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# Coughing and sneezing to the end of the world: Apocalyptic pandemic narratives in the 21st century

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**Coughing and sneezing to the end of the world: Apocalyptic pandemic  
narratives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

by

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**ABSTRACT**

This analysis of apocalyptic disease narratives seeks to understand the purpose and appeal of these stories in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As humans have created and become reliant on increasingly advanced and powerful technology, the apocalyptic narrative has become more common genre, and the disease variant has emerged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as a popular variety. The first chapter of this analysis defines the apocalyptic narrative by identifying the features and themes that distinguish it from the catastrophe narrative. The apocalyptic narrative then gets split into three distinct sub-genres based on the source of the catastrophe. Once the apocalyptic genre has been defined, an examination of disease in the past century establishes the relevance of the apocalyptic pandemic scenario by looking at modern infection events, their causes, and their effects. Next, a critical examination of Danny Boyle's film *28 Days Later* uses the macroscopic infection presented by the Rage virus to show the disease phobia present in Western society. An analysis of Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy then explores the connections between contemporary technophobia and apocalyptic plague, leading into an examination of the post-apocalyptic scenarios presented after the plague in the MaddAddam trilogy and the television program *Survivors* to understand how the desire for a simpler life present in Western culture makes the pandemic apocalyptic narrative appealing. Altogether, this critical exploration of the recent revival of interest in pandemic apocalyptic scenarios establishes the contemporary relevance of these stories, their origins in modern technophobia, and the appeal the end of the world holds for Western readers.

## CHAPTER 1. ON APOCALYPSES

The end of the world interests people. The possibility that some event could completely alter human life and civilization proves both fascinating and terrifying. Art reflects the culture that produces it, and stories about the end have a particular ability to lay bare both the fears and desires of their creators. As religion, culture, and technology change, apocalyptic scenarios change with them, but the obsession with the end of the world never leaves. With the rapidly developing technology of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, apocalyptic narratives—and the pandemic disease scenario in particular—have become increasingly common and relevant explorations of both the fears and desires of modern culture.

Apocalyptic scenarios have always interested humans because they offer a unique imaginative space and provide sense of meaning to existence (O’Leary 4). By framing events leading up to the apocalypse and the events following it as parts of an ongoing narrative, apocalyptic texts create a sense of overarching purpose and direction for both the past and future (Knickerbocker 348). The apocalypse most familiar to Western English-speakers—the Christian apocalypse presented in Revelations—gives meaning to both the past and the future by establishing all events as part of a divine plan. The common funerary comfort “All things happen for a reason” and its cousin “God works in mysterious ways” derive their power from the idea that everything ultimately works towards a good end as part of God’s plan. In the end, everything works out, and the apocalypse gives purpose to all of human history.

Apocalyptic narratives provide a way of understanding the current state of the world and a hope for a better future. The apocalypse acts as the conclusion of the ongoing story of the world and, at the same time, serves as the starting point of a new, better future. Greek and Christian thought—both major influences on current Western society—portray the world as an increasingly corrupt place, but the apocalypse resets the world and removes the corruption (O’Leary 5). However, the apocalyptic text changes significantly as science becomes the primary lens through which humans understand their world. The narratives retain this idea of the end creating a new world—which will be explored more fully in chapter five—but the possibility of man-made apocalypse significantly alters the implications of these stories. As science progresses, apocalyptic narratives take a sharp turn from creating meaning and hope for the future to questioning the continued existence of the human race by showing humanity’s ability to destroy itself.

The apocalyptic text changes significantly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While popular, secular writers did craft apocalyptic narratives before the 20<sup>th</sup> century—for example, Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*—the end of the world was, for the most part, the purview of religion. Despite scientific advances explaining the origins of life and the universe in general, the end remained an unimaginable event. The industrial revolution and its machines initially brought about dreams of equality, prosperity, and a better life for everyone (Marx 185, 196). Technology appeared to be mankind’s savior. Of course industrialization caused problems such as pollution, but people believed that better technology would fix those problems, too. With the creation of the nuclear bomb in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, however, technology suddenly

gave humans the ability to destroy the world relatively easily and cheaply. During the Cold War, the USSR and the United States built large nuclear arsenals and could, at the slightest provocation, have fired enough nuclear warheads to obliterate all life on the planet. People did not need gods or demons to destroy the world; they could do it themselves. Suddenly the previously unimaginable was not only possible but, with the tensions and brinkmanship of the Cold War, far too probable for comfort, and greedy, selfish, and short-sighted humans now had power previously reserved for God himself.

As science became increasingly apocalyptic in scope, narratives on the end of the world shifted away from supernatural intervention and toward the realm of speculative fiction. Writers in the Cold War era produced a myriad of works such as *Einstein's Monsters* and *Alas, Babylon* focusing on the implications of nuclear technology and the possibility of nuclear apocalypse, and rapid scientific advancement continued to provide a plethora of new and terrifying ways for the world to end. The profoundly disturbing destructive potential of new technology undermined the belief that technology would create a utopian world (Dinello 5). Instead, technology became an ongoing threat to all life on Earth that continues to this day. In his book *The Environmental Imagination*, Lawrence Buell calls the apocalypse “the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal” because apocalyptic narratives forces human civilization to recognize the destructive potential of the technology it continues to develop (285). Buell believes that, as humans increase the likelihood of eco-disaster by haphazardly exploiting natural resources to fuel the development of

new and often dangerous technologies, artists will respond to the sense of impending doom by producing more apocalyptic narratives (308).

That said, the increased potential for technological apocalypse has not completely eliminated religious apocalyptic narratives. The formation of the state of Israel at the end of World War II, combined with the invention of the nuclear bomb, led to a resurgence in Christian apocalyptic speculation amongst certain sects, and these beliefs have led to continued political support of the nation of Israel as a step in bringing about the apocalypse (O'Leary 7). Religious works such as Tim LaHaye's *Left Behind* series have sold particularly well amongst certain Christian groups in recent years, even meriting movie adaptations, video games, and a tie-in series targeting adolescents and teens, but stories about the end of the world have largely moved into the sphere of public, secular influence. Humanity, for the first time in its history, had developed the ability to easily and efficiently destroy the entire human species and even the entire planet, and new, terrifying possibilities continue to emerge as technology advances and mankind better understands both the capabilities and unintended consequences of its creations. Nuclear war, pandemic disease, global warming, rebellious artificial intelligences, genetic mutation, and numerous other disasters and destructions fill screens and pages, but not all disastrous scenarios work towards the same end.

In her study of apocalyptic texts and post-politics, Mary Manjikian splits disaster texts into two categories with distinctly different purposes. The major distinction comes from the direction in time the creator wishes the audience to extrapolate. The catastrophe narrative asks the reader to work backwards from the



event (Manjikian 87). While the story likely depicts the results of whatever disaster has occurred, the author intends for the reader to infer the series of events that led to the predicament depicted in the story (88). By creating a plausible scenario that allows readers to work out clear patterns of cause-and-effect, the catastrophe narrative attempts to raise awareness of potential threats with the eventual goal of preventing the scenarios it depicts (81).

The other disaster narrative—the apocalyptic text—asks readers to look into the future. These scenarios treat the disaster as inevitable and instead seek to understand the effects of the apocalyptic event (125). Instead of trying to save the current system, the apocalyptic narrative envisions a world after the end of contemporary civilization. The apocalypse breaks down current societal structures and creates a new world in which authors can imagine a number of previously impossible possibilities (135). These narrative uses disaster to analyze the current state of the world and to see possibilities beyond contemporary civilization and its structures (137). While the catastrophe narrative wants to predict and prevent disaster, the apocalyptic narrative revels in its ability to play with the end of society and the better understanding of human nature and civilization that results from this play.

The catastrophe narrative has its place—primarily the exploration and prevention of disasters—but the apocalyptic narrative goes far beyond this simple goal of prevention. The apocalyptic narrative allows both the writer and the reader to gain distance from contemporary reality in order to better understand it. By breaking current social structures and creating a future separate from them, the

apocalyptic narrative reveals both the weaknesses of the current socio-economic reality and the fears and desires of the readers and writers living in that reality. In practice, these two genres often overlap because a coherent, fulfilling disaster narrative shows both the context and consequences of the destructive event. Despite the lack of exclusivity, though, the categorization provides a convenient method to indicate whether the story focuses more on the events preceding or following the apocalypse.

While Manjikian's two categories provide a basic separation between the catastrophe and apocalyptic narratives, they provide little nuance beyond this simple distinction. Lumping the modern apocalyptic narrative into a single, overarching genre does an injustice to the genre as a whole. Instead, I propose splitting the apocalyptic narrative into three distinct sub-genres. All apocalyptic narratives use the overarching plot device of the end of the world to examine current civilization and explore other possible societal structures, but the different sub-genres implement the end through different means and, in doing so, work towards their critiques through different strategies. In the first sub-genre—the supernatural apocalypse—divine and/or demonic forces bring about the end of the world. The *Left Behind* series falls into this category. The second sub-genre—the science-fiction apocalypse—is either set against a futuristic backdrop or utilizes improbable methods to end the world. *Independence Day*, the new *Battlestar Galactica*, and any narrative depicting Romero-style zombies would fall into this category. Finally, the third genre—the speculative apocalypse—creates feasible scenarios in a contemporary or near-future setting. This sub-genre also overlaps

with speculative fiction by virtue of creating plausible scenarios, but it distinguishes itself within the genre of speculative fiction by focusing primarily on the end of the world and the aftermath.

These distinctions necessarily flow from the different assumptions pushing each type of apocalyptic scenario. The supernatural apocalypse often seeks to dramatize religious end-of-the-world scenarios. Depending on the source, the narrative may try to push a particular version of the end—such as the *Left Behind* series promoting premillennial Christian eschatology—or it may simply be created for fun if the idea comes from a largely dead mythology or the author's imagination. Very few people would likely take a fictionalized account of Ragnarok seriously, but many Christians in America hold similar beliefs to those espoused in the *Left Behind* series.

The science-fiction apocalypse can and often does work symbolically to convey serious ideas about humanity and modern society, but it has to be interpreted as figurative instead of realistic because of its fantastical elements. For example, trying to interpret *The Walking Dead* television series literally proves problematic. The series certainly does not seek to suggest that everyone should grab a rifle and learn to land headshots at 100 yards because the dead will soon be walking, but the zombie can yield a number of insightful critical interpretations including indictments of consumerism, cultural homogeneity, or communism. While this subgenre does not connect as obviously to contemporary society, it contains significant symbols that speak to the culture of its creators.

