

Who Cares? Locating in the Affective Resonance of the Apocalyptic Mode a Political Impulse to Care

Storytelling at the End of the World

After decades of dire warnings and plaintive calls to action, a consensus has emerged: there is a desperate need for new ways to tell the story of climate change.¹ Nearly five decades of scientific and popular discourse have generated awareness but not action. Nathaniel Rich synthesizes “the most common explanation” for the individual and collective failure to act,” by turning to “the depredations of the fossil fuel industry, which in recent decades has committed to playing the role of villain with comic-book bravado” (Introduction). This line of thinking suggests that humanity has been hoodwinked – deliberately and purposefully manipulated into inaction. There is no small measure of truth in this explanation – the influence of corporations, politicians, and institutions with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo have undoubtedly contributed to a pervasive and deadly stasis.² There is, however, another possibility, a possibility that hinges upon a different sort of structural influence – the power of stories.

Amitav Ghosh begins his non-fiction confrontation with climate change, *The Great Derangement*, with a section titled “Stories” in which he concludes that understanding the stories that we tell about climate change “may well be the key to understanding why contemporary culture finds it so hard to deal with climate change”(9). Embedded within Ghosh’s critique of the narrative framing of the climate crisis is a condemnation of the kinds of stories that have centered the climate crisis thus far, and these stories are – by and large – apocalyptic.

The apocalyptic mode has become by far and away the most popular and prominent framing of the climate crisis; and yet, the apocalyptic mode is consistently dismissed and demeaned as a narrative response to the climate crisis.³ Invariably, criticism of the

¹ Journalists, activists, public academics, and politicians have all engaged with this decidedly ecocritical line of thinking. For a brief review of transdisciplinary scholarship on the subject see: Simon Estok, “Narrativizing Science: The Ecocritical Imagination and Ecophobia”(2010); Mithra Moezzi, Kathryn B. Janda, and Sea Rotmann, “Using stories, narratives, and storytelling in energy and climate change research” (2017); and, Dylan Harris’ “Telling Stories about Climate Change”(2019), among many others.

² Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway in their influential 2010 publication *Merchants of Doubt* supplement what Rich terms “the most common explanation” with their chilling account of “a concerted and systematic effort by some individuals to undermine and discredit the scientific process” devoted to surfacing and establishing the truth of climate change (Chapter 6).

³ An emphatic rejection of the apocalyptic mode as it has been deployed to narrate the climate crisis can be found in Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus’ “The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World” (2004) or Erik Swyngedouw’s, “Apocalypse Forever? Post-political Populism and the Spectre of Climate Change”(2010) as well as Paul Hoggett’s “Climate Change and the Apocalyptic Imagination” (2011) and Donna Haraway’s, *Staying With the Trouble* (2016) among virtually innumerable others.

apocalyptic mode suggests that this particular form of storytelling stymies collective action to mitigate the threat of climate change by representing environmental cataclysm as a foregone conclusion. However, this reading of apocalyptic texts profoundly misunderstands their power. I propose that apocalyptic texts are neither apathetic nor apolitical; on the contrary, apocalyptic texts represent an embodied and deeply felt engagement with a planet in peril. The fundamental premise of this paper is that understanding the affective resonance of apocalyptically imagined environments is vital to engaging with the power of narrative to shape our shared understanding of the climate crisis and inspire transformative change.

Exploring the affective dimensions of the apocalyptic mode is vital to a more nuanced understanding of the implications and effects of apocalyptic storytelling in an age of climate crisis. Although a dialogue about the affective dimensions to environmental communication is increasingly prominent, scientific interest in affect and the environment is hardly new.⁴ With intellectual inheritances that date back to the mid-twentieth century, affect has been defined differentially according to varying traditions of scholarship emanating from the work of Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari on the one hand and critical interpretations of Sylvan Tomkins by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick on the other, but at its core affect theory consistently engages with the visceral and the embodied – with *feeling*. Ecocritical scholarship in particular has invested in exploring affective engagements with the environment. “From its inception in the early 1990s,” suggests Alexa Weik von Mossner, “ecocriticism has placed great trust in the ability of environmental narratives to have lasting effects on the attitudes and behaviors of their readers. Many ecocritics have also had an eye on perceptual and affective processes in that context, asserting that they are important not only in the production of environmental narratives but also for their societal effects”(8).

