superior extraterrestrial technology, numbers or biology. The Bible says it would no longer seek destruction by water, therefore fire is its logical antithesis. Nuclear fire is a very real possibility. Fear grows as the proliferation grows. With the very unsteady treaty device of MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) people grow to live in fear. The basis for this fear is the belief that humans, at their core, cannot stop from seeking violence and destruction. Much psychological thought, at the time, lent credence to the idea that man is destined to destroy himself because he can't help it. It is in his nature to destroy what he fears, and he fears, mostly, himself.

The third time period, which is the focus of this work begins around 1980 and continues to present day. During the decades of the 80's and 90's and continuing through the mid 2000's, Americans needed to find another demon to blame for the possible death of human society. The Cold War had ended without anyone setting off another bomb, the lessons of Japan were still understood but the emotional proximity and relevance was muted, so our fear dissipated. What

then, could we possibly look to that would bring about our destruction? With the realization that the dinosaurs of 65 million years ago were wiped out by a meteor or comet, and with the world seeing another visitation from Halley's comet in 1986, we began to look towards the heavens for our destructor. Comets called Wormwood were seen everywhere, harbingers of destruction just like the Book of Revelation foretold. But this threat was short lived. A meteor hasn't struck with any significance in our species' unconscious memories and, with the exception of the Tunguska Blast, one hasn't even come close. With the advances in space tracking and technology, we are growing more confident in our ability to recognize and avert a serious astronomical event. This removes the uncertainty and the fear from our collective consciousness. From where then could destruction come? The answer lies within our two core belief structures, those of science and religion. When it comes to the age old conflict of faith over reason, modern PA authors have a plethora of material from which to manipulate the emotional state of their readers.

I discuss three methods that PA authors use to create this tension of fear within their readers that is based upon the western teachings of Biblical Christianity. The first idea is that the world will indeed end, once again in a flood, but that this flood will be from a different medium than water. I also look into the Christian idea of the beast, in the form of the demon, as a harbinger of doom and a creature of torture, terror and destruction through supernatural means. Lastly, I look at the mechanism of Rapture, that method by which many Christians reportedly avoid the tribulations to come and how those "left behind" will view the new world order they are left with. These three devices, Flood, Rapture and Demon create within the reader a primal fear that initiates and maintains tension and terror making a PA fiction piece successful and, ironically, highly enjoyable.

Section 1 : The Flood

“Then God said to Noah and his sons with him: ...I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life.”

Genesis 9:15

There is an overwhelming use of the Flood archetype to create a destructive force large enough to bring about the Post-Apocalyptic landscape in which these fictive novels are set. Whether one is talking to the devoutly religious or the adamantly agnostic or even the reverently atheistic, there is and always will be a fundamental fear in the possibility of an overwhelming force that sweeps away everything humans have built. A force, we as individuals, as a culture or even a society, can never prevent. The biblical Flood, from which most of these fears are generated, is steeped in message and allegory and the fear of it has plagued man for centuries. It is a seminal event in Judeo-Christian folklore, coming as it does at the very beginning of the Bible. It is the device of God which is used to show his overwhelming power and authority over a humanity that has gone astray, leaving only the most holy of individuals to survive and repopulate. It for this very reason that it is a popular device for PA authors.

There has been much study over the years on whether or not the biblical Flood actually happened. There is much anecdotal evidence, however, that indicates it was, indeed, a factual event, though its breadth and scope are hotly debated. There are flood myths that show up in the ancient Sumerian text “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” in ancient stories retold in the oral histories of indigenous peoples in Australia and North and South America. There has also come to light a considerable amount of archaeological and geological evidence that supports the concept of a large scale deluge happening sometime in the distant past, but occurring while humans existed in their current biological state. It is no wonder then that there is an almost genetic memory that

plagues our dreams and creates an undercurrent of fear that Post-Apocalyptic authors utilize as a tool for setting a scene in their fiction.

There is a constraint, however, that many authors seem bound by when creating scenes of global devastation in their novels. Many, but not all, authors play along with the Judeo-Christian concept that another flood will happen but that the world will not be consumed in water. For as God said, in the introducing quote, He will never destroy the Earth again with *water*. So there is a small bone thrown to humanity. But there is a subtle threat in the same statement of the Christian God. This phrase implies that there will be a second time for destruction, and the next method will be just as destructive and probably far more imaginative. Thus, PA authors find themselves within a rich field of possibility because the methods of this future destruction are endless and speculation abounds whether it be fire, or ice (both distinct possibilities in the current political and ecological climate) or something far more insidious. It is in this wealth of possibility that good writers of PA fiction find the ability to stretch the imagination of their readers and utilize this deep seeded organic, genetic fear to shape their destructive events and couch a message, both political and allegorical, in the destructive forces of their choosing. I discuss some of the forms this future flood takes and it is surprising the imaginative ways this is brought about.

The Flood of Fire – *Swan Song*

Fire and Ice
 Some say the world will end in fire,
 Some say in ice.
 From what I've tasted of desire
 I hold with those who favor fire.
 But if I had to perish twice,
 I think I know enough of hate
 To say that for destruction ice
 Is also great
 And would suffice.