The speculative apocalypse provides a myriad of possible approaches. First, being plausible, it allows for an analysis and critique of the contemporary culture. By putting a version of the modern world under fictional stress, authors can break the current socio-economic structures to reveal their weaknesses and flaws. More importantly, the speculative apocalyptic text allows the writer to break and then rebuild the world. The ways survivors continue after the end show new and different possibilities for living socially that cannot easily happen in the current world. The apocalyptic destruction of society also breaks humans out of the normal social boundaries and creates a morally lawless sandbox in which the author can poke and prod various aspects of humanity. Separating humans from socially-enforced behavior can show both the light and dark sides of human nature. *The Road* serves as a particularly good example of this by putting the characters into a post-nuclear world without consequences or a future to see how they will treat each other when they are all condemned to starve to death anyway, but any story in which the usual social expectations and consequences cease to exist has the potential to explore human nature without outside interference. By breaking down a familiar version of the world, the speculative apocalyptic narrative can examine both social structures and human behavior.

The speculative apocalypse, in part, derives its power from Freud's concept of the Uncanny. While the term usually gets translated as "Uncanny" in English, the original German word *Unheimliche* literally means "un-homely" (Lloyd-Smith 76). The literal translation conveys the true nature of the Uncanny. The Uncanny does not simply portray something unusual; instead, it takes common and comforting

things such as the home or the family and makes them unusual and disconcerting. The strangeness comes from within the familiar object, not from outside it, and the Uncanny object gains power by being a disturbing version of a comforting thing (76). The world created in the speculative apocalypse appears familiar enough, but the subtle shifts in social and political dynamics that allow an apocalypse to run its course draw the reader's attention. Drawing the readers' attention to the Uncanny emphasizes certain aspects of contemporary culture and puts them under closer scrutiny by making them obvious. By creating a world similar to the reader's but with crucial differences making it unusual, the speculative apocalypse lends itself to social analysis and commentary.

The disease narrative presents one scenario for the speculative apocalypse and allows its creators and consumers to put the current reality under scrutiny by subjecting it to fictional stress. Narratives about pandemic disease allow both their creators and their consumers to explore the current society and dreams of the future. Disease naturally evokes fear both of illness and of the modern technology and trappings of civilized society that facilitate the birth and spread of pandemics, but it also creates an imaginative space where people can explore possible futures apart from structures that cannot be escaped without destroying the world. Deadly pandemic presents unique possibilities for the future in the narratives that explore it, and the disease narrative proves especially appropriate and prescient at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this short exploration of apocalyptic pandemic narratives, I hope to lay the groundwork for studying and understanding a genre

that will become increasingly relevant and prominent in a technological, consumerist society facing the ever-present threat of pandemic disease.

## **CHAPTER 2. CURRENT EVENTS AND THE CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF THE DISEASE NARRATIVE**

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, America and Western culture in general had largely forgotten the horror of pandemic disease (Humphreys 845). Scientific development may have brought about the nuclear bomb, but it had also begun efficiently combating disease. Modern medicine had, by and large, eliminated or at least declawed the most common and horrific infections of previous centuries. Germophobia started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as science developed a better understanding of disease, but medical science and a better understanding of cleanliness and sanitation made affluent Western societies mostly disease-free (Tomes 259). Childhood vaccinations eradicated or effectively suppressed diseases such as smallpox, mumps, polio, and measles. Antibiotics allowed for treatment of other diseases such as tuberculosis while DDT and other pesticides killed disease-bearing insects. As other technology such as water treatment and anti-microbial cleaners became common in many homes in the developed world, infection became even less likely. Advertisements told 1950s housewives that dangerous germs lurked throughout their seemingly clean homes, but these women could buy peace of mind for the price of a can of Comet cleaning powder (Humphreys 852). In the affluent Western world, at least, people did not get cholera or dysentery and a shot or a pill could cure or prevent many formerly deadly threats. While the common cold still existed, most moderately affluent people could expect a long and healthy life largely free of deadly disease.

The emergence of the HIV and Ebola viruses in the 1970s showed how far humans still had to go to eliminate all infectious disease, but, as neither of these diseases promised widespread mayhem and death in the developed world, modern medicine kept the developed world safe by eliminating or suppressing the most notorious infectious agents of previous decades (Dinello 248). HIV did not spread easily as long as the sexually active were informed and cautious, and Ebola infections revealed themselves too quickly, making quarantine and suppression relatively easy on the off chance that the infection did somehow travel outside of Africa. Disease narratives did come out of these developments—notably the 1995 film *Outbreak* and the book *Hot Zone*—but pandemics seemed a thing of the past in a world where even epidemics stayed confined mostly to the less affluent parts of the world. Cautious, relatively affluent Westerners had little to fear from disease.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century brought the fear of disease back into prominence and moved it from baseless paranoia to practical fear as technology and the global economy began to accelerate and enable the natural mutation and spread of new pandemics. The aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001 reawakened a cultural fear of disease that has only grown since. The mysterious mailing of anthrax envelopes reminded Western culture of a danger it thought it had under control by introducing a new threat: bioterrorism (250). This threat came to the forefront of the cultural consciousness at a time when designer diseases looked increasingly likely. Scientists were already cloning and genetically altering plants and animals; the same technology could potentially allow dangerous groups or individuals to modify diseases, too. The past decade has only provided more fuel for



these fears. Just over a year ago, scientists in the Netherlands announced that they had successfully mutated the deadly bird flu into a highly contagious version capable of airborne spread between humans (Conley). The scientists researched the topic in the hopes that understanding how the flu virus mutates would provide insight into producing vaccinations against future natural outbreaks, but the methodology used to mutate the virus has been kept secret to prevent its use in creating biological weapons. Of course, the threat of accidental release still exists, and other labs have successfully produced similar results on their own without knowing the exact methodology used by the Dutch researcher team (Conley). The possibility of science creating a new disease or, in the case of smallpox, accidentally or intentionally reintroducing diseases extinct outside of laboratories into an unprepared populace helped bring fear of disease to the forefront of the cultural consciousness. Bioterrorism and disease research are only the start of the contemporary disease anxiety; nature has shown that it can also easily create new and deadly diseases.

Recent years have seen a conspicuous number of new and often dangerous illnesses spreading through a variety of means without the help of bioterrorism or genetic manipulation. Foodborne illness has been a persistent problem over the last decade as diseases such as E. coli and salmonella repeatedly contaminate innocuous products including spinach and peanut butter. While these outbreaks have so far caused no more than a handful of deaths each, they do lend a certain nefarious air to even non-threatening fruits and vegetables that consumers would likely assume they could safely eat raw, making foodborne disease an unlikely but ever-present

threat. Apart from having otherwise safe foodstuffs being contaminated by poor processing or handling, people also have to worry about their food itself being sick. Both mad cow disease and foot-and-mouth disease, for example, have been occasional threats over the past decade and seem to reappear in isolated incidents every few years. The recent discovery of horsemeat in beef products across the US and UK—even some products being fed to children in school lunches—further highlights a dangerously under-regulated industry. If salmonella can get into peanut butter and horsemeat can get into a hamburger, almost any food from the supermarket or even the farmer's market could potentially be dangerous. Eating becomes fraught with potential unseen danger as almost any foodstuff may be diseased or contaminated. If the lettuce and tomatoes are not infected, the burger itself may still carry an infection or chemical contamination that will sicken or kill the unaware people eating it.

Medication, while not as commonly contaminated, has also become a dangerous commodity. In October of 2012, the news filled with stories about an outbreak of fungal meningitis after a Massachusetts drug company sent contaminated steroids to medical facilities in twenty-three different states (CDC and FDA Joint Telebriefing on Investigation of Meningitis Outbreak). In February of 2013, The FDA's website already showed at least one drug recall due to non-sterile containers growing mold, and if 2012 is any indication, the FDA will recall numerous medications due to contamination or lack of sterility before the year's end (*Drug Recalls*). Hospitals have also become a source of fear as reports of antibiotic resistant Staph infections circulate through the media, and fears of other

drug-resistant diseases appear with almost clockwork regularity every cold season. In the first few months of 2013, the CDC released warnings about a group of bacteria with almost complete immunity to antibiotics moving through American hospitals and killing almost half of the patients it infects. According to the CDC, the number of bacteria with this extreme drug resistance has quadrupled since the turn of the millennium, and their numbers will continue to grow if medical science cannot develop new treatments to counteract the rapid evolution and adaptation of these infections (Stein). Even unfounded accusations such as the fear of vaccinations causing autism feed into a fear of a dangerous medical system, and this particular example has the added ironic bonus of allowing previous suppressed diseases including mumps and measles to make a comeback amongst vulnerable populations of unvaccinated children. Thus, the real and perceived weaknesses of medical science both feed into fear of illness and give diseases new avenues to infect and kill humans.

Diseases carried by animals not commonly eaten have also become a serious vector for infection again. Mosquitoes in particular have reappeared as a serious threat, but other vermin are also catching up. Scientists have for years reported mosquitoes developing resistances to various pesticides, and many malarial mosquitoes have now adapted by producing proteins that metabolize and neutralize DDT (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). While humans have, at least in affluent areas, successfully used pesticides to control populations of disease-bearing insects for decades, the emergence of pesticide-resistant insects raises concerns about resurgences in these diseases as the now-resistant species rebound

unchecked. Hantavirus carried by rodents re-emerged as a threat in the 90s and has recently been making news again by infecting tourists in national parks (Tomes 260). Large populations of rodents living off human refuse reawaken fears of other diseases such as the infamous bubonic plague and Lyme disease carried by insects attached to those rodents (260). Unless new pesticides or other forms of pest control can be implemented, disease-carrying vermin may breed and spread infection virtually unchecked.

In addition to the man-made contaminations and unintentional adaptations caused by human technology, an increasing number of spontaneous, natural infections have moved across the globe in recent years. In the early 2000s, the West Nile virus somehow jumped from the Middle East into the United States, and mosquitoes have been spread the illness to more of the country every year (Dinello 250). Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome—commonly abbreviated SARS—started and stayed mostly in Southeast Asia, but other illnesses including multiple variants of the flu have spread to America and Europe (Park). The flu variation colloquially known as “swine flu” showed the potential of a virulent pandemic when it swept through schools and workplaces across America and the world, rapidly infecting large numbers of people while governments were still working on creating, manufacturing, and distributing a vaccine. Fortunately for everyone, swine flu was not particularly deadly, but its rapid spread demonstrates the potential for a more deadly disease to quickly infect a large portion of the human population via international travel and shipping. A more dangerous disease with the same infectivity of swine flu could, at very least, seriously disrupt economic and

governmental operations, endangering even those who have not fallen victim to the disease.