This paper is deeply indebted to earlier ecocritical engagements with affect in surfacing the political power of narrative – those “social effects” Weik von Mossner describes – particularly as those explorations intersect with considerations of the apocalyptic mode. And, among those probing the intersection of affect and environmental narrative, the most radical reconsiderations of the apocalyptic mode have been produced by Black, Indigenous, Feminist, and Queer scholars who have worked to radically reimagine the affective possibilities inherent in apocalyptic literature. What Audra Mitchell and Aadita Chaudhury term “the rich

⁴ In her consideration of allegories of the Anthropocene, Elizabeth DeLoughrey notes with interest that across the disciplines scientists have “lamented their inability to galvanize the public about the importance of mitigating rather than adapting to a warming planet...[and] this has opened up a dialogue about the affective dimensions to environmental communication”(179) citing Anthony Leiserowitz, “Climate Change Risk Perception and Policy Preferences: The Role of Affect, Imagery, and Values”(2002) and Diana M. Liverman, “Conventions of Climate Change: Constructions of Danger and the Dispossession of the Atmosphere” (2009).

and varied sphere of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) futurisms” actively challenge the “increasingly influential literature on ‘human extinction’, ‘global catastrophic risks’, and eco-apocalypse” by proposing “plural worlds that vastly exceed white visions of ‘the’ end of ‘the world’”(310). The pluralism and multiplicity of embodied experiences of environmental crisis at work in BIPOC futurisms offer clear evidence of the lived experience of radically unequal distributions of violence and upheaval meted out in a warming world.⁵ This work of exploring how the climate in crisis can *feel* very different based on each uniquely embodied experience of dwelling on a planet in peril is precisely the work of affective ecocriticism, a term pioneered by Sylvan Goldberg and adopted by Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino in their edited volume dedicated to expanding and enriching “the affect-environment confluence within new temporal and generic territories”(8). Working ecocritically, this paper aims to deepen and nuance our shared understanding of the political function of the “generic territory” of the apocalyptic mode. Contrary to the widely held belief that rendering the altered landscapes of the climate crisis apocalyptically is the narrative equivalent of watching as the world burns, I contend that narrative constructions of an apocalyptically imagined earth offer convincing evidence of an affective engagement with the environment in crisis that is avowedly political in its impulse towards care.

Care, according to the seminal definition produced by Joan Tronto and Bernice Fischer is a “species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible”(40). This broadly defined “species activity” requires an integrated conceptualization of care as both a disposition (affect) and a practice (labor). The affective dimension of care is often associated with love, affection, concern, worry, or taking responsibility for the well-being of another, while the material practices of care (labor) can be most easily identified in maintenance work and practices of care-giving (Tronto 105-08). Fundamental to this integrated understanding of care are two basic principles: first, the idea that care is a networked– “neither self-referring nor self-absorbing” and second, the idea that care “will lead to some type of action”(Tronto 102); in a sense, these two principles form the basis for a “politics of care.” Given that the apocalyptic mode is persistently associated with apathy and a perceived failure to inspire political action,

⁵ Scientific evidence of these disparities abounds throughout the literature. See, for example, Jalonne White-Newsome et al. “Climate Change, Heat Waves, and Environmental Justice: Advancing Knowledge and Action”(2009); Barry S. Levy and Jonathan A. Patz, “Climate Change, Human Rights, and Social Justice”(2015); S. Nazrul Islam and John Winkel, “Climate Change and Social Inequality”(2017); Thomas et al. “Explaining differential vulnerability to climate change: A social science review”(2018); and, Matthew Hauer et al. “The Path of Least Resistance: Projections of Social Inequalities as a Result of Climate Change in the United States”(2020).

interrogating the significance of care to the apocalyptic mode could not be more vital. Exploring the ways in which an impulse to care manifest in feeling and in practice within apocalyptic narrative offers an alternative to the perceived “politics of apathy” at work in the apocalyptic mode. In fact, the most incisive apocalyptic renderings of a planet in peril – like Kass Morgan’s YA novel *The 100*, which I will explore in detail – ought to be recognized as narratives that not only validate affective ties to a vibrant, more-than-human environment, but also proposes a humble, restorative, and communal approach to environmental regeneration and resurgence through care.

Of course, staking a claim to the political significance of the apocalyptic mode as a narrative framework for the climate in crisis demands a careful consideration of the environmental and political inheritances of the apocalyptic mode, which has concerned itself with cataclysmic environmental crisis for more than two thousand years.

Apocalyptic Inheritances: From Prophecy to Pop Culture

Apocalyptic writing finds its origins in theological prophecy – texts that proclaim an imminent and catastrophic end to the world that is both preordained and, essentially, prologue to the manifestation of a heavenly new world that shall be inhabited by the true believers.⁶ The contemporary theological scholar Lorenzo DiTommaso differentiates between these “biblical apocalypses” and more contemporary apocalyptic texts, which he terms “secular apocalypses” (479). The Book of Revelation – the final book of the Christian bible and inarguably the foremost biblical apocalypse – relates the vision John the Divine receives of a preordained and imminent end to the world. The cataclysmic nature of the transformations orchestrated by God in Revelation are environmental in nature, and it is the earthly environment that is most devastated as hail and fire were mixed with blood and cast upon the earth such that “the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up” (Rev. 8:7); “a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea” (Rev. 8:8); and a bottomless pit was opened “and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit” (Rev. 9:2). Throughout Revelation many men (and more than a fair share of women) die, but more dramatically –

⁶ For more on the history and function of apocalyptic literature see Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (1967); Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1970)(Cohn); John J. Collins, “Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre” (1979); Bernard McGinn, *Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture* (1998); James Berger, *After the End* (1999)

more spectacularly – the environment itself is broken, swallowed up, poisoned, bloodied and burned.