Robert Frost

During the years following the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki the threat of a global conflagration became a real threat to humanity as a species. The fire caused by the explosive effects of the thermonuclear device and the images of human ash shadows burned into pavement and the possible and inevitable nuclear winter that would result, helped to frame the Science Fiction imagination immediately.. Even as far back as 1944, when the first atomic bombs were being tested, there was a worry that the heat and fire from the bombs could set the atmosphere aflame and burn every living thing on earth to ash. While we know that this did not happen and that the effects of a single device won't do this, what about the effects of a hundred, or a thousand or even ten thousand nuclear devices going off in series? Bombs that are many times the magnitude of those that were dropped in Japan are now in existence. It is this environment that the PA novel genre began to grow in popularity and prevalence. It isn't surprising when, according to Daniel Wojcik:

The extent to which visions of nuclear catastrophe are found to be compatible with prophecy beliefs about a fiery conflagration at the end of time is indicated by...39 percent of a sample population agreed with the statement 'when the Bible predicts that the earth will be destroyed by fire, it's telling us that a nuclear war is inevitable.' If this sampling of the populace is representative, then

as many as eighty-five million Americans may believe that nuclear apocalypse is foreordained (Wojcik 298).

Throughout the Cold War there were stories of man being thrust back into the Stone Age because of a thermonuclear war. People incinerated where they stood. Cities laid waste and the earth scorched to sterility. This concept gained in strength as the hostility between the Soviets and the Americans heated and the Cold War peaked. Slowly, as hostilities began to dissipate with the advent of the Reagan/Gorbachev summits, and the ideals of Glasnost and Perestroika took hold, fear of nuclear holocaust began to dissipate. Suddenly, cooler heads prevailed. At the culmination of the Cold War came a book by Robert McCammon, *Swan Song*, which did an exceptional job of portraying what this Flood of Fire would look like throughout various sectors of the American landscape.

Political threats culminate and a president, weak of character and conscience, is pushed by war mongering generals into a first strike against the Soviets, causing the inevitable. There are three distinct environs that McCammon inspects when the Flood begins. There is the small gas station outpost in the plains of Kansas, devoid of most civilization, abutting small town America, and, presumably, safe by disassociation from society by distance. Readers hope there is safety in distance. The next community is the armored bunker. Protected from the coming conflagration by engineering and forethought, its inhabitants have been well prepared and trained. This paranoia will certainly keep them safe? But human greed creates a living tomb for these survivors as it collapses in the onslaught. Lastly, there are the environs of New York city. The obvious first strike target of any hostility towards the United States. We expect this to be consumed but are still shocked by the process and the outcome. The flood scenario is described here in the experiences of the sinner-saint character, Sister Creep as she dives down into the sewers to try to escape the coming apocalypse:

A blast of fire was roaring toward her along the tunnel, and she could already feel the rush of air being sucked into it as if into a vacuum. In less than a minute it would be upon her...She looked back and saw the flames shooting out red tendrils that snapped the air like whips. The vacuum suction pulled at her, trying to draw her backward into the fire, and when she screamed the air sizzled in her nostrils and at the back of her throat...The air was unbreathable. There was no time to get up and run; the fire was almost upon her.

The imagery of suffocation and the onrush of the unstoppable wall of fire immediately brings to mind what it must be like to be drowned in a deluge of water with the added agony of being burned alive.

These three distinctly American environments, places that most Americans can identify with, gives an excellent cross section of where we would all find ourselves should this Flood of Fire come to pass. By showing the diversity of environments and individuals in his characters, McCammon shows the reader that though we may all be different and exist in varying places, when this flood comes we are all swept up in it.

The Flood of Sickness – *The Stand*

With the end of the Cold War and the dawning of the 21st century many new, and terrible, ways are developed in PA fiction to bring a swift and effective death. As the threat of death by fire receded, and man's burgeoning science became more sophisticated through technology, a new and more terrible threat of flood came to the forefront of the human experience.

Sickness is something that man has dealt with for his entire species history and it is only in the past two hundred years or so that we have come to understand the cause and cure of many illnesses which have devastated man on multiple occasions. The Black Death during the mid-14th century devastated the population of Europe to the tune of more than 12 million dead. Settlers bring small pox to the New World, destroying millions of indigenous lives and entire

cultures. The constant threat of polio to children from all walks of life and even the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918, memories of which can still be discussed by survivors, all lead humans to have a very real respect and fear of the vast threat of bacteria and virus. Disease is one of those possible catastrophes that exist somewhere between the real and the supernatural. This gives it even more power in the human emotional psyche to create disturbance and terror. As Elana Gomel states in her article “The Plague of Utopias,” “Pestilence is poised on the cusp between divine punishment and manmade disaster. On the one hand, unlike nuclear war or ecological catastrophe, pandemic has a venerable historical pedigree that leads back from current best sellers...to the medieval horrors of the Black Death and indeed to the Book of Revelation itself” (Gomel 407).

Fortunately there is science and education on our side helping to eradicate many of these global threats. But, what if man were to work on a threat instead of a cure? What if the overwhelming knowledge and science of man were to create, instead of cure, a virus that could selectively kill his enemies? What if this threat got out? Who would be safe then?