The re-emergence of pandemic illness has only been exacerbated by modern technology, particularly transportation technology and the modern news machine. Many of the new illnesses listed above did not start in North America or Europe. Swine flu, for example, likely started somewhere in Asia and travelled across the Pacific in a human carrier (McNeil Jr.). Already in 2013, a new coronavirus may have spread from the Middle East into the UK when vacationing British natives returned from a trip to the Middle East; the new virus has, at the time of this writing, killed at least six people and may have the capability to spread from human to human, albeit slowly (Branswell). International business and easy travel have allowed disease to spread rapidly. People traverse large areas of the globe almost daily, potentially bringing diseases from one side of the world to the other in less than a day (Kelly and Whittington 59). Additionally, the regular transportation of products across state and country borders allows for even easier infection. The steroids infected with meningitis shipped to almost half of the states in the US before the recall occurred, and foodstuffs may also travel from a single origin point to many selling locations (“CDC and FDA Joint Telebriefing”). Numerous scares for mad cow disease alone show a high level of worry about spreading animal infection, but other livestock could carry infections with the ability to easily move to humans as well. The tangled web of international travel and shipping means disease can, at least in theory, reach almost any corner of the globe in little time, rendering even remote

areas vulnerable to unexpected infection (Tomes 259). Only news of the infection travels faster than the infection itself.

While diseases can potentially traverse the globe in a matter of days, news of a new outbreak can reach most anywhere in a matter of seconds. News of a new and mysterious illness creates panic, and in that panic, people demand more news (Humphreys 846). The cycle self-perpetuates by constantly trying to provide new information for a curious and fearful audience, but with a limited amount of reliable information available, the news begins spreading whatever incomplete information it has, possibly even using rumors and speculation to get viewers and drive up advertising profits. Incomplete information and rumors leave people with a terrifying uncertainty and may also make them more vulnerable by supplying bad information, causing panic or giving a false sense of security by suggesting precautions that do not work (850). Instantaneous news also allows people to watch the inexorable progress of a disease (850). They can find out when it reaches their country and track it as it works its way from the initial point of infection and bears down on their homes, but they cannot do anything to resist or escape it because they cannot see it.

The invisibility of disease also adds to the terror it evokes. Anyone can be infected, but they may not show it. Every cough or sneeze could be spreading disease to an entire room of people, or the infection could be quietly deposited on a doorknob by an unwashed hand. And if the people are not infectious, mosquitoes, bad hamburger, or mysterious letters could all contain infection. While nuclear war, floods, and even Ice Age-inducing asteroids will have at least some warning to allow

for prevention, preparation, or escape, disease strikes quickly and quietly.

Preventative measures border on paranoia as individuals quarantine themselves or engage in almost ritualistic sanitization in an attempt to fight an infection that they cannot see. The victim cannot know if he has been infected until symptoms begin to present themselves, and at that point he can do little except wait for death or recovery unless a treatment exists. Combined with the self-perpetuating news cycle providing constant reminders and new rumors about outbreaks, this invisibility leaves potential victims watching and waiting for an end they cannot see until they can no longer prevent it.

While other apocalyptic scenarios inflict violence from outside the human body, disease inflicts its violence from within. Fire, flood, starvation, and other scenarios may damage the body or deprive it of some necessity, but the body remains completely under the ownership of its host. Even radiation poisoning, while invisible, attacks from the outside. It simply damages or kills cells and leaves the victim to die slowly. Disease, though, invades the host's body and forcibly co-opts it for the disease's ends. A viral disease turns its host's body against him in a particularly violating manner by assaulting his DNA. Initial infection comes from an outside source, but once it has successfully infected the host, it uses his body to reproduce. Eventually, most diseases use the host's body to infect others, too. By making the infected person cough, sneeze, vomit, or otherwise eject the pathogen in proximity to others or deposit it in high traffic areas, a disease spreads itself into new hosts and begins the cycle again in a new body. Disease uses the host's body to

replicate and spread, making it more sinister than other apocalypses as it not only destroys people but also uses its victims' bodies to further its destructive spread.

The very real threat of pandemic disease sweeping across the globe makes such scenarios a relevant topic for the speculative apocalyptic narrative. First, a pandemic can happen. The rapid, almost unchecked spread of swine flu across the country showed how the right disease could infect much of the populace in short order. Despite modern medical technology and attempts to slow infection by limiting person-to-person contact, the disease still easily moved across the world. Other, stricter measures such as quarantines likely would have been implemented had the disease proven more deadly, but the simple fact that the disease spread so quickly and left doctors scrambling to find a vaccine and produce enough of it showed the reality of pandemic illness. In addition, Western society shows little optimism about its ability to fight off a serious pandemic (Tomes 264). A combination of global travel, drug resistance, industrial agriculture, genetic experimentation, and naturally emerging diseases makes the world vulnerable to any virulent new disease. Dr. Thomas Frieden, director of the Center for Disease Control, describes the modern situation as "a perfect storm of vulnerability" (Park). Diseases can move between individuals, species, and countries with ease, evolving and adapting new resistances, symptoms, and modes of transmission as they go.

Government experiments have further highlighted Western civilization's inability to deal with pandemic illness. In 2001, medical institutes including John Hopkins and the University of Pittsburgh worked with politicians, military officers, journalists, and researchers from the Department of Homeland Security to create



the “Dark Winter” scenario. The scenario simulated a smallpox outbreak in Oklahoma City, and the results showed a country that was not prepared to deal with the threat of bioterrorism or deadly pandemic illness (*Dark Winter*). The government proved incapable of coordinating efforts between local, state, and federal agencies, and the US medical system could not respond to the sudden surge in demand for treatment. The theoretical scenario showed massive civilian casualties as government authority broke down, and the disease overwhelmed the capabilities of the medical system (*Dark Winter*). While this scenario was meant to follow the lines of a catastrophe narrative and highlight the weak points of the United States’ preparedness, it also showed the sheer destructive potential of disease and the inherent difficulties in responding to such an event. In the event of a pandemic outbreak, many developed nations such as the USA likely do not have the procedures in place to deal with an unexpected outbreak of a virulent disease.

Finally, the targeted chaos caused by pandemic disease makes it an excellent candidate for the plausible subgenre of apocalyptic fiction. Pandemics can kill large numbers of people and effectively break down political and economic infrastructure, but they do not cause the widespread collateral damage present in many other apocalyptic scenarios. Most other apocalypses destroy indiscriminately, damaging or disrupting significant sections of the natural world as they kill off most of the human population. Disease narratives, on the other hand, change very few conditions outside of human society. As diseases only affect living creatures and generally do not infect more than a handful of species, the destruction in a pandemic scenario focuses almost completely on the human race and, indirectly, the

institutions it creates and maintains. The Department of Natural Resources likely ceases to exist, but the natural resources it controls remain largely unaffected barring any unforeseen, catastrophic failure of the now-untended human infrastructure. The question then becomes how survivors will react to this new world. If the apocalyptic genre facilitates a deconstruction and analysis of society and human nature, then the disease narrative allows for that analysis with minimal interference in the rest of the natural world, and this theme will be explored more fully in chapter 5.

While the increasing contemporary relevance of disease narratives and the unique post-apocalyptic scenarios possible in the wake of pandemic illness ensure that the genre will continue for the foreseeable future, little criticism has addressed the more plausible disease narratives of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Plenty of scholarship examines the disease narratives of Romantic England and early colonial America, but the contemporary disease narrative has yet to get its due. Zombie narratives have gained some ground as the topic of serious criticism and analysis, but the more plausible disease narratives have, for the most part, been ignored or, at best, glossed over quickly in favor of other apocalyptic scenarios. The fear of pandemic illness has begun working its way into the cultural consciousness, but narratives about it are still winding up as the fear becomes more noticeable and widespread. The re-emergence of this genre and the contemporary relevance demonstrated by recent events suggests that these narratives merit a closer critical examination to understand the fears and desires they play on. By exploring both the

terror and attraction offered by apocalyptic pandemic narratives, this essay will show why these narratives appeal to affluent English speakers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### CHAPTER 3. VISIBLE INFECTION AND DISEASE PHOBIA IN *28 DAYS LATER*

At first glance, Danny Boyle's 2003 film *28 Days Later* appears to be little more than another variation of the zombie survival story. The movie opens with the origins of the viral outbreak by showing a group of oblivious animal rights activists liberating monkeys being used to study infectious diseases and, in the process, releasing an infection known only as the "Rage virus" (*28 Days Later*). The film then jumps forward four weeks. The protagonist—a bike courier named Jim—wakes up from a coma twenty-eight days after the virus escapes the lab. With no knowledge of the outbreak, he predictably finds himself in dire straits when he stumbles across people infected with the virus, and he joins the ranks of the survivors when two other uninfected people rescue him and explain how to survive after the outbreak. From there, the film basically follows the typical zombie movie plot. More survivors join Jim's group and some become infected as the group tries to escape London to ride out the outbreak in an area with fewer people without being captured by a rogue military unit or falling victim to the disease on the way. A few survivors successfully escape the Rage virus, and the movie ends with a military jet spotting the group's SOS, presumably leading to their rescue (*28 Days Later*). All in all, the movie plays out roughly like a typical zombie movie with the survivors fighting the infected hordes and escaping both infection and other dangerous survivors to eventually move on to a new life.

With the typical zombie tropes, viewers can see where *28 Days Later* takes its cues from other zombie movies. Scriptwriter Alex Garland acknowledges George Romero's *Dead* trilogy as the inspiration for such scenes as looting the grocery store

and the infected soldier chained up behind the mansion amongst others (*28 Days Later* IMDB). On the surface, at least, *28 Days Later* shares a number of common themes and tropes with the typical zombie story.

However, despite employing a number of common zombie tropes and even taking inspiration from zombie movies, *28 Days Later* is not a zombie film. Director Danny Boyle says he likes to “take a genre and fuck with it a bit,” and *28 Days Later* shows how this process of breaking genre conventions creates a very different narrative (qtd. in Hunter 78). Instead of following the usual zombie movie set-up with a virus that reanimates the dead and turns them into a horde of rotting corpses bent on devouring the living, Boyle and his cohorts create a cross between the Ebola virus and rabies that infects living humans (79). This crucial difference completely changes how the movie functions thematically, making *28 Days Later* a film that amplifies the effects of disease to show the most terrifying aspects of disease and infection. *28 Days Later* scales the process of infection up to the macroscopic level, allowing viewers to more easily see and analyze the horrors of infectious disease.

