



Worldcon 75 Academic Track
Session 14: Temporal Effects

Saturday 12:00-13:30
Room 209

Chair: **Jerry Määttä**

Abstract 1:

Mikko Mäntyniemi (University of Tampere, Finland):

At the End of Time: Unnatural Temporalities of the Eschatological Narratives

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This paper examines the unnatural and strange temporalities that create the apocalyptic sensibilities of narratives. Especially in the narratives that deal with the apocalypse (or the end of time and history) the temporalities are forced into “a rush towards the end” (Gomel 2010). This apocalyptic fervor drives the narrative towards a certain kind of end, fulfillment of both the plot and time. In this paper I argue that apocalyptic narratives create specific kind of temporal estrangement compared to the post-apocalyptic narratives, which in turn create their own unnatural temporalities.

The main theoretical approach of this paper is the rhetorical narrative theory as presented by Wayne C. Booth (1982) and James Phelan (1996). Apocalyptic narratives always embody a certain ideology: what is the cause of the destruction, who survive and who are doomed, and who witnesses the end. My paper examines the apocalyptic narratives more closely from the rhetorical perspective, where the narration is seen more as an act rather than a construction. Or, as James Phelan describes it: “the telling of story by someone to someone on some occasion for some purpose” (Phelan 1996, 8). Using the rhetorical narrative theory, I argue that apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives create certain kind of temporalities to promote certain ideologies.

Another concept I use in the paper is the concept of Chronotope by Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) and further developed by Elana Gomel (2010). According to Bakhtin (1981, 119) “[i]n the literary Chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. I also use Elana Gomel’s Apocalyptic Chronotope in the paper to highlight the unnatural connection of space and time in apocalyptic narratives.

Because my paper focuses on the different temporalities of the apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic narratives, I chose Nevil Shute’s *On the Beach* (1957) and Margaret Atwoods *Oryx and Crake* (2003) as the main focus of this paper. Both of these novels consist of both apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic temporalities. Atwood’s novel describes the events both before and after the apocalyptic catastrophe from the perspective of the novel’s main character, Snowman-Jimmy, but in Shute’s novel these two can be seen working simultaneously. In Shute’s novel the northern hemisphere of the Earth has been destroyed in a nuclear war, and the last humans are waiting the inevitable doom in Australia. The tension between the looming destruction and the already happened Armageddon comes from the different perspectives of the characters: Australians and Americans, and my paper examines these different views of the apocalypse and the apocalyptic temporalities, and how it is described by the novel. Special interest is paid to the differences between the temporalities of lone survivors and communities in moments before the end.

Mikko Mäntyniemi is a PhD student at the University of Tampere. His research focus is on the apocalyptic narratives. In his research he uses classical narratology, rhetorical narrative theory, unnatural narratology, and the possible worlds theory.

Abstract 2:

Jouni Teittinen (University of Turku, Finland):

World, Interrupted: Future Anterior and Varieties of Anticipation in Three Apocalyptic Novels

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While apocalyptic fiction and its study is all the rage, what still merits increased attention is how the (post-)apocalyptic perspective impinges on the pre-apocalyptic (call it “our”) world. In exploring this wide problematic, I draw from three novels that bring the pre- and the post-apocalyptic into relation in markedly different ways: *On the Beach* by Nevil Shute (1957) portrays the wait for a lethal nuclear fallout to arrive to Australia from the northern hemisphere, already destroyed; *The Burning Book* by Maggie Gee (1983) connects its narrative of domestic drama with visions of nuclear holocaust both past and future; and *Station Eleven* by Emily St. John Mandel (2014) sets up storylines in both the pre- and the post-apocalyptic, with the latter temporal frame often intruding on the former.

In connection with Jacques Derrida’s, Mark Currie’s and Eva Horn’s writings on and around the tense of future anterior (“what will have been”), I propose to extract from these three novels some elements towards the larger aim of constructing a philosophically, psychologically and culturally nuanced account of post-apocalyptic temporality. In each novel, the future apocalypse casts a shadow on the preceding time, imbuing pre-apocalyptic events with new meaning or meaninglessness. These intra-narrative relations may, I suggest, also reflect the extra-narrative question of how the (post-)apocalyptic perspective instills our present experience with a touch of the future anterior. It remains an open question how closely this complex of temporal displacement, irony and immersion aligns with the notion of cognitive estrangement (Darko Suvin), but they certainly share a sense of re-viewing our present by way of its future -- or its loss of future.

Jouni Teittinen, MA, is a doctoral student in Comparative Literature at the University of Turku, Finland. His dissertation concerns the thematic, structural and philosophical questions pertaining to time and temporality in post-apocalyptic literature, working through such issues as memory, technics, species and extinction. He has published on human-animal relations and presented, besides apocalypse and animals, on Emerson and American Romanticism.

Abstract 3:

Christina Lake (University of Exeter, UK):

Marsians and Martians: Estrangement and the Future Evolution of the Human Race

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This paper investigates the role of the planet Mars in fictional representations of the future of humanity, and argues that a critical factor in relocating human aspirations to the neighbouring planet is to provide an alternative venue for enacting evolutionary ambitions and fears. As such Mars can be seen as more than just another trope for inducing cognitive estrangement, but an opportunity to restage the evolution of life on a parallel world. As the known world expanded, leaving fewer unexplored island and hidden valleys, Mars became the inspiration

and location for a number of works of utopian fiction in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Despite the multiple possibilities of an alien planet, there was often little attempt to see Mars as anything more than dream version of Earth. In *Unveiling a Parallel* (1893) by two women from Iowa, Alice Ilgenfritz Jones and Ella Merchant, the “Marsians”, as they called their fictional inhabitants of Mars, could just as easily be living in classical Greece as on future Mars. However, the device of the astronomical telescope suggests the ambition to effect scientific observation of contemporary life. More importantly, Mars provided a setting which allowed the time and geographical space for the evolution of a perfectly moral society where gender equality and spiritual development are underpinned by sex-free procreation of children, by the earnestly perfect Caskians. Only four years later, H. G. Wells turned to Mars for the far less utopian *War of the Worlds* (1897), which also addresses the future evolution of the species to a state beyond bodily needs. Despite the alien appearance of Wells’s Martians with their enlarged brains, they too can be seen as a critique of contemporary society, in this case the rapacious powers of late Victorian imperialism. However the Martians are also a serious attempt by Wells to imagine how the evolution of intelligence might progress over time, with Mars represented as an advanced civilisation, evolved to a higher level than its human neighbour. My paper also contrasts the role of Mars in these earlier fictions with the detailed scientific realisation of Mars in Kim Stanley Robinson’s Mars trilogy. Although Frederic Jameson believes that the hard SF content of the Mars trilogy ultimately contributes to a utopian allegorical reading, Robinson, like Wells, has a serious interest in the long-term future of humans. My paper considers Robinson’s connection to the earlier evolutionary projections, along with the more radical plans for evolving Mars itself into a human habitat. I will argue that Mars is more than simply a vehicle for signalling estrangement, but also attracts serious attempts to imagine where evolution could take humans as a species.

Christina Lake is in the process of completing a part-time PhD on eugenics in utopian fiction at the University of Exeter. She is a long-time science fiction fan and fanzine publisher, and has had short stories published in *Interzone* and a number of short story collections. She works as an academic librarian in Cornwall in the South West of England.