Stephen King’s, *The Stand* deals with just such a flood scenario. What if man were to create a super flu? Like McCammon, King creates a multifaceted story across multiple characters and locations, all within the boundaries of the United States, to place his coming apocalypse. This is an effective tool as it helps the reader to again see that no one is immune and nowhere is safe.

Following an unwitting release of a super flu dubbed, “Captain Trips” by the populace of America, the pandemic quickly sweeps through all cross sections of society. As the government tries to control the situation through disinformation and military might, much of the chaos and disorder one associates with an apocalyptic event comes about. People die in droves, many clinging to the hope that a cure will come “by the end of the week” as the government promises.

But, alas, there is no cure to be had and at the end of the first section of the novel, 99.9% of the American population is destroyed by the flood of this man-made virus. There is little left, but a few remaining survivors who will bring a battle of good versus evil to its head in another 700 pages. King makes no bones about mentioning the biblical overtones of the end of this world as prophets and priests proclaim the end is nigh. At the end of chapter 26, where all of the social collapse happens, there is an apropos couple of lines which King writes to show his ironic use of religion as a message of warning:

Graffiti written on the front of the First Baptist Church of Atlanta
in red spray paint:

“Dear Jesus, I will see you soon. Your friend, America. PS. I hope
you will still have some vacancies by the end of the week.”

This type of PA flood has become even more popular in recent history since the events of 9/11 and the subsequent threats of bioterrorism. We have within our oral and written history, as well as our genetic memory, knowledge of how sickness and disease can be an indiscriminate killer. Illness takes the young and old, rich and poor, powerful and weak all at once and equally. If and when a flood of this type were to ever spread across the land, who is to say where they would turn for comfort or explanation in the ending moment? Noah had the God of Abraham, but who would we have?

The Flood of Unchecked Progress. – *The Year of the Flood*

The madness of man is the belief in his own superiority over the habits of nature. We spend so much time trying to subjugate and bend nature to our whim that many often fail to stop and ask, should we? No, man’s hubris has always been in his asking can we? This is the landscape that Margaret Atwood creates for her *MaddAdam Trilogy*. Filled with biblical reference and parallel, the second book of the trilogy, *The Year of the Flood*, deals more

specifically with the flood that destroys the majority of the Earth's population. Through the majority of her first novel, *Oryx and Crake*, we find that humanity has bisected itself into two distinct populations; those who live within compounds run by corporations for scientific success and profit, and those from the "outside" world which try to scrape by on its leavings. As the gap between the haves and have not's widens, we see that the moral and ethical constraints of society have crumbled in the face of overwhelming power and profit. This moral decay, analogous to the decay preceding the biblical Flood of Noah, ultimately leads to the intentional release of a super virus that sweeps through global society killing those who thought they were protected within the compounds as well as those who reside outside. Again, we are left with a few survivors who struggle, amidst the destruction of all human life, to survive daily life and rebuild.

Atwood follows a biblical script closely in her text. One of the survivors is Ren, who is a part of a sectarian group of separatists, called "The Gardeners," a group that is preparing for the oncoming flood by developing skills in survival through creating a self-sufficient environment. The group is called "The Gardeners" because they strive to create food and sustain themselves through gardening and self-sufficiency as they live atop an abandoned apartment building aptly named the Edencliff Rooftop Garden. They see themselves as the group that will repopulate the dead Earth as Adam and Eve tried to do from the Garden of Eden. As Adam 1 speaks his homily at their weekly service he gives voice to this compact:

By covering such barren rooftops with greenery we are doing our small part in the redemption of God's Creation from the decay and sterility that lies all around us, and feeding ourselves with unpolluted food into the bargain.

Ultimately though, like the Biblical Adam and Eve, they are thrust from their Garden. All of the Gardeners, except Ren, are killed along with everyone else through the "waterless flood."

Many readers would argue that, like *The Stand*, the flood that is referenced in Atwood's novel is a sickness, bioengineered by man, that gets out of hand and kills. This is the end result which does bring about the mass extinction event. I would argue, however, that the true flood that Atwood wants to call attention to is the flood of unchecked human scientific progress. The unchecked progress of science and bioengineering, which has run amok in Atwood's landscape, is ultimately the catalyst of the viral flood. What happens in this world is the ultimate fear that many have about the science of eugenics, the ability of man to shape his own genetic destiny. The fact that science has culminated in man being able to create hybrid animals, plants and even humans, shows that it has grown outside the constraints of morality and ethics. When one genius, the human god of science and technology seen in the character of Crake, determines, on his own, that life in its current form is twisted and unsalvageable, he deliberately forces a flood of sickness to wipe the Earth clean of its corrupt inhabitants. Thus a man has supplanted God in the role of judge.

The Gardeners, in contrast, believe that each human, distinct and precious, is ultimately savable. They see man as a being of infinite possibility and though they welcome the coming flood as a necessary purge, they do not desire its catastrophic results. Because man is perfect he is, in essence, an ark within himself. Transferring genetic code as well as memories, through oral tradition and knowledge, and through moral and holistic practice, everyone is an ark. This is from *The God's Gardeners Oral Hymnbook*:

My body is my earthly Ark,
 It's proof against the Flood;
 It holds all Creatures in its heart,
 And knows that they are good.

