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Writing and Reading Inside and Outside an Apocalyptic Paradigm: *Oryx and Crake, The Road* and the End

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ABSTRACT

Most people are familiar with the term *Apocalypse*. As a term, and a concept, it appears again and again in literature and the media. However, despite its apparent familiarity, when explored in depth apocalypse is very hard to pin down. Apocalypse is a time of destruction, but it may also provide an opportunity for renovation and renewal. It is the end of everything yet may be followed by a new beginning. It is an event that may provide revelation, clarity and redemption, and yet it also often involves the obliteration of humanity. It is a paradoxical term, which is closely linked with the ways humans try to make sense of their world; and as such, the sense humans make, based often on apocalyptic patterns of thinking, is contradictory.

The paradigm of apocalypse profoundly influences the way people see the world. It influences politics, business, the way people think of time, of beginnings and endings. For those who write about apocalypse, it is very easy to simply write inside the apocalyptic paradigm and support the conventional ways of thinking about apocalypse. However, some writers attempt to situate their perspective outside traditional ways of thinking about apocalypse, and in doing so critique this way of viewing the world that is so often taken as fixed.

Through the analysis of Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* and Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road,* this essay considers the conflicting ways people think about apocalypse, and explores the ways in which thinking about apocalypse influences understandings of the world. It investigates the ways both authors, in these novels, initially subscribe a traditional conception of apocalypse, but then try to step outside apocalyptic thinking and question it; at times they fail to do so convincingly, because the apocalyptic paradigm is so influential. This essay also explores the role of the reader and the influence of his or her attitudes when interpreting fiction, and concludes that while the authors' attitudes seem to reflect the contradictory, paradoxical ways that people think about apocalypse, so generally will those of readers.

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