The shift from a zombie virus to a hyper-infective Ebola-rabies cross renders the title “zombie” inaccurate. The survivors in the film call victims of the disease the “Infected” with good reason: upon closer examination, the Infected share few characteristics with the stereotypical zombie (*28 Days Later*). The most important distinction is that the Infected, unlike most zombies, have not died. The film does not specifically state this fact, but the indicators quickly appear upon close examination. First, the Infected die far more easily than the typical zombie. Zombies usually survive any trauma as long as their brains remain intact. Numerous gunshot

wounds and even dismemberment will not stop the zombie, and it will simply keep walking, crawling, or dragging itself after living humans until someone destroys its brain. While the zombie can survive almost any injury, the Infected prove no more resilient than the average human. They seem capable of ignoring pain and will keep trying to attack despite painful injuries, but any massive trauma such as that inflicted by the exploding landmines and machine gun fire outside the army's fortified manor house can kill the Infected without specifically destroying the brain. Frank's death in the film confirms this theory. The soldiers fire a number of rounds into his chest, but they never hit him in the head. The quick cuts between low, close-up camera angles give the audience an excellent view of Frank's torso, even splattering the camera with blood in one shot, and viewers can easily see every gunshot result in another hole in Frank's torso. In fact, Frank dies after the first few rounds, and the camera switches to a shot showing Frank's torso—his head and feet are off camera—and his daughter kneeling a few feet behind him as the soldier needlessly fire more rounds into Frank's dead body. The soldiers succeed in killing him—and, in fact, over-killing him and traumatizing his daughter—before he can attack anyone because, just like healthy humans, the Infected need their hearts, lungs, and other organs in working order to stay alive (*28 Days Later*). The Infected cannot form the nearly invincible zombie horde because survivors using conventional weapons and explosives can easily kill large numbers of Infected without resorting to special tactics or fancy marksmanship.

More importantly, the fact that the Infected are not dead means that they can fall victim to starvation and dehydration. The film's original ending shows a quick

shot of two Infected lying on the ground, incapable of responding to the loud noise made by an approaching fighter jet. These Infected appear to be in the later stages of dehydration, suggesting that the Infected still have the same basic biological needs as their healthy counterparts. Before the scene cuts back to the cottage Jim and his friends have been living in, the camera pulls out from the initial Infected to show a second Infected who has been trying to lift itself off the ground with its arms collapses back to the ground and stops breathing (*28 Days Later*). Jim and his friends have no need to fear these Infected because the disease's victims are literally dropping dead on the side of the road. The Infected can be killed fairly easily, but the survivors do not even have to put themselves in the dangerous position of killing the Infected. Instead, survivors only have to hold out for a few weeks until the Infected die of natural causes. While the typical zombies becomes immune to the basic necessities of human survival by virtue of being animated, rotting corpses, the Infected remain very much human. The opening of the sequel *28 Weeks Later* reinforces the idea that the Infected quickly die when, just over six months after the original outbreak shown in *28 Days Later*, people return to a United Kingdom completely free from the Infected. While the typical zombie movie shows hordes of the living dead remaining a threat for years or even decades, the original Rage virus outbreak runs its course in England in about half a year. The Infected lack both the zombie's near invincibility and the human instinct for self-preservation, giving them a severely shortened life expectancy of only a couple weeks after infection. The virus hits hard but only lasts a short time as the Infected quickly fall to conventional weapons or the weaknesses of the human body.

The Infected in *28 Days Later* also lack the usual motivation driving zombies. While corny jokes and kitschy zombie-themed products often have zombies looking for brains, in practice, most zombie narratives show the living dead as indiscriminately interested in any type of human flesh. They show more interest in chomping on whatever limb proves readily available than in cracking open skulls because arms and legs make easier meals than brains. Since feeding motivates them, zombies often attack with their mouths, trying to sink their teeth into their victims as soon as possible in order to rip out the mouthfuls of flesh they desire. The Infected, though, do not attack in the same way or for the same reasons as the normal zombie. The Infected primarily show interest in destruction, and they prefer to use their hands instead of their mouths. They take advantage of their bipedal stature by using their hands to viciously maul the uninfected, but *28 Days Later* never shows them biting. When they do try to infect others, they use very different methods than the typical zombie.

In most zombie stories, infection only occurs as an accidental side effect of the zombie's attempt to eat. When a zombie manages to bite its victim but fails to achieve its goal of consuming him, the infection spreads to the bite victim and creates a new zombie. The Rage virus, though, works differently. While the Infected often appear interested only in killing, they sometimes intentionally infect others. Furthermore, none of the Infected clearly seen in *28 Days Later* have obvious bite marks, and they clearly lack the maimed limbs and other massive physical trauma that often results from the successful zombie attack. One character gets bitten near the end of *28 Weeks Later*, but this attack appears to be the exception rather than



the rule. When the Infected do try to turn others, they prefer the violent, disturbing tactic of pinning their target down and vomiting blood on his face. Unlike zombies, they even seem capable of rudimentary teamwork to achieve this goal. Two Infected soldiers in the manor, for instance, work together to pin down another soldier and attack him (*28 Days Later*). The Infected intentionally kill or infect, but they do not show any interest in feeding, either on humans or on anything else.

Their vulnerable, still-living state and lack of interest in feeding push the Infected outside the usual zombie narrative and its themes. In the typical zombie narrative, the undead, near-invulnerable zombie driven primarily by the urge to feed often acts as a subversion of capitalism (Boluk and Lenz 139). The zombie infection creates a mindless, shambling horde of rotting corpses driven only by its impulse to indiscriminately consume flesh the zombies do not even need to survive, making the horde into a twisted parallel of impulsive consumers in a capitalist market. The Infected, on the other hand, act as an exaggerated version of the normal infection process. They become living incubators and distributors of the disease as is typical of infection, but to emphasize the terror of infectious disease, they become deranged and violent as the virus literally dissolves their internal organs. Since they serve as a visible exaggeration of infectious disease and not a horde of mindless, undead consumers, the Infected act in ways that break from zombie narrative tropes in order to better highlight disease and its spread.

By exchanging the usual zombie virus that raises the dead for a more realistic rabies/Ebola hybrid, *28 Days Later* changes the nature of infection and makes it far more terrifying. Instead of showing an impossible disease, *28 Days Later* creates a

fairly plausible disease with symptoms that highlight the most terrifying aspects of infection. Normally, disease uses its host's body to reproduce and spread. It infects the host, multiplies inside him, and then eventually uses him to move and spread to others. Viruses use particularly egregious methods to replicate themselves. Viruses are not alive; they are just bits of DNA or RNA instead of being complete cells (Cowley). Despite not being alive in the common sense, they still try to reproduce, and, without cells of their own, they have to hijack a host's cells and repurpose them (Cowley). The virus invades the host's cells and uses them to reproduce its own genetic structure instead of the host's, inflicting violence on the host by attacking him at the most basic level of his identity—his DNA. Normally, of course, this process occurs only at a microscopic level. The host likely cannot pinpoint the exact moment or methods of his exposure. He will experience symptoms related to the infection such as a sore throat or vomiting as the virus infects cells and his immune system responds, but the process of infection itself cannot be seen without a microscope. Barring any particularly noticeable and unlikely methods of infection, disease moves and infects almost invisibly, showing itself only through the symptoms it causes. *28 Days Later* take this normally invisible and unnoticed spread and makes it visible, emphasizing the most disturbing aspects of infectious disease in the process.

When the Infected choose to infect a new victim, the transformation works far differently than it does in the average zombie film. Like many zombie viruses, the Rage virus spreads via bodily fluids, but instead of biting like zombies, the Infected often vomit blood on their victims. The fluids stay contagious for at least a short

length of time after the host's death, too, allowing for accidental infection such as Frank's infection via blood from a dismembered limb. This scene puts a special emphasis on the blood as the camera follows a drop of blood shoots through it as it drips from a corpse on a wall and infects Frank. The blood distorts the shot and tints it red, emphasizing the infective nature of the blood and symbolizing its effects by twisting light to make Frank appear grotesque. Diseases often use body fluids to spread, but more pedestrian diseases tend to spread subtly through mucus or saliva instead of conspicuous, bloody vomit or dismembered flesh. Vomit makes the process of infection impossible to ignore, amplifying the typical pattern of infection. Frank's infection also provides the best example of the Rage virus' progression. The typical zombie virus takes anywhere from a few minutes to a few days to kill and convert its host, often allowing an infected person to hide the bite and turn at the most tense and inopportune point in the plot. The Rage virus, on the other hand, has no sense of dramatic flair. When it infects a person, the symptoms begin to show signs almost instantly. Frank quickly begins displaying the characteristic bloodshot eyes and twitchy movements of the Infected, and within thirty seconds he has lost control and tries to attack his daughter. The movie reflects Frank's sudden change by moving from longer, panning shots of Frank to a series of rapidly changing camera angles depicting Frank from all sides (*28 Days Later*). The victim of the Rage virus goes from healthy to psychotic and violent in less than a minute, making an infected person an immediate danger and undermining any chance of the victim hiding the infection and becoming a liability at an inopportune time.

In contrast to the typical disease the Rage virus of *28 Days Later* moves in a decidedly obvious manner that emphasizes the violence diseases inflict upon their hosts. The Rage virus presumably uses its host's cells to reproduce its genetic code, but it goes one step beyond most diseases by hijacking the host's mental faculties as well. The Rage virus overrides not only its hosts DNA but also his personality and free will. The Infected lose both their identities and their bodies to the virus. They become agents of infection as their bodies fall apart due to the effects of the disease, and their lack of identity exacerbates the problem further by eliminating any sense of self-preservation and replacing it with the overwhelming urge to destroy. The Infected, having been driven mad by the disease, become nothing more than slaves to the virus as they replicate it within their cells and spread it by attacking others.

Instead of becoming consumers like the typical zombie, the Infected become dedicated agents of the disease. They raise infection from a microscopic, unnoticed, and accidental event to a visible, conspicuous, and intentional assault on the healthy. While disease normally moves silently, forcing the healthy to seek news accounts of the disease to map its progress, healthy survivors in *28 Days Later* need only look at the monsters bearing down on them to see how close the infection has come. This removes the uncertainty of infection and the terror of the unknown, replacing it with visceral, primal fear of the violence the Infected use to spread the disease.

To facilitate their purpose as destroyers and agents of infection, the Infected of *28 Days Later* move in an atypical and disconcerting manner that separates them from both normal zombies and healthy humans. While the stereotypical zombie moves at a rapid shuffle on a good day, the Infected can run; however, they still do

not move like normal humans. Boyle intentionally used a slow-motion effect at full speed to film scenes of the Infected. The resulting high frame rate in the film makes the motions of the Infected noticeably twitchy by making the frames and, as a result, the movements of the Infected appear to stutter (*28 Days Later* IMDB). The film also rapidly oscillates between different angles and shots when showing the Infected, forcing the audience to attempt to track the already spastic movements of the Infected and making them seem both faster and more dangerous. The rapid, spastic movements make the Infected more dangerous and capable on foot than their uncoordinated zombie counterparts. In addition to moving faster, the Infected also possess a notable skill absent in the typical zombie's repertoire: the Infected can climb. They climb over barricades of shopping carts and freeways choked with abandoned vehicles to pursue the survivors, displaying more mobility than the usual zombie (*28 Days Later*). And when the Infected pick a target, they devote all their abilities to catching that person. They move as fast as possible and show no regard for their own safety, throwing themselves completely into their pursuit. Nothing short of death stops the Infected from trying to spread the Rage virus.