It's builded firm of genes and cells,
 And neurons without number;
 My Ark enfolds the million years

That Adam spent in slumber.

And when Destruction swirls around,
To Ararat I'll glide;
My Ark will then come safe to land
By light of Spirit's guide.

With Creatures all, in harmony
I'll pass my mortal days,
While each in its appointed voice
Sings the Creator's praise.

Atwood is obviously concerned with the path our technological advancement is taking. She writes within a religious, moral and ethical framework for many of her novels. In the *MaddAdam Trilogy* she gives the reader a view of one possible scenario should we, as a society, abandon common sense and compassion in favor of profit and science for science sake. The reflective nature of the Gardeners in *The Year of the Flood* along with their hopeful, yet fatalistic view of the future, reminds the reader that vigilance is everyone's job. In her article on "The Future of Prophecy," Janet Larson had the following to say about Atwood, "Typically she seeks after the possible unities of things by searching back through the lives of the Earth and its cultures for wisdom, weaving together many traditions, including the *Judeo-Christian*, (emphasis mine) in order to reawaken commitment to a covenant with life that Western civilization has again and again broken" (Larson 27). Atwood is saying that even though a flood may be inevitable, it is by no means the end. Just as it wasn't the end for Noah.

Chapter 2 – The Demon

“When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him...

Then Jesus asked him, ‘What is your name?’

‘My name is Legion,’ he replied, ‘for we are many.’”

Mark 5:2-9

The Bible is rich in allegory and parable and, because humans are so rich in imagination, it is not at all surprising that many writers take these stories and embellish them for entertainment purposes. Long has the Bible needed an adversary for the Savior and the saints. Can we ever really know a person is truly holy if they are not tested by evil? In every rich literary tradition heroes need antagonists, and the Bible is no different. Was not even Jesus tested by Satan in the wilderness? It has been argued by philosophers for centuries that the human condition needs a darkness so that it can search out the light. Evil must exist in order for goodness to also exist. For how can anyone know goodness and light, if there is no evil and darkness with which to contrast it?

For this reason, people, since time immemorial, have invented ways to strive against the dark within our souls. Whether it was a way to rationalize the taking of a life or to answer the question of “why do bad things happen to me when I am a good person?” It is thought that the origin of the search for evil, and its physical manifestation, monsters, began as man became self-aware. As mankind began to know ourselves and understand our place within a hostile world, we had to find a way to rationalize the seeming evil that happened. Now, what humanity often explains as evil is actually just a way that our psyches handle the bad things that happen in any complex system. Chaos and entropy are the nature of the cosmos, whether we like it or not. As

humans, we strive to create order out of that chaos so that we can maintain some control over an uncontrollable world.

The writers of the books of the Bible were just drawing on a long tradition to help their readers, listeners and ultimate followers make sense out of this chaos and gain some control over it. Without this apparent control, life would be so frightening that we wouldn't be able to get up each day and face the inevitability of pain and death that every life promises. What is that noise in the night, out on the savannah? What kills the goats, forcing my family to starve and suffer? Why does my child grow sick and die? All questions that lead inexorably to the creations of gods and monsters. Gods are things we can't control, greater than us and beyond us. But monsters can be seen and interacted with. Maybe we can then control them.

When man became self-aware, he saw another way to gain control over his own fears. This was to force them upon others. If I want something or if something is taken from me, I can always hurt, maim or kill to get what I want, thus we regain power. But it is with a false sense of security that we actually exist. Because anything we can do, can be done to us. Thus we become the monsters we fear.

When we find the monster within or without, it is never the horror we imagine in our nightmares. It is almost always a reflection of the physical world in which we find ourselves. It is in the real world we find our monsters and it is this physical place that gives them their form and function. Most of the monsters we create are bastardizations of the real world. Creatures that exist or existed, embellished through imagination to help quiet the unknown. The ancient dragon, imagined from the bones of the dinosaur. The all-powerful sea monster, the Kraken, its form and function taken from the giant squid, Architeuthis, or sometimes a creature is an amalgam of animals common enough but fierce and deadly in combination, like the Sphinx, the

Griffon or the Harpy. Creatures that have the parts of everything we have feared from our time living in the outdoors and often with parts that are human as well. Predators can and will kill to eat and survive, but, more often than not, the deadliest and most evil of our monsters are abominations of the human form. We have all heard that the greatest evil in our human experience is man's inhumanity to man. Why then would our monsters, or demons, not appear like us. In this way they become unrecognizable until it is too late and we are subject to their destruction.

So what role do these biblical monsters play in this game of destruction? They are our antithesis. They are the uncontrollable force that acts against us in order to take what we have and destroy what we love. The Bible has many manifestations of this evil which many PA authors draw upon to create the ultimate nemesis. The Demon is the monster in human form. He is the creation of the imagination that is man with power beyond humans and an appetite that is ravenous and malignant.

