

Definitions: “Post-apocalypse”

Material

Text 1

The term apocalypse comes from the Greek word *apokalypsis*, meaning a lifting of a veil¹ or, simply put, a revelation. It is a term of significant importance for biblical exegesis² and religious studies. Apocalypses, such as those from the Old Testament Book of David or the New Testament Apocalypse of St John, were prophetic texts that hinted at³ future times of great trauma, although the Greek term for that genre of text would not have been applied to pre-Christian sources. This trauma, described as a series of trials and tribulations⁴ in apocalyptic sources, presaged⁵ a time when the mighty, powerful, and wicked would be brought low, while those who suffered at the hands of the powerful would be redeemed⁶ and justly rewarded for their suffering. Within the early Christian frameworks, the might and force of the Roman Empire provided the perfect background for many of these apocalyptic ideas to take root and flourish⁷.

As the ultimate book of the Christian Bible, the Apocalypse of St John contributed momentarily⁸ to European intellect and culture. [...] This heavily symbolic, and at times disturbingly graphic book outlines a course of the future that would hearken⁹ the Second Coming¹⁰ of Jesus Christ. The Evangelist depicts a world that would suffer powerful physical trials and tribulations, yet the arrival of Christ and the fulfilment of history would be a joyous event, one in which Christian adherents¹¹ would be justly rewarded for their lifetimes of devotion, patience, and suffering. [...] Thus, St John's text functioned to encourage the community of the Christian faithful, to give them aid und succor¹² during bleak¹³ times. The Second Coming of Christ would be a traumatic time, yet also a redemptive¹⁴ time, a time when old scores would be settled.¹⁵

Although the majority of modern Western society and popular culture today is purported to be avowedly¹⁶ secular, the Apocalypse nonetheless still resonates. [...] Within the realm¹⁷ of modern popular culture, the apocalypse acquires another level of meaning and functions as a revealed vision of the end of the world that can be horrifying, frightful, and impending¹⁸, as well as one that can be hopeful, humorous, and in the distant future.

From: “Introduction.” In: *End of Days: Essays on the Apocalypse from Antiquity to Modernity*, eds. Karolyn Kinane and Michael A. Ryan. Jefferson, NC/London: MacFarland 2009, pp. 2-3. 359 words.

¹ veil = piece of very thin cloth

² exegesis = interpretation

³ hint at = point to

⁴ tribulation = hardship, misfortune

⁵ presage = predict

⁶ redeem = compensate

⁷ flourish = prosper

⁸ momentarily = importantly

⁹ hearken = witness

¹⁰ Second Coming = Jesus Christ's resurrection before the final judgment

¹¹ adherent = follower

¹² succour = help, support

¹³ bleak = dark

¹⁴ redemptive = *erlösend*

¹⁵ settle old scores = *alte Rechnungen begleichen*

¹⁶ avowedly = openly

¹⁷ realm = area

¹⁸ impend = threaten

Text 2

The expression 'post-apocalyptic dystopia' combines terms from two rather different language domains and has a somewhat oxymoronic¹⁹ quality. Whereas apocalyptic discourse has its origin in religious revelation, a literary dystopia presents a narrative in which current aspects in human society that are seen as negative are extrapolated²⁰ to a more or less frightening extreme in order to confront readers, as it were, with the writing on the wall. Contrary to apocalyptic representations of doomsday²¹ that go back to eschatological²² visionary insight, dystopian fiction is grounded in literary concepts of verisimilitude²³ and, at the same time, contains a more or less subtextual²⁴ political agenda. [...] In contrast to dystopian narratives, descriptions of the apocalypse and its post-apocalyptic aftermath²⁵ do not link themselves to the social reality of the contemporary audience. The prominent intention of apocalyptic narration is not a plea²⁶ for reforms, but a visionary depiction of total eschatological transformation.

From: Holm, Jan, "Post-Apocalyptic Dystopia: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*." In: *Dystopia, Science Fiction, and Post-Apocalypse: Classics, New Tendencies, Model Interpretations*, eds. Eckart Voigts; Alessandra Boller. Trier: WVT 2015, 379-394, p. 379. 149 words

Task

1. Before reading:
List your associations and ideas connected with the term "apocalypse". Find synonyms and antonyms which help understanding the term.
2. While reading:
Make notes of the most important ideas about "apocalypse" and "dystopia" from the two texts.
3. After reading:
Write down your own definition of the term "post-apocalyptic dystopia", combining the essential pieces of information presented in the two explanations above.

¹⁹ oxymoronic = self-contradictory

²⁰ extrapolate = project into the future

²¹ Doomsday = the day the apocalypse begins

²² eschatological = *heilsgeschichtlich, auf die Erlösung der Welt ausgerichtet*

²³ verisimilitude = realism

²⁴ subtextual = hidden, implicit

²⁵ aftermath = consequences

²⁶ plea = urgent request

Solutions

Textbooks:

Context, p. 54

Pathway Advanced, pp. 368 (Info-Box)

Fokus Literaturvermittlung: p. 160

Task 1

List of synonyms and antonyms for "apocalypse"

Synonyms		Antonyms
Armageddon		
Chaos		Creation Day
Catastrophe	APOCALYPSE	Order
Devastation, destruction		Paradise
Disaster		Peace
Doomsday		
End of the world		
Judgment Day		
Revelation		

Task 2:

"Apocalypse" = Greek for "revelation"

Traditional understanding

prophetic texts that hinted at future times of great trauma,
series of trials and tribulations
the Second Coming of Jesus Christ

Modern meaning

apocalypse acquires another level of meaning and functions as a revealed vision of the end of the world that can be horrifying, frightful, and impending, as well as one that can be hopeful, humorous, and in the distant future

"Dystopia"

literary dystopia presents a narrative
grounded in literary realism
transport a political agenda
link themselves to the social reality of the contemporary audience

Note: Both texts are in one respect contradictory. Whilst Text 1 emphasises the production of apocalyptic religious texts in the times of the Roman Empire (cf. Kinane/Ryan, l. 9-10), Text 2 insists on historical independence from "social reality", and the visionary character of (post-) apocalyptic narratives (Hollm, l. 8-10).

Task 3:

Definition

The term "apocalypse" has Greek origins, meaning "revelation". The word is used as the title of the last book in the Bible, describing prophecies about the end of the world. The Biblical apocalypse outlines the fall of the powerful during Jesus Christ's Second Coming, and the rise of the poor who are rewarded for their suffering.

In our modern times, "apocalypse" has lost its religious meaning, and is closely connected to the idea of a dystopian world, i.e. a world as we know it which, however, is sketched as a very negative place. In many cases, such dystopian texts are set in a time after a global catastrophe, which make them post-apocalyptic narratives.