The symptoms of the Rage virus also make it terrifying. By combining rabies and Ebola, the Rage virus takes on the most disturbing qualities of both. The repeated, bloody vomiting and constant bleeding from the eyes evokes the unpleasant hemorrhaging and organ failure that have made Ebola infamous (Tomes 260). Violence and madness similar to the late stages of rabies also show up in the Rage virus. Combined, the symptoms make an especially horrific disease. The Rage virus works quickly to destroy the patient's body like Ebola but with the added

horror of destroying his personality and taking over his mind to further its spread like rabies. The destruction of the victim's identity acts as both a blessing and a curse. On the plus side, the infected person likely loses most self-awareness during the infection and does not notice the excruciating pain of having his internal organs basically liquefy. The downside is that the infected person loses his sense of self and attacks others. The attacks do not seem entirely random, though, when considering the behavior of the Infected in *28 Weeks Later*. The primary Infected in that film first kills his wife and then attempts to hunt down his two children, even pursuing them through crowds of healthy individuals and across the city (Cooke 174). This behavior suggests that the Infected retain just enough memory to remember individuals and understand that those individuals were important to them, but the Rage virus overrides affection and protective instinct, instead turning intimate relations into priority targets.

The way the virus turns the Infected against those closest to them acts as a violent amplification of the usual way in which disease spreads. Normal disease often infects those closest to the sick. Friends, colleagues, and family members who spend a significant amount of time in contact with the infected individual get exposed to the disease and, as a result, have a high chance of becoming infected themselves. Close proximity ensures that people handle the same objects and breathe the same air as the infected person, giving the disease plenty of opportunities to spread. With the Rage virus, though, the infection of friends and family does not come from accidental exposure. Instead, the Rage virus exaggerates and emphasizes the way disease often spreads to those closest to the infected victim by having the Infected in

the film quickly turn and then actively seek out those close to them. For example, Frank's accidental infection brings the danger of disease into his family. He spends his last moments of sanity telling his daughter he loves her and yelling that Hannah, Jim, and Selena all need to get away from him. Seconds later, the disease takes hold, and he charges towards his daughter. Only the intervening soldiers prevent Frank from killing or infecting his daughter and friends, and the film emphasizes how close Frank came to destroying his daughter by framing a shot of her kneeling mere feet behind his corpse as the soldiers continue to fire into his body (*28 Days Later*). The Rage virus highlights the danger an infected individual can pose to his family and friends by turning a father against his daughter.

The Rage virus does not stop at making intimate contacts dangerous; it also turns survival and basic human goodness into liabilities. At one point in the movie, Jim explores a fast food restaurant and stumbles across an Infected child. Fortunately, Jim easily overpowers the emaciated, infected child and escapes unharmed, but the potential for infection remains (*28 Days Later*). First, his encounter shows how a necessary part of surviving a pandemic—gathering supplies—can lead to infection. Stumbling across an infected person or even simply finding a body while searching homes and businesses could infect a member of the group and consequently lead to the infection of others. Jim avoids infection and kills the boy, but the event clearly disturbs him. He cannot tell the others what he saw or did, and this all happens because he wants a burger and decides to explore the wrong fast food joint (*28 Days Later*). Interestingly, the Rage virus actually undermines another possibility of infection in this situation. In a scenario with a

disease that presents less conspicuous symptoms than the Rage virus, survivors may be tempted to help other survivors or take them into the group. However, when any other person could be infected, kindness to others may be a group's undoing. Taking in a new person could easily allow the infection to slip into an otherwise healthy band of survivors. Despite the practical reasons for refusing help, compassion remains a compelling emotion. If Jim feels guilt over killing an obviously infected child, one can easily imagine how much harder ignoring a possibly healthy child would have been.

As the Rage virus emphasizes, disease makes no distinction between people. Instead, illness infects without prejudice or favoritism (Gomel 406). First, *28 Days Later* shows the UK—a highly developed and affluent society with good medical care—falling victim to disease. The Rage virus completely destroys a nation that should have the technology and capability to deal with a pandemic. The disease also pays little attention to human distinctions such as age, race, sex, or social class. Jim, a lowly bicycle courier, escapes infection through a series of chance events. Other wealthier and more powerful people presumably succumb. After all, no one ever mentions the Queen surviving, and the movie shows suburban homes and manor houses whose occupants have either died or joined the ranks of the Infected. The Rage virus, like any effective disease, infects anyone it can. Men, women, and children of all races, classes, and religions fall victim to the virus; health becomes a combination of caution and simple, dumb luck. A pandemic does not allow anyone an easy method of escape, making it a terrifying equalizer.



The unique Rage virus presented in *28 Days Later* brings these fears and phobias of disease to the front of the viewers' minds by presenting a disease that spreads conspicuously and hijacks the victim's body and mind in order to propagate. The obvious exaggeration of the normal process of viral infection makes it all the more terrifying by showing the violence it inflicts upon the individual and the subsequent likelihood that they will spread the infection onto those close to them. The spread of the Rage virus makes the hidden dangers of disease apparent by showing the potential for anyone—priests, soldiers, children, friends, and even family members—to become dangers to healthy individuals, but reality proves even more insidious. The Rage virus quickly makes its presence known; most other diseases do not show their potential victims this courtesy. For all the terror present in the violent chases and attacks by the Infected, this method of infection at least works obviously and gives potential victims a clear opportunity to fight or flee. Healthy individuals, however, cannot flee the disease they cannot see hiding on a door handle. The Rage virus terrifies through its conspicuousness, but the average disease induces even more fear with its subtlety.

But while *28 Days Later* skillfully makes disease visible and emphasizes the most terrifying parts of viral infection, the movie comes up noticeably short in regards to the past or future. For the most part, the film focuses on the immediate fear and chaos of infection, pushing the story away from the usual apocalyptic narrative. In this way, *28 Days Later* fits more readily into the category of catastrophe narrative with its focus on the disaster, but it does not make a very good catastrophe narrative because it provides too little information on the disaster to

discern how the UK could have prevented it. Apart from maybe suggesting that governments should research deadly diseases in facilities that overzealous animal rights groups cannot easily break into, the film gives little advice in regards to prevention. The gap between the disease's outbreak and the start of the primary story—the eponymous twenty-eight days before Jim awakens from his coma—further frustrates any chance of understanding how the Rage virus spread and shattered British society. Instead, society and the government disintegrate off-camera, and the story picks up four weeks after the outbreak when Jim comes out of his coma to find himself in an empty hospital inside what appears to be a largely empty city. The plague has come and mostly run its course by the time the main narrative starts, frustrating any attempt to analyze the factors that let the Rage virus destroy England

If the start of the film denies the possibility of viewing the movie as catastrophe narrative, the ending refuses to make the film an apocalyptic narrative, either. The theatrical ending of the film gives a little hint at the future by implying the survivors' rescue, but for the most part *28 Days Later* ignores the aftereffects of the pandemic. The audience knows the survivors escape and the plague burns out on its own, but the future stays mysterious. Most of the film takes place in the fifth week after the infection, and the ending only gives the audience a quick glimpse of the eight-week mark. Even *28 Weeks Later* gives little indication of what happens next as the plans for repopulating the UK quickly fall apart, and the film focuses primarily on a doctor's and soldier's attempt to save the two children who may be immune to the Rage virus from both the Infected and the military's extermination of

all potentially infected civilians. Both films show the immediate chaos and terror of deadly disease, but they give little analysis of its origins or its effects on future society.

The scale of the infection in *28 Days Later* further undermines the possibility of interpreting the film as an apocalyptic disease narrative. Early in the film, Selena says she heard news reports of the Rage virus spreading to North America and mainland Europe, but a soldier at the manor later contradicts this claim, saying the disease has not left England. *28 Days Later* leaves the status of the rest of the world in question, but *28 Weeks Later* proves Selena's information incorrect. The Rage virus does not escape England, leaving the rest of the world physically untouched although likely on high alert. The UK breaks down, but most of the world presumably continues with business as usual except for the sudden lack of British television. The unexpected breakdown of the UK likely inconvenienced a number of people, but the disappearance of one island country—even a wealthy, developed nation with tens of millions of people—would not upset status quo much. The Rage virus never moves from epidemic to pandemic in *28 Days Later*, undercutting its ability to provide a world-shaking apocalypse. The end of *28 Weeks Later* suggests that the virus has escaped the UK, but without a third film, any interpretation of the Rage virus' effects on the human race as a whole remains purely speculative.

This is not to say that *28 Days Later* does not examine any social or political questions. These undercurrents run throughout the film, and Boyle has even said that he wanted the film to examine the destructive nature of individualism in modern society (Hunter 81). However, the emphasis on disease and infection

combined with the relative lack of information about its spread or global consequences makes the message a bit difficult to dig out. *28 Days Later* does an excellent job of emphasizing disease phobia and demonstrating the terror disease can evoke, but in order to examine the social, political, and personal ramifications of pandemic illness, the disease narratives must provide more information on the causes and long-term effects of pandemic disease to properly understand both the lure of the disease narrative and its implications.

**CHAPTER 4. TECHNOPHOBIA, SOCIETAL BREAKDOWN, AND PANDEMIC  
DISEASE IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S MADDADDAM TRILOGY**

Contemporary disease narratives that give more information about the causes and results of pandemic illness often contain a sense of technophobia. In fact, most modern apocalyptic narratives—along with many dystopian and other forward-facing stories—display some level of disillusionment with technology. After America used the nuclear bomb to end World War II, technophobia unavoidably seeped into the cultural consciousness. Over fifty years of Cold War nuclear brinkmanship put the fear of mutually assured destruction in the back of many Western minds, and continuing technological advancement has only exacerbated the fear. The mad dash of technological development that has led to genetically-engineered farm animals and palm-sized computers connected to a decentralized, world-spanning collection of information has ensured that authors never run out of new technologies with terrifying possibilities to use as subjects in their cautionary tales.

Science fiction and its more widely respected cousin speculative fiction have, for decades, reflected the fears of their creators by providing a counter to the technological utopia being pushed by the creators of these new devices and products (Dinello 5). For example, the introduction of the Borg in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, the killer robots of the Terminator movies, and virtual reality prison of The Matrix series suggest that Western culture was becoming increasingly worried about computers and artificial intelligence in the 80s and 90s. As new technology gets invented or becomes more widespread and common, people want

to understand the implications of that technology, its possible effects on culture, and the ways in which it could go horribly wrong.