Revelation, with its consuming interest in environmental cataclysm, remains the most widely read and profoundly influential biblical apocalypse.⁷ However, for centuries secular apocalyptic texts have also conjured up spectacular visions of environmental crisis. When Jonathan Safran Foer suggests that “the chief threat to human life—the overlapping emergencies of ever-stronger superstorms and rising seas, more severe droughts and declining water supplies, increasingly large ocean dead zones, massive noxious-insect outbreaks, and the daily disappearance of forests and species—is, for most people, not a good story”(13) he is profoundly mistaken. In fact, these sorts of stories have been among the most popular for nearly a century.

As early as 1916, the film *The End of the World* riveted audiences with spectacular depictions of natural disasters; 1933 brought the earthquake-and-flood epic *Deluge* to the big screen, and that was long before *Waterworld* became one of the costliest flops in entertainment history, only to re-emerge in the public imagination as a cult classic. More recently, films like *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *Children of Men* (2006), and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) have all provided wildly popular representations of the overlapping emergencies of rising seas, pervasive droughts, declining water supplies, severe storms, and mass-extinctions.

In fiction, popular and critically acclaimed texts from Barbara Kingsolver (*Flight Behavior*, 2012), Margaret Atwood (*The MaddAddam Trilogy*, 2013), Kim Stanley Robinson (*New York 2140*, 2017), and John Lanchester (*The Wall*, 2019) are just the latest in a long history of disaster fiction that has captured the public imagination. What sets these stories apart from the kind of stories demanded by climate activists like Safran Foer is not the subject matter; what sets these stories apart is a particular approach to storytelling. Each of the titles referenced here – and a host of others that have gone unnamed – are undeniably and self-indulgently apocalyptic. What then leads scholars of the climate crisis like Safran Foer to ignore or discount these apocalyptic narratives of slow and spectacular environmental crisis? The rejection of the apocalyptic mode as a powerful force for imagining otherwise hinges not on the question of popularity, but on the question of politics.

The apocalyptic mode is perceived by most credible writers of the climate crisis as the narrative manifestation of apathy – the functional opposite of thinking that engages

⁷ Bernard McGinn terms Revelation “the apocalyptic book *par excellence*”(Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages 14).

constructively with the cause of our current crisis or that which proactively proposes an alternatively-imagined future. Donna Haraway describes the apocalyptic mode as “a position that the game is over, it’s too late, there’s no sense trying to make anything any better, or at least no sense having any active trust in each other in working and playing for a resurgent world” (3). Haraway is not alone; throughout the late 20th and early 21st century, serious scholars of the climate crisis have overwhelmingly dismissed the apocalyptic mode. “In discussions about climate change,” observes Rebecca Evans, “the popular tendency toward the apocalyptic is matched only by the popular tendency to critique apocalyptic rhetoric as fatalistic”(501).

However, the casual, unthinking certainty with which the apocalyptic mode is rendered politically problematic fails to take into account the historical significance of apocalyptic rhetoric to the American environmental movement. In fact, many – if not most – of the texts that came both to define and to determine the course of the modern American environmental movement have deployed apocalyptic narrative strategies to great effect.

Invoking *Silent Spring*, Greg Garrard has suggested that “the founding text of modern environmentalism...relies on the literary genres of pastoral and apocalypse, pre-existing ways of imagining the place of humans in nature that may be traced back to such sources as Genesis and Revelation, the first and last books of the Bible” (*Ecocriticism* 2). Garrard’s analysis of *Silent Spring* points to a powerful synthesis of the narratological and political power of apocalyptic rhetoric. The fable that opens Carson’s seminal text actively draws upon a long history of apocalyptic rhetoric to conjure up an apocalyptic landscape that would not only capture the reader’s imagination and lay claim to a particular vision of the American environment, but also provoke direct and sustained political action. And Carson was successful, extraordinarily successful in fact. *Silent Spring* has captured the attention of generations of readers and scholars, selling millions of copies and shaping the debate around pollution and environmental degradation in America. *Silent Spring* has also profoundly influenced the political landscape, producing legislation and regulations that have transformed not only the American landscape but also the global ecosystem.⁸

In his 2001 analysis of environmentalism and the apocalyptic tradition, Garrard notes that beyond *Silent Spring*, Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (1972) and Al Gore's *Earth in*