PA authors draw upon three separate types of the demon archetype to instill horror and provide a destructive force upon their characters; the devil, the legion or the demon horde. The horde is seen as an unstoppable wave of super human death and destruction like a flood of flesh discussed in chapter one, is a powerful antihuman image and is portrayed as pure animal instinct, devoid of reason. The arch demon, individualistic and filled with pointed malignancy is the demon which has no overriding sense of control. It knows its own appetite for death, commits suffering in the name of pain sake, and is often, the Devil incarnate. More often than not this creation takes on inherent Satan like qualities, but PA authors rarely say that it is, in actuality Satan. By preventing a Satan character from appearing in a fiction piece authors restrict the devastation which could take on purely Godlike force in which man would have chance of

survival and must, ultimately, lose. There has to be a chance for man in order for a PA work to succeed. These demons have many of the Satan-like powers and qualities, the ability to perform miraculous, though malignant, works, magic capabilities and the ability to be a general or leader to a host of destructive forces, but are not omnipotent or indestructible, thus man has a chance at winning the struggle. Sometimes demonic, but more likely human in origin, these characters are often singular and are the antagonists in novels of this genre.

The demons that I discuss in this section are to be distinguished from the devil-like specific character that we sometimes see in PA fiction. Characters such as Randall Flagg in *The Stand* who is of obvious demonic origin and endeavors to capitalize on the misfortunes of man's accidental extinction through the "Captain Trips" virus. Randall Flagg is more like a Satan figure than a demon, though this is left vague in the story. The reader, at times, believes he is the Antichrist figure that comes on the heels of destruction to complete the task of subjugating the survivors or destroying those who will not bow down. The antagonist in *Swan Song*, again, a character of ultimate evil and definite Satanic and demonic origins, should be placed in this category as well. He is a central and pivotal character that acts more like a Luciferian image than a member of the demonic horde that I discuss in this section. These characters belong in a class by themselves, while definitely biblical in origin and motivation, they do not fit the profile established. For this section I delve into the demonic grouping of the generic agent of terror and chaos. The demons of Dante and those of renaissance artists or those of the poet William Blake are the ones that I deal with in the following excerpt.

Man's Monstrous Reflection - *Demons*

A Divine Image
 Cruelty has a human heart,
 And jealousy a human face;
 Terror the human form divine
 And secrecy the human dress.

The human dress is forged iron,
 The human form a fiery forge,
 The human face a furnace sealed,
 The human heart its hungry gorge.

William Blake

As was stated above, there is little horror that man has not visited upon his fellow man over his lengthy history that hasn't been horrifying and terrible. In many ways, the image of the demon is a reflection of all of the horror and atrocity that we can and have created. Whether it is murder, torture, rape, mutilation or any number of things man has done to harm children or those who cannot stand for themselves, the demon in all its monstrous and terrible glory is an apt analogue for man's inhumanity to man.

The novel *Demons*, by John Shirley, is a story that is the perfect example of how man uses the demon as a supernatural device for creating chaos and power. As is often the case, however, when we try to reign in that chaos, it gets out of hand and becomes the foundation for a hell on Earth. In the novel, there is a shadow organization that conducts secret ancient ceremonies to bring demons into the world so as to create chaos and death. The leadership of the organization, in the form of a rogue multi-billion dollar corporate owner, wants to take over the running of the world. In order to accomplish this summoning task, several mass extinction sites are created by killing off the residents of communities through the use of a "reportedly" innocuous pesticide. This pesticide, however, happens to be lethal to anything biologic. By creating the extinction sites in a pattern resembling a pentagram across the US, demons are

summoned and instructed to kill, maim and torture at will, without purpose or reason. The demons that are summoned are somewhat anthropomorphic and exhibit behavior that is strangely human, almost as if they are abomination of humans. In this way Shirley points out that these supposed supernatural creatures are actually just manifestations of humanities' own vices and evil spirit, "So they weren't demons, except in the way that any human could be a demon: they were humans who betrayed him." The novel is replete with comparisons to humanity with the demons. In appearance, many of the demons have distinctly human forms and characteristics:

SHARKADIANS can fly via rows of smallish leather wings that shouldn't be big enough to carry them but can. Head is all jaws; body is ostensibly like a human female, but with clawed hands and feet.

GNASHERS Talkative; at times, appear to have an agenda; are verbally sadistic; telepathic. Humanoid but have four arms...have human eyes.

BUGSYS Parodies of humans; no two are alike but all are similar in style, complete with skin that resembles clothing but spotted with oozing sores. They can sometimes be stymied for a while by offering to play cards with them – they love gambling. Tend to chatter idiotically...Like the Gnashers, speak English or any language of Earth at will.

The image of the Sharkadian, very Harpy-like in appearance with a female body, the claws of a predator and the head of a shark is a horrific image and emotionally terrifying. The promise of lust and love with the threat of death and dismemberment is a deeply instilled fear for the stereotype of the lethality of women should they be spurned. The image of the Gnasher, a talkative, verbally sadistic individual, reminiscent of someone who can harm and maim just as easily with words as with a weapon, claws or teeth. Having four arms reinforces the image that through their manipulations and machinations they can grasp and hold on with preternatural strength. Lastly we have the Buggy, an image of greed and sadism. Humans in the story who encounter them, are only able to escape its clutches by feeding into its desire and vanity. This is

exemplified in the fact that they love to gamble, hear and play music and listen to compliments. All of these characteristics are very human in nature and are reflected quite aptly in the image of these demonic forces.