Contemporary apocalyptic fiction often shows a suspicion of techno-science and its products (Watkins 119). Science fiction and speculative fiction have explored the dark and dangerous possibilities of technology for decades, constantly imagining new ways in which technology could end up destroying human civilization (Dinello 6). Consumer culture, free market capitalism, military development, and numerous other social and economic structures get indicted by this suspicion; without the constant push to earn more money by selling new products to more people, businessmen would have little motivation to constantly create demand for new novelties. A society and economy based on always producing more and getting people to buy more cannot be sustained forever, and it ends up spawning its own destruction in one form or another.

The obvious problem with connecting disease to technophobia comes from the fact that, aside from bioweapons, most diseases are not directly created by human technology. Most diseases occur naturally and have for millennia; cavemen likely dealt with some version of the common cold, too. And for most of recorded history, disease has been natural. Even deadly pandemics such as the Black Death began spontaneously. Only in the past few hundred years have humans developed an understanding of disease, and even since that point, disease outbreaks have largely been natural, spontaneous occurrences, although humans unintentionally help diseases by providing optimal conditions for diseases to mutate, reproduce, and spread. Modern medicine can now trace the causes and transmission vectors

and can even treat or prevent illness, but the appearance and spread of disease still happens without much intentional human intervention. Humans have the ability to create weaponized diseases, but, if these monsters have been created, no country or organization has deployed them on a large scale. The closest America has come to a bio-weapon attack is the post-9/11 anthrax letters, and even those were on a very small scale. The possibility exists for widespread, intentional use of bioweapons, but it has not happened yet.

Still, technophobia is a critical part of the disease narrative. Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy—or at least the two books released so far—make particularly strong connections between disease and technology, expanding on a number of ideas only hinted at in *28 Days Later*. For Atwood, the danger of technology comes primarily from genetic manipulation and the commodification of everything from people to genes, but globalization and the spread of Western consumer culture both play significant parts in enabling the pandemic, too. Both *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* depict an apocalyptic pandemic event. The novels use flashbacks to show a world spiraling into self-destructive, consumerist hedonism. The narrators of each novel come from different social classes and provide unique perspective, but the end product is the same. A brilliant young man who goes by “Crake” in honor of the extinct bird becomes disillusioned with the modern culture he has grown up in and, by conning corporate backers, he gets the money and technology to create a super-virus that wipes out the human race and in order to make room for the perfect human hybrids he has created. Corporate greed and the manipulation of genes give Crake the funding and technology to engineer

the disease; hedonistic consumption and the global distribution of products ensures that his new bio-engineered plague strikes all parts of the world simultaneously. The consumer culture allows the plague to be created and spread, but it cannot survive what Crake releases. Atwood's novels present two different aspects of technophobia in relation to disease. First, Crake creates and releases the disease, highlighting the possibility of terrorists, extremists, or governments intentionally creating and releasing deadly diseases. Secondly, Atwood's analysis of the near future demonstrates fears that current technology and social patterns can make Western culture more vulnerable to disease, be it man-made or naturally occurring.

Atwood's novels prove particularly relevant for analyzing real-world fears and possibilities because she intentionally draws the futuristic setting of the MaddAddam trilogy out of the present. She labels her work as speculative fiction because the setting "employs the means [of technology] already more or less to hand, and takes place on Earth" (Atwood, "*The Handmaid's Tale* and *Oryx and Crake* in Context" 513). By keeping the setting close to the contemporary world in both time and technological development, Atwood makes the connections between her fictional future and the current state of the world more readily apparent while also avoiding the stigma often associated with the sci-fi label. Atwood creates a world that seems familiar to her readers, but the slight differences make it disconcertingly foreign at the same time. She utilizes the Uncanny to draw attention to aspects of the current society that she wishes her readers to notice, letting the unnerving similarities between the present and her speculative future draw the audience's critical attention.



Atwood's novel falls perfectly into the technophobia emerging in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As the military and corporations dump ever-increasing amounts of funding into research, they produce profitable, life-threatening technology with little regard for the possible human consequences (Dinello 6). The MaddAddam trilogy takes the production of new technologies to the extreme in its near-future North American setting. The two completed novels have three unique narrator-protagonists amongst them, and each narrator provides a different view of the near future.

Jimmy/Snowman tells the story of *Oryx and Crake* through flashbacks after the world has ended, and his background as the child of fairly wealthy researchers living in a company-funded, gated community means his story comes from the view of a relatively affluent individual. His sheltered upbringing also skews his perceptions, however, as his position of privilege and the manipulation and suppression of news by the Corporations and private military leave him with a partial and often inaccurate understanding of the world. Toby and Ren split the narration of *The Year of the Flood*, and their position as slum dwellers and members of the eco-cult called the God's Gardeners lets them fill in the facts that Jimmy never learns because of his privilege. As a high-ranking member of the God's Gardeners and the eldest of the three narrators, Toby in particular tends to have the most insight and experience, but even she does not know the full story of the apocalypse. None of narrators come across as entirely authoritative, though, at least when the others have been taken into account. No character gets a complete picture of the world, meaning that any understanding of Atwood's world requires readers to synthesize the whole picture from a variety of disparate parts. By piecing together

the facts presented by these different narrators, readers can understand Atwood's speculative future and see how technology and corporate power have created the situation that leads to the apocalypse

First, Atwood sets her novel in the near future somewhere in North America to make its predictions relevant to affluent Western readers. Neither *Oryx and Crake* nor *The Year of the Flood* has yet identified the exact date or location of the story's major events, but the novels take place somewhere in the United States of America, probably one hundred or so years in the future. Amanda, one of the major characters in *The Year of the Flood*, hails from the former state of Texas (Atwood *Year of the Flood* 84-85). Amanda's origins establish the North American setting and, combined with the fact that all three narrators manage to walk to the coast within a few days' time, suggest that the novels take place near the ocean. However, this is not the United States the readers know; major changes to the environment and the political situation have seriously modified both the physical and political landscape of the nation.

Simply put, the future world of Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy lacks anything resembling a democratic national government. Instead, the CorpSeCorps private security company seems to have the most power of any private or political organization. Despite being the oldest narrator and one of the oldest characters in the novels, even Toby does not remember a time before the CorpSeCorps controlled basically everything. The collapse of public police forces due to a lack of funding during Toby's childhood let the private group expand its power by taking over law enforcement duties, all paid for by the 'charity' of the Corporations footing the bill

(25). After taking over for the police, the CorpSeCorps quickly extends its power into almost every aspect of governance and business, including organized crime. They utilize the local mob in the slums to run their illegal operations such as growing and selling drugs, and they torture and murder people who cross them or have information they need (173; 191). Their power may go even further, though. The God's Gardeners suspect that the CorpSeCorps uses official marriages to capture identifying information such as fingerprints and DNA in order to better track people, suggesting that the CorpSeCorps keeps records on everyone and tracks them Big Brother-style (115). Basically, by the time the MaddAddam trilogy starts, the CorpSeCorps has established itself as the de facto authoritarian regime. The CorpSeCorps and its Corporation funders embody the Technologism that has become a religion of sorts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the extreme consumption-orientated capitalism that enables it.

Technologism is the belief that technological development and the free market capitalism supporting it will provide a path forward by creating technology that fixes problems and rights wrongs in human society (Dinello 18). In a Technologicistic society, the military and private sector demand increased independence and autonomy from regulations and restrictions in order to develop new technologies, eventually leading to the creation of dangerous technologies and the implementation of morally questionable practices in research and manufacturing (31). Atwood's futuristic world takes the Technologicistic push seen in modern movements to deregulate research and production and pushes it to an extreme by removing entirely the regulations and the government that made and

enforced them. In Atwood's future, The CorpSeCorps and the Corporations it works for appear to have unchecked autonomy and control over most day-to-day occurrences, but even they cannot overcome the disasters caused by their rampant, careless drive for new technologies and more profits. Technologism makes the Corporations rich, but it also damages the environment and destabilizes civilization.

While the characters of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* only get hints at the limitations of CorpSeCorps and Corporation power, those hints suggest a far more unstable North America than the façade the security group and its corporate clients would like to present. Most of the chaos gets suppressed by the CorpSeCorps and only filters through the news in hints, but the problems exist. The most notable and jarring revelation comes in the form of Amanda. Amanda, a former Texan, has fled the state after droughts and a hurricane destroy the economy and kill her parents (Atwood *YotF* 84). To trap Texan refugees in their destroyed state so they can be used as a cheap source of labor by the Corporations, the CorpSeCorps builds a wall and mans it with armed guards (85). This event shows the extent of the CorpSeCorps' power and the lack of rights given to most citizens. The CorpSeCorps can build a fortified wall to keep American citizens from traveling between states and gun people down if they try to escape. In this instance, the future USA looks more like communist East Berlin than a land governed by the Constitution. Amanda manages to sneak past the wall, but the relative lack of other Texan refugees in the story suggests that the armed guards on the wall do a pretty good job of keeping the now-destitute Americans in their demolished state. Atwood never writes that the US government still maintains even the illusion of power in the face of the CorpSeCorps

and their corporate masters, and the fact that a private military can isolate one state and murder its citizens suggests the federal government, if it still exists, has little to no real influence or power.

The natural disasters in Texas also show a serious level of environmental degradation caused by industrialism unfettered with environmental regulations. At the beginning of *Oryx and Crake*, Snowman wakes up on the beach and looks out at the “offshore towers” and the “ersatz reefs of rusted car parts and jumbled bricks and assorted rubble” (Atwood *Oryx and Crake* 3). The beginning of *Oryx and Crake* takes place mere weeks after the apocalyptic plague strikes, meaning that the sea level must have risen and partially submerged this unnamed city well before the apocalypse. Other casually dropped bits of information further highlight the environmental degradation. For example, Jimmy and Crake graduate from high school in February because the east coast now has a wet season that makes outdoor commencement impossible in May, and even in February a tornado moves through their local area the day after they graduate (173). The MaddAddam trilogy also hints at sweeping extinctions as a result of corporate development and the rapidly changing environment, although the release and escape of new genetically engineered life forms may be filling the gaps left by those dead species. Flooding, new weather patterns, and numerous extinctions show a severely damaged planet in Atwood’s futuristic setting.

The environmental destruction and lack of democratic government do not seem to bother the average citizen, though, because the CorpSeCorps intentionally keeps such information from the average citizen. Shortly before releasing the

plague, Crake tells Jimmy about a secret CorpSeCorps report he has read suggesting that demand for resources will soon exceed the available resources in all parts of the world, not just the areas that have been marginalized by wealthy Westerners (294-95). Environmental damage and, likely, overpopulation have given human civilization an expiration date; if not for the plague, the people of Atwood's speculative future would have shortly consumed all the available resources and fallen into famine and war. However, the Corporations make sure to keep this sort of dangerous information away from the average person. Instead, they push a culture of rampant consumerism and hedonism to keep people distracted while the Corporations fill their pockets.