⁸ Eula Biss in her expansive 2014 text *On Immunity*, quotes the journalist Tina Rosenberg who states plainly that “Few books have done more to change the world...DDT killed bald eagles because of its persistence in the environment...*Silent Spring* is now killing African children because of its persistence in the public mind.” Biss goes on to postulate that “the blame for this may belong more to us, the inheritors of *Silent Spring*, than to the book, but either way Malaria has resurged in some countries where DDT is no longer used against mosquitoes”(“On Immunity”).

the Balance (1992) rely heavily on the apocalyptic mode and that “apocalyptic rhetoric is deployed in the activist literature of Earth First!, the philosophical reflections of Bill McKibben, the poetry of Robinson Jeffers...even the notion of 'environmental crisis' itself is inflected by it”(“Environmentalism and the Apocalyptic Tradition” 47). Given the centrality of apocalypticism to the notion of environmental crisis itself, it is not surprising that the texts most central to defining and conveying the climate crisis have also relied heavily on apocalyptic rhetoric.⁹ In recent decades, the climate crisis has become virtually synonymous with environmental apocalypse throughout the popular press, in climate fiction, non-fiction, and in the rhetoric of activists who liken the warming world to Armageddon in a dramatic unification of the biblical and secular understandings of the term. And indeed, it is only logical that climate activists would invoke a sense of environmental apocalypse given that “very similar rhetorical strategies have provided the green movement with some of its most striking successes”(Garrard “Environmentalism and the Apocalyptic Tradition” 49). In fact, the apocalyptic mode has become utterly vital to environmental discourse (*Ecocriticism* 104); Lawrence Buell even goes so far as to suggest that “apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal”(285).

Clearly, the apocalyptic mode is not only popular and influential but demonstrably effective in transforming not only hearts and minds, but also laws and policies in the interest of environmental preservation. This inconvenient historical reality poses an interesting question: if the apocalyptic imagination of environments in crisis does not lead to apathy and inaction, what then does the apocalyptic mode do?

Revolution and Resurgence: The Political Power of the Apocalyptic Mode

Historically, the apocalyptic mode has often been deployed as a rejection of the status quo. Biblical apocalypticism is widely acknowledged to be a form of revolutionary imagining otherwise – a way of writing back against hegemony and claiming space for a radical insurgency.¹⁰ Indeed, conceiving of writers in the apocalyptic mode as revolutionaries is only

⁹ See for example, Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (1989); Al Gore, *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006); and David Wallace-Wells, “The Uninhabitable Earth” (2019) among many others.

¹⁰ Judy Diehl describes the Book of Revelation as “the most unambiguous and blatant example of confrontation between the early Christians and the Roman Empire in the New Testament”(168) and similar interpretations of anti-imperial rhetoric and purpose have been identified in less prominent biblical apocalypses. Examples of this sort of apocalyptic imagining otherwise can also be identified throughout the ongoing process of settler colonialism, from the 15th century Friar Ramón Pane’s engagement with a prophecy foretelling an apocalyptic end for the Taino people in the wake of the Columbian arrival, to the 19th century Paiute prophet Wovoka’s Indigenous re-inscription of the rhetoric of the Book of Revelation in the Ghost Dance Movement (as described

logical. The powers that be have no interest in the end of the world – only a dissatisfied minority convinced that transformative change is the only possible way forward would dedicate themselves to a narrative framing of time and space that posits an immanent end and a radical new beginning.

Understanding the apocalyptic mode as revolutionary demands dismantling the subtle logic that universalizes discourses that predict the imminent end of the world. The self-same rhetoric that naturalizes a singular “end” to a singular “world” produces in discourse a homogenized and undifferentiated human race in jeopardy. This logic fundamentally ignores the inequalities that have always been inherent in apocalyptic visions of catastrophe and are notably resurgent in the discourse on climate change.¹¹

An apocalyptic framing of the climate crisis is essentially a rebuke to the dominant discourse, which refuses to acknowledge the differentiated and radically unequal ways in which the intersecting and ongoing forces of settler colonialism and late-stage capitalism impact individual experiences of the climate crisis. Thus, apocalyptic renderings of a planet in peril can be interpreted as both a logical and fundamentally clearheaded response to the structural transformations at work in a warming world; what Rebecca Evans terms “an ideologically honest reckoning of how deeply the logics and material practices that produce climate change are rooted in Western modernity”(505). Read in this light, the systemic antipathy toward apocalypticism represents not a vested interest in new imaginative possibilities, but rather a denial of the revolutionary challenge to the status quo manifested in the apocalyptic mode.