We can see from these descriptions that the author intends for the reader to make a leap of logic into a belief that there is a possibility that these creatures are insane humans who have popped up around the Earth and presented themselves as biblical demons. In fact, at the end of the novel, many of the inhabitants of the Earth believe that the entire event was orchestrated by people wearing costumes and releasing psychotropic drugs into the water supply. So terrible is the mirror which is held up to humanity that they convince themselves the entire matter was a hoax. We as a species are infinite in our ability to self-deceive. We can commit horrors unimaginable and rationalize it away so as to go on living in the fictive world we create. A world where we are the real monsters in nature.

God's Horrific Hammer – *The Dead*

Next we find an interesting book by Mark E. Rogers called, *The Dead*. In this book, the demons are not brought about by man. Not directly, anyway. In this story, the demon horde is the prophetic dead of the Book of Revelation who rise up after the Rapture to take dominion over the Earth and persecute those who remain. Like the classic zombie, these dead are vast in number, self-replicating through the taking of the living, immune to pain or mortal needs. The difference arises in their inability to be killed by the well-known method of destruction of the brain. The dead of the novel are divine agents, thus, though the protagonists and pivotal characters try a variety of ways to destroy them, they keep coming, even if they have no head or body to use:

Max grabbed up the shotgun, fired into the mummified wrist protruding through the door. Ignited by the point-blank blast, bits

of burning flesh streaked like little meteors, and the severed wrist whipped back into the blackness trailing flame...Gary stepped back, panting. And felt something crawling up his leg. He looked down. It was the severed hand, scrabbling like a giant spider.

This image is extremely powerful for readers because it is at this point they realize that there is no truth to the stories of zombies that they have all heard through popular culture. These creatures are unstoppable by any force short of full immolation. Even though the characters are faced, throughout the novel, with overwhelming evidence of the existence of the reality of Biblical Apocalypse, their rationality refuses to accept the reality that they are thrust into. They see the horrors that their friends and neighbors have become, but refuse to believe that they are the monsters being punished.

There is no greater image of the demon as evil human analogue than in the zombie. They are the undead horde, human in image and form, but insatiable in their hunger for human flesh or brains. One of the greatest taboos in the human emotional self is the taboo against the eating of human flesh. This is why the image of the zombie is so powerful. They have appetites so singular in purpose that it overcomes millions of years of evolutionary boundary and restriction. This demon horde is slightly different, however. These zombies kill to win over people to the side of death and evil. They kill to punish men for their sins. Headed by a master demon, they are the hammer stroke of God, wiping away the earth in a horror filled, painful, torturous stroke so that man may know His awful power.

At the head of this horde is a singular demon which has taken over the body of a state trooper. Thus the author has taken an image of authority and order and twisted it into an agent of death and chaos.

But there are things more than human about. Legion's one, as even you must have guessed. The Biblical Legion, if you can believe it. A real celebrity. Gadarene swine, and all that – it

seems it wasn't just schizophrenia after all! In any case, he's running the show here on Earth. And as the name suggests, there are actually quite a few of him.

This passage is a direct reflection of the introductory quote from the book of Mark. It reinforces the idea that the Legion, with whom the protagonists are struggling, is not some natural phenomenon, but rather the actual character that Christ cast out into the swine when he meet the demon in the tombs. Even the use of the term legion in this context indicates that there are overwhelming odds against humanity in this case. It is the evils of man that are innumerable. It is the vast capacity of man to create torment. Man's inhumanity to man is legion. In the end, there is no salvation through struggling with this reality. The characters who escape the dead are those who accept their monstrous natures and ask for forgiveness and perform the ultimate of sacrifices, dying for another. It is only through this remarkable act of selfless love that we can overcome the demon that exists within each of us.

Chapter 3 – The Rapture

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the lord in the air.

1 Thessalonians 4:17

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live upon the earth.

Revelation 3:10

Even thinking about the word Rapture makes one want to be part of it. Imagine Rapture, the enduring sensation of total and unequalled bliss. I suppose that it is not at all strange that this is what many Christians in western society call the process by which they are taken up and “saved” from a world which is to be plunged into torment and unending disaster. Who wouldn’t want to be part of this? Yet Christian doctrine says that no more than 12,000 members from the 12 tribes of Israel, are going to be a part of this spiritual orgasm, “Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.” (Revelation 7:4). That is less than .00002% of the world’s current population. A select group indeed. But what is the alternative? According to the Book of Revelation, “Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, ‘Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the Earth.’” In the previous sections to this work, we have already seen what that wrath entails. But, for those who can bear the tortures and demons and floods, there is still hope. If one can stick it out, the individual will then reside with Christ in a paradise on Earth for a thousand years. Sounds nice doesn’t it?