All the problems lurking in the background of Atwood's trilogy come from a single source: unchecked corporate power developed out of the idea of Technologism. Only the Corporations matter in this fictional future; everything else—including people and animals—becomes either a product or a consumer, sometimes both. However, each of the novels has a different focus within this corporate-run world. *Oryx and Crake* focuses primarily on how the Corporations turn living creatures into products. Genetic manipulation runs throughout the novel, and the Corporations have capitalized on the genetic structures of living creatures by turning them into products or the means to produce products. Atwood introduces a number of chimera-like animals such as the rakunk—a skunk-raccoon hybrid that makes a pretty good pet—as well as some animals that are less chimera-like and more terrifying. The ChickieNob, for example, is a genetic derivative of the chicken. However, unlike a normal chicken, the ChickieNob grows twenty

drumsticks, breasts, or wings on its featherless, turnip-shaped body in a two-week span and lacks a brain or central nervous system (202-03). Essentially, the Corporations have created a meat vegetable; they pour a nutrient slurry into its mouth-stalk and watch the not-chicken efficiently produce the most desirable tidbits of meat without wasting energy on unnecessary things such as feathers, brains, or movement. Plants and animals, as far as the Corporations care, exist only to provide the genetic material necessary to create new, more profitable life forms.

People too get turned into products by unchecked corporate power and greed. Oryx in *Oryx and Crake* serves as one of the most noticeable examples. She gets introduced to the readers when Jimmy and Crake see her in a child pornography video readily available for purchase on the Internet (90). Later, she gets hired as a prostitute by Crake's college and services Crake. The Student Services office at the prestigious Watson-Crick keeps its genius students focused on their studies by pimping for them whenever they feel the need for sex, and they seem capable of finding a sex worker to fulfill almost any desire or fetish (208). The readers never learn if Oryx's work is legal—the child porn site, at least, maintains the appearance of illegality despite its ready availability—but her activities, if not legally condoned, at least get intentionally overlooked. *The Year of the Flood* shows the legalized sex industry through Ren. After her mother remarries and abandons the now college-age Ren, leaving her with no way to pay her tuition, Ren gets a job as a prostitute and trapeze artist for a particularly kinky brothel called Scales and Tails. Scales belongs to SeksMart, a "legitimate Corp," showing that prostitution has been completely legalized in Atwood's future and has even become a large,

profitable business for one Corporation (Atwood *YotF* 294). According to Mordis, the brothel's manager, Scales offers something different from the "run-of-the-mill brand [of sex] the guy could get at home, with the face cream and the white cotton panties" (7). Instead, the workers at Scales wear bodysuits with scales, feathers, vaginal ruffles, and other distinctly non-human features. The suits provide the club's novelty and dehumanize the already-objectified sex workers further by hiding their bodies under freakish, non-human features. In the future of the MaddAddam trilogy, sex becomes nothing more than a product whose consumers need increasingly unusual novelties to stimulate them, and the objectification of people in the sex industry never seems to bother the consumers or Corporations profiting from these industries.

Beyond selling people and animals, the Corporations sell almost anything imaginable and promote a culture of mindless, conspicuous consumerism to fatten their pockets. Adam One, the leader of the God's Gardeners, claims that the biblical Fall into sin was "a fall into greed" that has led to humans thinking everything on earth belongs to them (52). The culture at large—which the God's Gardeners refer to as the Exfernal World—runs on mindless consumerism of cheap, disposable novelties, so Adam One's theology appears to be a direct response to culture around him. This consumerism even infiltrates groups such as the Gardeners, though. While they are supposed to be scavenging for useful objects others have thrown out, the God's Gardeners kids regularly head into the rundown Apple Corners mallway to look at the goods on display. Ren—at this point still only a child—says of the Gardener kids, "Our souls didn't interest us. We'd peer in the windows, giddy with



wanting” (71). Even though God’s Gardeners’ beliefs keep these kids almost entirely isolated from the consumer culture, it still manages to make them covetous of items they have no use for. Jimmy, on the other hand, exemplifies and revels in the consumer lifestyle. He lives a life of pure, mindless hedonism and spends most of his pre-plague life gratifying his basic impulses. While he has inklings of doubt about the culture he lives in, he regularly buys useless novelties including self-cleaning clothing and a talking toaster, and he bounces in and out of casual sexual relationships in an attempt to bury those doubts in a combination of emotion-free sex and pointless possessions (Atwood *O&C* 249-50). Jimmy’s behavior typifies the consumer culture present in Atwood’s speculative future and reflects current Western consumerism by showing someone concerned only with his next consumptive fix. The Corporations have nearly complete control of people’s lives, and they keep the populace entertained and comfortably numb while carrying out their destructive moneymaking schemes. This extreme version of current consumer culture, however, also creates its own destruction and highlights the technophobia in the culture that eventually provides its own destruction.

Essentially, Atwood takes the current state of Western culture and cranks everything up to 11. Instead of having corporations trying to buy elections with campaign funding and Super PACs, they expel the political middlemen and run the country through their private military. Global warming advances from today’s melting ice caps and unusual weather to flooded coastal cities and a monsoon season in the continental US. At the same time, the wealth gap increases, and conspicuous, mindless consumerism becomes the norm, even commodifying human

beings. The future culture Atwood creates has abandoned any pretense of curbing its desires and has instead chosen to make the stimulation and subsequent gratification of desire through consumerism its primary goal (Bergthaller 733). Only fringe groups such as the God's Gardeners fight back against the consumer culture, and the Corporations simply use their puppet media to mock and defame these groups until few people take them seriously. However, Atwood has not created a new culture so much as pulled out all the stops on the current culture, moving a self-obsessed, materialistic present to its logical if extreme end. The Corporations rule, and the people continue consuming products with little regard for the future or other human beings. Atwood labels her trilogy a work of speculative fiction because, at its core, it does not create any new ideas or technologies; it merely exaggerates current ideas and makes them more noticeable as a result. Decades of a no-holds-barred approach to technological development and corporate power move the current world into Atwood's future. Ultimately, this consumerism and the technology needed to create a constant stream of new novelties feeding it become the creators of the culture's destruction.

Crake creates his apocalyptic plague as a response to the unchecked, self-destructive consumerism he sees annihilating the world around him, and he cleverly utilizes the consumer culture and the Corporations' constant desire for new products and more money to create and distribute his pandemic. He makes the fear inherent in technophobia into a reality by using unchecked corporate development to destroy the human race (Dinello 6). First, Crake plays on corporate greed to get funding for his project. His research—all occurring under the umbrella of the

Paradise project—basically promises everything people could want. First, Crake’s research team creates the BlyssPluss Pill, a drug that provides the ultimate in protected sex while also acting as a mind-blowing aphrodisiac. The pill protects against all known sexual diseases, provides an “unlimited supply of libido and sexual prowess,” blocks the testosterone that led to violence and feelings of jealousy, extends youth, and acts as a 100% effective contraceptive (Atwood *O&C* 294). The pill provides the potential for unlimited consequence-free sex, and the second part of the Paradise project—the custom-made humans—fills in the lack of reproduction Crake expects the pill to cause (304). As far as the Corporations are concerned, Crake has made them the perfect one-two punch of products. He can give people the ultimate sexual experience, prevent them from reproducing, and then sell them perfect babies. However, the Corporations do not know that Crake is exploiting them.

While Crake has produced a viable safe sex/aphrodisiac pill and fine-tuned human genetic manipulation, he has not done it to make money. Instead, he uses these technologies to end the world. Crake uses genetic engineering technology to create the perfect disease, which he then secretly slips it into the BlyssPluss (325). Crake has Oryx and other members of his team distribute trials of the drug to brothels all across the world, and by putting a time delay on the virus’ activation, he successfully infects major cities across the world almost simultaneously. The disease spreads and kills very quickly and messily, provoking a CorpSeCorps response quickly and earning it the name JUVE—Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary—in the media, but Crake circumvents the barrier of quarantines by distributing the virus

across the globe (341). He uses the globalization of business and product shipment to move his disease all over the world in a matter of weeks simply by slipping it into a single, attractive product.

The multiple properties of BlyssPluss ensure that it gets wide use amongst both the sex workers and their customers, too. Ren's narrative shows that, at Scales and Tails, at least, both the workers and the customers end up using BlyssPluss almost immediately. For the workers, the immunity to all STDs makes their jobs safer and allows them to charge more for skin-on-skin sex as they can now safely have sex without any sort of protective barrier (Atwood *YotF* 130). The drug also makes prostitution physically safer and more profitable by putting customers into a blissful stupor, and Scales and Tails sees a massive decrease in both broken furniture and violent outbursts by customers once the workers start drugging clients via drug-laced olives and chocolate-dipped berries (202). Additionally, since Scales and Tales services high-ranking members of the Corporations and the CorpSeCorps, the BlyssPluss pill successfully spreads the infection to important, wealthy people (305). Crake does not dump his virus into low-end, disreputable brothels; he intentionally distributes it in a way that he knows will infect a large number of high-ranking officials along with the sex workers and possibly anyone else who comes in contact with them. He utilizes the desire for sexual gratification free of attachments or consequences to both fund and distribute his killer virus, allowing the globalized, consumption-oriented economy to spread its own destruction.

The little information Atwood gives about the disease's spread shows a world plunged into chaos. Rioting and looting quickly ensue, and people suddenly turn to religion for answers, at least until they realize that gathering in large groups increases the risk of contamination (Atwood *O&C* 340). Jimmy's timelapsed summary of the news shows the population's attitude towards the disease shifting as the JUVE virus spreads. The news starts pretty upbeat as stations cover run-of-the-mill chaos including a radical group's hilarious attempted liberation of a bunch of ChickieNobs (340). As the disease spreads, though, the news shifts focus to the lack of progress on a cure and the infection of more and more areas (341). The news quickly begins reinforcing and magnifying the populace's fears of the disease by getting doctors and researchers to show charts of the disease's symptoms and spread. They never succeed in curing the disease, though. Medical professionals mobilize and begin quarantine and isolation procedures in the second week of the infection, but their efforts prove useless. Plans and procedures to treat the JUVE virus rapidly disintegrate as the doctors and nurses either fall sick or flee the infection. Jimmy literally watches the world fall silent on a private website tracking the places on the globe still communicating via satellite. He sees the last points of light blink out across the globe, signifying the end of human civilization as communications go dark (342).