As perhaps the first of a growing number of scholars to embrace the revolutionary logics inherent in environmental apocalypticism, Frederick Buell suggests that on a planet in peril the apocalyptic mode must be understood as “a way of life” (*From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century*) – an imaginative framework that is vital to dwelling in crisis. And yet, despite Buell’s optimistic assessment of the climate crisis as “site for reinventing apocalypse” (“A Short History of Environmental Apocalypse” 32), he remains fundamentally dismissive of the political potency of apocalyptic environmentalism in the present moment:

To say that apocalypse has become today a way of life is, of course, to suggest an attitude that undergirds much environmental passivity and quiet desperation today.

by Mark Rifkin in *Beyond Settler Time* (2017)), to the contemporary promise of apocalyptic hip hop described in James Ford’s essay “When Disaster Strikes: On the Apocalyptic Tone of Hip Hop”(2018).

¹¹ See, for example, Wallace-Wells who invokes a universal “we” who have “engineered” the climate crisis and a singular “we” who have the “responsibility to avoid it” (*The Uninhabitable Earth* 10-11).

The metaphor is, in short, a central expression of our current environmental dilemmas. It also is something that, strange as it may seem, can and already is being used to help escort us further and further into catastrophe. (F. Buell "A Short History of Environmental Apocalypse" 30-31)

Echoing Buell, Erik Swyngedouw's critique of the apocalyptic mode suggests that an apocalyptic framing of the climate crisis "produces a thoroughly depoliticized imaginary, one that does not revolve around choosing *one trajectory*, one that is not articulated with specific political programs or socio-ecological project or revolutions (Swyngedouw 219, my emphasis). Swyngedouw, like Buell, has identified a political populism inherent in the apocalyptic mode, yet both authors dismiss the potential impact of the apocalyptic mode as dangerous and misleading in that apocalyptic populism is not conducive to uniting a globalized "we" in political action against a threat imagined universally.

Rather than positing the need for a unified global "we" to take up political arms against a status quo that consistently and recklessly refuses to acknowledge the dynamic, individual, and networked relationships between people and environments in peril, I suggest that the climate crisis might in fact be an opportunity to embrace the affective possibilities in the apocalyptic mode and consider the political impact of the impulse to care.

Contemporary climate writing is virtually given over to what Maria Puig de la Bellacasa describes as "calls for caring" as though "the response to sustained and pervasive ecological crisis [is] a unified and moralizing demand that everyone, everywhere 'care more'"(de la Bellacasa). These "calls for care" are often meted out by an economic, political or cultural authority without regard for individually situated experiences of climate and crisis. When established, white, male, authors like David Wallace-Wells writing for *New York Magazine* demand that a universalized "we" must "care more" for a planet in peril, the prospect of care is deployed in service of a hegemonic world order. Thus, when it comes to explorations of care, the question ought not to be "how can we care more?" but rather, as de la Bellacasa suggests, "what happens to our work when we pay attention to moments where the question of 'how to care?' is insistent but not easily answerable"(de la Bellacasa). Apocalyptic literature like Kass Morgan's *The 100* offers just such a potent site for observation and interrogation.

Affect, Care and The 100

In what follows, I will explore the affective environments of Kass Morgan’s apocalyptic YA novel *The 100* as one useful example of the political potency of an impulse to care. Morgan’s text is an example of what Frederick Buell dismissively terms “women-centered” apocalyptic fictions which feature “dramas of relationships” in contrast to the “male-centered survivalist action-adventure that, unsurprisingly, stands at the center of many post-apocalyptic fictions” (“A Short History of Environmental Apocalypse” 18). Buell’s gendered division of apocalyptic fictions is telling for the ways in which it dismisses the significance of “relationships” to the apocalyptic mode. However, any effort to reconsider the apocalyptic mode and its affective dimensions could not conceivably move forward without surfacing and engaging with the serious environmental considerations that are made manifest in these “women-centered” relationship dramas; and so, taking up Morgan’s female-driven narrative offers the opportunity not only to engage with affective and political considerations, but also to suggest ways in which the apocalyptic corpus must be reimagined in order to achieve a more complete understanding of the function of apocalyptic renderings of a climate in crisis.

The 100 is the first book in a series of young adult science fiction novels that have spawned a transmedia empire. Book One of *The 100* reached #13 on *The New York Times’* Young Adult Best Seller List subsequent to its 2013 publication; however, it was the development of an eponymous TV series, which premiered on the CW in 2014, that prompted overwhelming popular recognition of the series. An estimated 2.7 million American viewers watched the series premiere, marking the show as one of the most-watched in the history of the network. *The 100* was subsequently licensed exclusively to Netflix – a move that expanded the potential audience for the apocalyptic series dramatically. Curiously, the apocalyptic teen drama not only appealed to a broad audience, but also generated widespread critical acclaim. The average rating for the series on Rotten Tomatoes is 92% positive, and reviewers have compared the series favorably to modern television classics such as *The Sopranos*, *Breaking Bad*, and *Game of Thrones*.¹² *The 100* has also generated an enthusiastic and persistent fan response – from 2015 through 2018, *The 100* was consistently ranked among the top 20 most re-blogged live-action television shows on Tumblr (fanlore.org); and as of this publication, fans of the show have contributed more than 33,605 fan authored fics based on the show to Archive of Our Own, one of the most popular online archives of fanfiction.