In the texts that I chose to study that utilize the Rapture as a psychological device, I strive to focus on those which are secular rather than religious. Now, I will say upfront that it is an impossibility to have a Rapture theme without any Christian connotation because the idea seems to be specifically Christian in its character as a method of saving the faithful. No other major religion has an analogue, but there are those authors who are skillful enough to couch this

distinct idea in a secular environment with secular repercussions. Edward James put it best in his article, “Rewriting the Christian Apocalypse as a Science Fictional Event,”

[As a progenitor of Science Fiction] no one in print, as far as I know, perhaps out of misplaced reverence, has suggested St. John of Patmos, the author of the book of Revelation. Yet he is one of the most widely quoted and influential of all writers on the future: the symbolic creator of a prophetic tradition that has influenced much more secular approaches to speculation about the future, and his Book survives to this day as an influential and powerful way of imagining the future (James 45).

I want to first make the distinction that The Christian Rapture is not the same as a mass extinction event or a mass exodus like we see in many Science Fiction and PA literature.

Rapture is not the result of a flood event, like a conflagration, or a watery deluge or even a global viral spread. Rapture is a pure, distinct, supernatural event that PA authors utilize to establish a psychological context within which those who are left behind, whether individuals, communities or societies as a whole, must deal with the repercussions of being such. In this way, there are actually two different ways an author can treat the event. The author can use the Rapture in a way that initiates a tribulation period on a biblical scale, i.e. quakes, famine, demons, stars falling from the skies, “dogs and cats, living together, mass hysteria,” etc. Or, authors can utilize the event in a more subtle, psychological way where the turmoil and tribulation exists within the conscious experience of the people who are left behind. I will look at examples of the latter use of a Rapture event avoiding the overt religious Rapture which has been studied by Christian scholars.

There is a single, effective, purpose to using this event-type in the PA genre, and that is to draw on the common and combined deep seeded fear that most of humanity shares. The fear of being excluded and segregated from our peers. Humans, being social animals, must remain within a fairly healthy group environment in order to be happy and whole. We see this all the

time in the news, “isolated loner who lives by himself, snaps, and kills thirteen puppies at a local mall.” I make light in this instance, but the basis of the problem is true. We cannot exist alone and being left behind, believing we are not worthy of belonging, is one of, if not the ultimate fear with which we are faced. I dare say that I would rather deal with a hoard of zombies with two good friends at my back or risk life and limb in a global thermonuclear holocaust with a small group of survivors, than live alone in paradise.

The Rapture’s Effect on the Individual – “Judgment Passed”

In the short story “Judgment Passed” by Jerry Oltion, we find a group of eight interstellar travelers who return to an Earth devoid of all human existence after exploring a distant planet. Through the story, we find that Christ has returned and taken up everyone, not just the select few as the Book of Revelation indicates. This event happens over the course of several days, and is reported in newspapers which give an account of Christ coming down from on high, “He’s apparently given people six days to prepare themselves, then on the seventh He had called them all to judgment. No special call for the faithful, no time for tribulation for the unbelievers; He’d hauled everyone off at once, presumably to sort them out later.” All news stops, the travelers return and are alone. Oltion does a very good job of giving the remaining characters a variety of responses to the dilemma in which they find themselves. They are all clearly shaken, and haven’t a clue as to why they were left behind. The first response of the group is to have a Christian service, “To try to get God’s attention.” This, of course, fails to work. It is at this point that the group fractures and goes their separate ways to try and sort out what they should do. Two distinctly different courses of action take place. A couple, having come to terms with the idea that there is no one coming back for them and that they may never understand what happened, decide to restart human society. This is the path towards hope. It is precisely because

these two individuals have someone, even if it's only a single individual, to cling to, that allows them to dream of a future. The alternative path is seen in the despondent loner who is hell bent on getting God's attention so that he will be taken up as well. Where the path of hope previously alluded to is one of creation, the path of despair, of needing to be brought along, is the path of destruction. The loner decides he will set out to ignite as many nuclear warheads in as many locations as needed to get the attention of the One who left him behind. A big hammer to knock on a big door. Ultimately, through psychological subversion and misdirection the couple are able to manipulate the destructive member and assimilate him into the future they have envisioned. As always, two paths, one of hope and one of despair and destruction. Which will mankind choose should the choice ever be placed before him?

The Rapture's Effect on Society - *The Leftovers*

The novel *The Leftovers*, by Tom Perrotta, is a little bit more ambitious in its scope. We find in its pages that the characters who are left behind act out in these same patterns of construction and destruction depending upon their perspective of the disappearance event. Perrotta follows Oltion in one respect, using a Rapture like event to create psychological instability in his story and within his characters. Remembering that there is a human fear of loss, especially unexplainable loss, Perrotta grabs on to the throat of the reader before they even open the book. Those who inhabit the story are "The Leftovers" in every nuanced sense of that word. They are those who must clean up after the chosen are taken, though there is never any rhyme or reason to the supposed selection. It is as if everyone who is left behind takes on the characteristics of being a leftover; the scraps to be put away, perhaps useful in the future, or maybe left to rot, never knowing the joy of use.