Primarily, this paper will focus on Kass Morgan’s text, with occasional references to the television series, which quickly departs from the plot of the books after the pilot episode,

¹² See Kyle Fowle’s review for *The A.V. Club* and Maureen Ryan’s for *The Huffington Post*.

which closely corresponds to the plot of Book 1. Both series kick off in space three generations after a thermonuclear apocalypse as the last remaining descendants of the human race cling to life on satellites in orbit around the earth. As the satellites slowly fall into disrepair life in space becomes increasingly untenable, and 100 juvenile offenders who would otherwise be put to death are sent back to Earth to test whether the planet might once again be able to sustain human life.

The narrative is relayed through the voices of Clarke, Bellamy, Wells, and Glass, for whom the matter of returning to an apocalyptically imagined earth is inextricably bound up with the romantic love that consumes a vast quantity of the affective space of the narrative. Clarke is sentenced to return to earth for the crimes of her parents – a complex subplot involving political subterfuge and illegal human trials in pursuit of scientific advances concerning radiation poisoning; Wells commits a criminal act in order to follow Clarke – “the girl he loved”(Morgan 218, 99) – to earth; Bellamy also intentionally makes his way to earth – in this case by sneaking aboard the dropship – for the love of his sister, a juvenile offender; Glass on the other hand sneaks off the dropship to reunite with “the boy she loved”(Morgan 33, 41, 234, 72) aboard the space station.¹³

Notably, each of the protagonists relaying this apocalyptic tale care deeply about “returning” to earth – a narrative framing that situates a timeless “human race” as not only the erstwhile occupants of earth, but also the environmental stewards and sovereigns of the planet, even in absentia. Once back “home” (Morgan 61, 185, 264,) on earth, Clarke, Wells, and Bellamy each expressly entangle an affective longing for the earth and the interpersonal love relationships that motivate what Buell would call this “drama of relationships” (“A Short History of Environmental Apocalypse” 18). Clarke, staring up at the trees with tears in her eyes, recalls her parents and remarks (to the boy she once loved) “I feel closer to them here...They spent their lives trying to figure out how to get us home” (Morgan 264). Moments later Clark and Wells (the boy Clarke once loved, who is still very much in love with her) share a kiss, and for Wells

the world around them faded away as Earth became nothing more than a swirl of pungent scents and damp air that made him press himself closer to her. The soft ground cradled them as they slid off the log. There was so much he needed to tell her, but his words were lost as his lips traveled across her skin, moving from her mouth to her neck. In that moment, there was no one else. They were the only two people on Earth. Just like he’d always imagined they would be”(Morgan 265).

¹³ The

For both Clarke and Wells, to yearn for and return to an apocalyptically imagined earth is to be reunited with those who they most deeply love and desire. That longing, desire, and the union of human and more-than-human in an apocalyptically imagined environment manifests in the way the soft ground “cradles” the two lovers.

The ways in which the affective longing for the apocalyptically imagined earth are bound up in the love relationships between the characters reinforces the principle of networked care emphasized by Tronto. According to Tronto, “too often, care is described and defined as a necessary relationship between two individuals. In assuming that care is dyadic, most contemporary authors dismiss from the outset the ways in which care can function socially and politically in a culture”(103). Throughout *The 100*, the affective longing for the earth that is manifest in both the desire to return and the interpersonal relationships between the characters is not simply a dyadic relationship, but rather a networked concern that incorporates one or more individuals – often the entire human race – and an ecosystem perceived to be both complex, more-than-human, and vibrantly active with its own situated *cares*.

And, within *The 100*, the cares of the earth are at least as insistent and dynamic as those of the juvenile offenders. The earth, which actively “cradles” Wells and Clarke as they kiss, is portrayed alternatively as welcoming, gentle, loving, vengeful, apathetic, and violent. When Clarke first steps off the dropship, the colors and scents and sights of the earth are arrayed in “welcome,” an expansive and “joyful” celebration of homecoming:

At first, all she could see were the trees. There were hundreds of them, as if every tree on the planet had come to welcome them back to Earth. Their enormous branches were lifted in celebration toward the sky, which was a joyful blue. The ground stretched out in all directions — ten times farther than the longest deck on the ship. The amount of space was almost inconceivable”(Morgan 48)

The desire for this joy, this welcome, this sense of networked belonging is resplendent throughout apocalyptic fiction, and the search for those affective connections must be recognized as a powerful political claim. The politics of joy and belonging are fundamental to the possibility of transformative change; without the capacity for joy and belonging, the future is foreclosed upon and change feels impossible.

Joy and the limitless possibilities of the apocalyptically imagined earth that are implied in the “almost inconceivable” amount of space on the ground are suggestive of one of the fundamental promises and premises of apocalyptic mode: the possibility of a new beginning. There is a lurking and vicious potential in the apocalyptic “new beginning,” a sort of populism that regards the other as inherently dangerous and perceives the future as

belonging solely to a certain subset of humanity. This apocalyptic tendency Rachel Wagner has described as the “cowboy apocalypse”: “a blend of frontier mythology and end-of-the world scenarios, cowboy apocalypticism provides a simple mythic solution to complex global problems: Violently wipe the slate clean, it says, and let the survivors demonstrate their mettle on a new frontier.” Moreover, in its application to the environment, the “new beginning” has historically been yoked to devastating ideas of a pristine landscape devoid of its former inhabitants and open to productive transformation by new (White, Western, Settler) occupants. This apocalyptic logic was deployed throughout the waves of settler colonization that devastated indigenous populations in the Americas, and this persistent emptying and offering up of space to a select few is one of the most insidious functions of the apocalyptically imagined environments. Scholarly rejection of the apocalyptically imagined environment is in a sense motivated by recent and hard-won investments in transforming the way the very idea of the “pristine” environment is understood.¹⁴

And, within *The 100* there is a persistent return to the idea that the apocalyptically imagined earth presents for this particular group of individuals the opportunity for a new beginning; however, that idea is repeatedly and explicitly complicated at every possible turn. The start the 100 do get on earth is neither fresh nor clean – the drop ship crashes and the human survivors step onto earth bruised and bloodied, immediately forced to contend with the smoldering wreckage of their own making. In the wake of the crash (an apt metaphor for the ravages of the climate crisis if ever there was one), the first moments the 100 share on earth are dominated by care work – Clarke spends her first day caring for those individuals who are injured in the crash landing; Bellamy is consumed with caring for his sister and the labor of gathering supplies and producing shelter. Wells is given over to caring for the group as a whole, working to ensure that supplies are distributed fairly and that the camp is established to the benefit of all. These labors demonstrate an interest in mutual dependence and an impulse toward care-work that is networked – communal. The affective desire for community reflected in this networked approach to care manifests frequently throughout apocalyptic literature. And, this affective longing is not without its own pitfalls – Tronto cites paternalism and parochialism as two dangers inherent to a politics of care; and, more often than not a “cowboy apocalypse” – what Buell would term a “male-centered survivalist action-adventure” – will deploy an interest in community that quickly reveals itself to be little more

¹⁴ See for example W.M. Denevan’s “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492” (1992); William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground* (1995); and Gerald Horne, *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism* (2017)

than a pretext for a dangerous othering of both individuals and environments beyond the sphere of the “community.”

However, the populist impulses that percolate below the surface of the small community of 100 underage offenders that forms in the shadow of the drop ship is mitigated by the framing of the “new beginning” made manifest in the “return home.” Although the return is frequently referenced as the opportunity for a fresh start, the idea of this new beginning as a baptismal washing away of sins is quickly rejected – “the rain was only water, and there was no such thing as a clean start”(Morgan 233) – in favor of the idea of a new beginning as a matter of care – an opportunity that hinges upon the choices made in pursuit of a better world rather than a do-over with no strings attached. The sister who Bellamy came to earth to protect expresses this desire most efficiently: “I know a lot of us have done things we’re not proud of, but we’ve been given a chance for a new beginning. I know I almost ruined it for a lot of you, but I’d like to start over — to become a better person, to help make Earth the world we want it to be”(Morgan 246). The sentiment expressed by Octavia reflects a frequent refrain throughout the text: “we have a chance to do better”(Morgan 249). The distinction between a “clean start” and “a chance to do better” reflects a vital affective logic of the apocalyptic mode: a deeply felt awareness of the labor, the *care*, required to remake the world. As an apocalyptic rendering of environmental crisis, *The 100* reflects not only an awareness that structural forces at work have produced devastating changes beyond the scope of human intervention – a two-headed deer, luminous butterflies that populate this familiar, yet undeniably altered earth– but also a sense that it is through care that individuals can become a force for transformative change. When Wells suggests that “maybe, here in the ruins of the old world, they could start something new” he is reflecting not a *promise* but a *possibility*.