The event is never completely determined to be the actual Rapture as the disappearances are cross religious and cross cultural, “Something tragic occurred, the experts repeated over and over. It was a Rapture-like phenomenon, but it doesn’t appear to have been the Rapture.” The scope is quite broad, however, since Perrotta seems to be more concerned with how society as a whole would deal with such an event rather than the individual, “It didn’t matter that God hadn’t factored religion into His decision-making – if anything, that just made it worse, more of a personal rejection.” The fallout from such a seemingly random event leaves society in disarray. Schools are shut down, businesses closed and the government is crippled as scientist and theologians struggle to find an answer. The social impact of the event is then spelled out by Perrotta through the story of a family in a small town. A mother has her husband and two children taken. A girl’s best friend vanishes in front of her. Children are left parentless or a single child in a family of six vanishes. There is no pattern and there is never any answer to the mystery in the text. The purpose of the event seems to be entirely a method of psychological stress in which his characters are placed for the story to develop.

One of the interesting social consequences is that people become far more serious and the enjoyment of anything seems impossible. There is always the specter of those who were taken lurking in the shadows for those who were left. It is this struggle, emotional at its core, that creates tension in the characters and the story. Characters can’t let go of those who are gone, there were no bodies to bury because it was unknown if the missing were dead or merely displaced. Because of this there is always the possibility of a reappearance happening. What if you had a funeral for your baby but it reappeared suddenly, just like when it went missing? The guilt and confusion is crippling. Then there is the feeling of anger that is associated with this loss. It can’t be rectified in the normal stages of grief because it is backed by a seeming envy of

those who were chosen. It is this complex psychological and emotional system that all of the characters find themselves in the story. Even three years later, when the story takes place, there is no resolution and the fallout is still being felt.

An interesting result of the event is that special cults pop up around the world called the Guilty Remnant. Their answer to handling the mystery is presented with in the interactions between those who belong and those who don't:

At the time, the [Glorious Remnant] seemed to have sprung up out of nowhere, a spontaneous local reaction to an unprecedented tragedy...despite its monastic appearance, the Mapleton Chapter quickly revealed itself to be an ambitious and disciplined organization with a taste for civil disobedience and political theater.

As the story progresses, the reader finds out that the Guilty Remnant are trying to force the disappearance event to happen again. As they go about reminding, with their silent protest, the people of town about their impure thoughts and activities, they begin to stage in-group assassinations to prove to the God who took their loved ones that they can sacrifice whatever is necessary in order to be chosen as well. In one way, this sacrificial act is like Abraham raising the knife over Isaac, ready to sacrifice him to prove his love for God. In *The Leftovers* however, God doesn't stop the knife from falling. Like the character in Oltoin's book, who was banging on the door of Heaven with nuclear bombs, these people are banging on the gates with their very souls.

Again, like the Oltion story, there are two paths to take. That of creation and hope and that of regression and despair. The story of hope does begin to come out towards the end of the novel as characters reconcile, slowly, the event and happiness begins anew, but the specter of death and old world retribution remains in equal amounts at the end. Thus Perrotta is saying the nature of man is both progressive and regressive, dependent upon the individual.

Conclusion

As the new millennium approached, there were many new and exotic ways that PA authors brought about the end of the world in their novels and stories. Man has forever been fascinated with the possibility of the world ending in a cataclysmic event. Millennialists during the year 999 were just as convinced that their world was coming to an end a thousand years ago and I am sure that those who are living in the year 2999 will also be certain of their imminent destruction as well. Even as I write this, there are those who are counting down to December 21st, 2012 which is the end of the Mayan calendar. It would seem that man will always find a need to explore the nature of his fears and strive to bring them into the light of day.

Things will always go bump in the night. It is impossible to know everything that exists in a complex and chaotic world. For this reason we, as a species, will always strive against the monsters that live in our world and live within us. We will be curious about the news, flock to movies and buy the books in droves so that we can see the monsters we create. I believe that it is in the creation of art, which often imitates life, that we bring into the light of day those parts of ourselves that can be monstrous and evil. By looking at them, perhaps we can understand a little of why evil exists and how it can still hold sway over people in today's society.

What then, is the alternative. Humans are a social breed. Though we may fear our neighbors, misunderstand those from diverse cultures and hate what is different, the alternative is no less frightening. We cannot exist in a vacuum. We cannot sit by when terrible things happen to people, when loved ones and friends in far off countries disappear without notice or cause and do nothing. Being alone and left out, left over and left behind is a terrible thought to ponder. For this reason, we should all strive to move forward in peace and understanding so that we can be a part of something bigger than ourselves.

Post-Apocalyptic fiction is an excellent and creative way to explore the innumerable possibilities of possible destruction and the hope that exists in overcoming it. There is, however, always an upside to this genre. In the event of a future Flood event, there is the hope and possibility of renewal and rebirth. Like the Flood of Genesis, there was a dawning of a new day in which mankind was given a clean Earth to repopulate and a new agreement, or covenant, was established with God. There is, for readers of PA fiction, this hope. While readers may revel in the idea and process, in all its gory details, of everything being wiped clean through virus, fire or ice, there is the hope that it may be we who survive. There is that appeal of rebirth, a new chance at life, perhaps in a simpler, quieter environment bereft of evil and the demons we are. Perhaps we don't need a Rapture to take us away on angel's wings. Maybe we can create a new world order through constructive rather than destructive methods. We see this at the beginning of each year. We rededicate ourselves to health, to our families or to prosperity in the coming year. Humans have always been fascinated with endings, but we are more enraptured by beginnings.

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