The possibilities of care work in *The 100* occur at the individual and communal level. Care can be identified in the simple pleasures of maintenance work – the rigors of bathing become for Bellamy “one of his favorite things about Earth, how mundane stuff like washing your feet suddenly felt like a huge deal”(Morgan 148) as well as in the careful investment in building permanent structure, a process that littered the grass “with wood shavings and pieces that had been discarded after false starts” (Morgan 319). The maintenance of the individual and the communal body are invested with just as much affective attention as the maintenance of relationships through care-giving. Clarke’s interest in care-giving as a healing practice aligns with her medical training, and manifests most evidently in her work to attend to the injuries that arise in the wake of the crash – “There weren’t many serious injuries, but there

were enough to keep Clarke busy. For nearly an hour, she used torn jacket sleeves and pant legs as makeshift tourniquets, and ordered the few people with broken bones to lie still until she found a way to fashion splints”(Morgan 53); however, it is only when she finds her best friend “lying on the ground, nestled against the roots of a tree” (Morgan 54) that it becomes clear how intimately the earth itself is imagined into action in these practices of care. The earth that somehow *makes* “mundane stuff like washing your feet” significant; the earth, that welcomes and cradles the vulnerable teens in need of protection; that self-same earth is bound up in the work of care-giving Clarke embarks upon as she discovers Thalia, with “blood gushing from a wound on the side of her ribs, staining the grass beneath her dark red, as if the earth itself were bleeding.” Care for Thalia, and care for the earth seem almost one and the same, and yet it is the earth that is called upon in this instance to do the work of care-giving as Clarke whispers “‘I swear, Thalia, it’s all going to be okay.’ It sounded more like a prayer than a reassurance, although she wasn’t sure who she was praying to. Humans had abandoned Earth during its darkest hour. It wouldn’t care how many died trying to return”(Morgan 55). In an instant, Morgan reflexively transforms the impulse to care from a human concern to a networked, more-than-human impulse, echoing Maria Puig de la Bellacasa’s provocation to “think of care as an obligation that traverses the nature/culture bifurcation without simply reinstating the binaries and moralism of anthropocentric ethics”(13).

In fact, throughout the *The 100*, the apocalyptically imagined earth is both intimately and *carefully* rendered as networked subject to the cataclysmic devastation at hand as well as an active participant in that devastation. On the one hand, apocalyptic literature like *The 100* envisions the fate of humanity as bound up with the state and fate of the earth itself. On the ship that speeds the juvenile offenders to earth Clarke overhears a conversation between two girls “who were arguing over the likelihood of the air on Earth being breathable...”

‘I’d rather drop dead right away than spend days being slowly poisoned,’ one said grimly. Clarke sort of agreed, but she kept her mouth shut. There was no point in speculating. The trip to Earth would be short — in just a few more minutes, they’d know their fate”(Morgan 44).

This sense of the transcendent ecological forces at work in determining the fate of humanity is one vital aspect of the affective power of the apocalyptic mode to manifest a lived experience of the environment. People are, every day, put into jeopardy by rising tides, warming climates, poisoned waterways, melting glaciers, and lingering storms; and, the most precariously perched are inevitably communities marginalized by race, ethnicity, geography, mobility, and income. This sense that the earth, which has been poisoned by others, has

control over your fate is not experienced equally in the Anthropocene, but it is reflected in Clarke's meditations aboard the drop ship.

In Conclusion

An affective reading of the apocalyptic mode begins to unearth the ways in which this “generic territory” represents the *visceral* experience of dwelling on a planet in peril. So much of the discussion on climate change is marked by ignorance of the disproportionate and radically unequal ways in which environmental violence shape individual experiences of a planet in peril. The apocalyptic mode begins to write back against the homogenizing “we” that abounds throughout climate writing with a more intimate and embodied “I.” By depicting the way in which the environment on a planet in peril *feels*, the apocalyptic mode offers a vital representation of the dynamic relationship between individuals and their environments in an age of climate crisis. Moreover, apocalyptic narrations of a climate in crisis manifest evidence of networked practices of care – emotional labor as well as the kind of maintenance work and care-giving that is so often undervalued by climate activists in pursuit of sweeping techno-fixes or global social movements.

In its affective engagement with the environment in crisis and an impulse towards care, the apocalyptic mode offers an alternative to the dominant narratives of environmental devastation that render the earth impotent and the “human race” a homogenous agent of devastation without accounting for radically unequal experiences of environmental devastation. Rather than positing a universalized “we” who must take up arms against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that have brought us to the brink of environmental cataclysm, apocalyptic literature can – paradoxically – present a more modest approach to dwelling in crisis. What a close reading of *The 100* reveals is a potent visceral and emotional connection to the environment in crisis that is manifest in the apocalyptic mode; and, an interest in maintenance and care-giving as a radical approach to resurgence on a planet in peril. This ecocritical re-examination of the “generic territory” of the apocalyptic suggests that there are significant political claims being made within apocalyptic narrations of the climate crisis that have not yet been engaged by the broader scholarly community. And, as storytelling is increasingly foregrounded in conversations about the climate crisis, developing a more nuanced and attentive engagement with the apocalyptic mode is vital to considerations of environmental justice and resurgence in the Anthropocene.

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