By showing the creation, distribution, and results of the JUVE virus, Atwood pushes back against what she sees in the current culture. She takes what she finds in modern Western culture and exaggerates it a little, pushing neoliberal capitalism to its logical, extreme end (Canavan 142). Eventually, though, the culture caves in on

itself. Increasingly large and powerful multinational Corporations exploiting a globalized economy to produce an ever-increasing variety of consumer goods end up causing the end of the world, albeit accidentally. That level of technological development and consumption cannot be sustained for any length of time and eventually collapses under its own weight (Duncan). Atwood's exaggerations make these structures more noticeable, but she does not add anything to the system that does not already exist in some form.

The best explanation of the technophobia underlying the MaddAddam trilogy comes from Crake. He sums the entirety of it up in a few brief sentences:

Change can be accommodated by any system depending on its rate....  
Touch your head to a wall, nothing happens, but if the same head hits the same wall at ninety miles an hour, it's red paint. We're in a speed tunnel, Jimmy. When the water's moving faster than the boat, you can't control a thing. (Atwood *O&C* 341-42)

Crake reveals the depths of technophobia and what he views as the inevitable collapse of human society. Crake gets his views in part from the Olduvai theory. The Olduvai theory argues that industrial civilization cannot be maintained for any length of time because it consumes too many resources too quickly and does not move toward sustainability. Instead, consumption peaks but cannot be sustained, leading to a downward spiral of technological breakdown that eventually dumps human civilization back at a pre-industrial level (Duncan). Crake knows that the consumer culture he lives in cannot be maintained forever because it consumes resources too quickly. Crake also sees humanity's reach exceeding its grasp.

Humans can make all sorts of amazing devices and creatures in Crake's world, but people do not seem to consider the implications of these technologies (Dinello 5). These technologies easily spiral out of control, though. Before Crake releases the JUVE virus, numerous genetic experiments accidentally or intentionally get introduced into the wild. The glow-in-the-dark rabbits and rakunks, for example, appear throughout the trilogy. After the pandemic, more dangerous species such as the wolvogs and pigoons escape into the wild. But beyond the spread of dangerous, mutant animals, where does the technology stop? After all, Crake finds a market for genetically engineered humans. Are genetically engineered super soldiers the next step? The constant push to make new, often genetically engineered products creates massive potential for unintended consequences, especially since the Corporation have little regulation and few morals slowing and regulating what they do. Instead of bumping gently into the wall, the unscrupulous mad dash for novel, new products to feed consumerism increases the potential for disastrous consequences.

The headlong charge towards the brick wall also translates back into contemporary technophobia, particularly about genetic engineering. Contemporary news often carries stories about fear of GMO grain or new varieties of pests and infections that have gained biocide resistance via natural selection or crossbreeding with genetically modified organisms. Beyond this, contemporary scientists continue to find evidence that the technophilic agricultural system creates contaminated food and an excellent breeding grounds for new diseases, and the globalized economy, like that of Crake's future, gives disease rapid, easy access to large parts of the world. By the time anyone recognizes a problem, the product has shipped to a large

area and made its way into many homes, potentially sickening or killing hundreds. And, of course, contemporary society will quickly face shortages of important substances including petroleum, water, and maybe even helium. Contemporary technology has already begun to run up against problems it has created but cannot easily solve, and the constant push to hide problems from the consumer and keep him happily consuming in ignorance will only exacerbate these problems in the long run. An economy based on perpetual growth via new products being sold to an ever-increasing population looks dangerously similar to the ninety mile-per-hour rush towards a brick wall that Crake describes. Atwood does not invent issues in the MaddAddam trilogy; modern civilization already has the virtually unchecked growth and technological development that could lead to disastrous consequences. As Atwood's future implies, the possibilities are nearly endless. Crake engineers a virus, but disease could have just as easily occurred spontaneously. Ignoring disease, environmental degradation and resource exhaustion also appear to be viable paths to human extinction, both in the MaddAddam trilogy and the future of the real world.

Technophobia and the resistance to Technologism do not provide solutions, though; they only highlight the problems. After recognizing these problems, the trick then becomes changing the course of civilization, but Crake suggests that change does not happen easily. He talks about the water moving faster than the boat, and that becomes the biggest issue standing in the way of change.

Technological development has moved beyond the control of any one person or government. The purpose of the apocalyptic text, though, is not to figure out how to



prevent disaster; the apocalyptic text imagines a new world. The disease narrative indicts modern society, but it does not propose a fix. Instead, it looks forward to utopia.

## CHAPTER 5. AFTER THE END: LIFE IN THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

Humans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century fear disease and fear that their technology and society will facilitate the creation and spread of disease. The bleak futures presented by speculative fiction and science fiction provide a myriad of ways in which technology can get away from its human creators and destroy them. However, despite all the fear, people also find the apocalypse strangely alluring and edenic. Disease narratives in particular offer a unique set of possibilities for the future, and what happens after the plague reveals a number of interesting possibilities about human nature and Western culture. Disease does not end the human race; instead, it gives humans a fresh start.

Apocalyptic narratives in general entail more than just disaster. While the end of the world does provide a certain morbid pleasure to readers through its imagined destruction of virtually everything its readers know, people often get absorbed in the destruction and forget that the apocalypse is not just an end. Apocalyptic narratives, both religious and non-religious, carry a distinct element “after the end” that leads to a post-apocalyptic world (Knickerbocker 347). The Christian apocalypse, for example, does not end with the Four Horsemen destroying the world, but instead, after all the destructions, it ushers in the second coming of Christ and the perfect, eternal age of his rule. Many non-religious apocalyptic texts also contain this crucial “after the end” element. Notable exceptions exist, but many apocalyptic texts, despite all the death and destruction, leave room for a future. Disease narratives, due to the unique nature of this type of apocalypse, provide

particularly interesting possibilities for the post-apocalyptic future, and in doing so they reveal underlying desires in modern culture.

As mentioned previously, apocalyptic plague strikes with scalpel-like precision compared to many other apocalyptic scenarios. Many apocalyptic scenarios work via widespread destruction. Nuclear war pulverizes former population centers, irradiates large areas, and may plunge the entire planet into nuclear winter. Global warming decimates coastal areas and throws temperatures and weather patterns into chaos all over the world. Disease looks tame and idyllic in comparison because it causes none of these widespread, lingering problems. Disease does not damage infrastructure or the environment. It does not leave any lingering effects such as radiation or desertification. It only strikes humans and possibly a few other species depending on the disease. Once the disease has infected and killed everyone and everything it can, it basically vanishes; a deadly pandemic removes people but causes little collateral damage. This precise destruction creates unique possibilities for the future.

Apocalyptic disease narratives expose a number of fears about and weaknesses of the current culture. They show that, in Western English-speaking cultures, people fear technology. Westerners fear both the possibility that technology could directly create a disease but also the increasingly common instances of disease being created or spread accidentally by the globalized consumer economy and the technology that powers it. An ever-growing population squeezing more tightly into urban and suburban areas gives further reason for pause because, as *28 Days Later* demonstrates, disease easily rips through a dense

population. Many of the things that enable the fictional pandemic are also critical parts of current Western civilization. People will not suddenly move back to the country and take up subsistence farming; urbanization and globalization will, for the immediate future, remain the foundation of Western civilization and its economy.

Apocalypses, however, break these monolithic structures. The apocalypse forcibly discards the philosophies and structures of consumption-based capitalism by undercutting old ways of thinking and living. In a way, Western culture needs the apocalypse in order to be able to see beyond capitalism and its related structures (Canavan 138). Once the apocalypse has occurred, it reveals the weaknesses of those structures that can otherwise prove difficult to identify from within. Representative democracy and the free market economy, for example, do not provide safety and prosperity after the end (Manjikian 127). Notably, the apocalypse almost always comes from within these structures, too. Internal forces and unintended consequences explode outward, ripping apart the basic structures of Western society (133). Thematically, this destruction from within allows creators of apocalyptic texts to demonstrate problems within these structures while also allowing artists to imagine a space beyond the structures. The old paradigms collapse in on themselves in the apocalyptic text, allowing the characters to do the previously unimaginable by creating lives outside the formerly acceptable and possible ways of living.

Disease seldom manages to completely wipe out the human population, leaving a small group of survivors to begin rebuilding. Any post-apocalyptic story must, by necessity, have a group of people survive the end, but disease presents

important, unique methods of doing so. Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* and the BBC program *Survivors* both show possible methods of survival. In Atwood's novel, a surprisingly large number the God's Gardeners manage to live through the JUVE virus pandemic. Their survival, in part, comes from isolation, providing one possibility of surviving the plague. Ren, for example, starts the novel in a sealed isolation zone after an excited customer bites through her protective bodysuit at work (Atwood *YotF* 6). She gets confined to a quarantine zone until her tests show that the bite did not give her any diseases, and the quarantine also fortuitously keeps the JUVE virus out. The other Gardeners have similar stories. Amanda lives by being out in the middle of the desert during the outbreak, and a trio of Gardener brothers survives simply by being imprisoned in an isolated room when the pandemic starts. Isolation works, and it is one of the major teachings of the God's Gardeners leader, Adam One. He tells his followers "[People will] be drowning. Don't let them clutch you. Don't let yourself be that last straw, my Friends" (354). As part of their planned isolation, the Gardeners build secret supply caches called Ararats. Toby survives at the spa she manages because, immediately after getting her job, she begins supplying an Ararat in the stockroom (265). The food holds her in good stead through the initial JUVE outbreak, and after most of the people have died she begins utilizing the other part of her Gardener training. All the Gardeners learn how to identify edible and dangerous plants, snare small animals, grow vegetables, defend themselves, and otherwise survive on looting and foraging in a post-Flood world. Preparation, knowledge, and isolation allow many Gardeners to avoid infection and stay alive through the plague.

In contrast, *Survivors* presents a very simple but possible scenario for surviving a plague: immunity. Abby Grant, the main character of the show, falls ill with the deadly strain of influenza but recovers. The other members of her group of survivors, on the other hand, prove immune despite their obvious exposure to the virus. The 11-year-old Najid, for example, wakes up in a mosque to find that his parents and the rest of the congregation have died all around him, and Dr. Anya Raczynski stays healthy despite working in a hospital filled with infected patients (*Survivors* 1.1). The survivors, despite almost certain exposure, do not die. They present the interesting but very real possibility that, in the event of a deadly pandemic, some people will recover or never even fall ill. These resistant survivors have one major advantage over those who survive God's Gardeners-style through isolation: they do not have to worry about infection at a later date. Unless the virus mutates later on—and *Survivors* does suggest this possibility in the second season when one of the group falls ill with a mutated version of the disease—the surviving humans can focus on securing food and shelter without worry of illness (2.5). Immunity quickly pushes the disease out of the survivors' minds by rendering it mostly harmless. The pandemic wraps up nicely and leaves a group of survivors free from its destruction in a largely empty world. They do not have to worry about disease, just food, shelter, and safety.

While surviving the initial apocalypse is great, survival alone does not get the characters or the themes of the story very far. The post-apocalypse is a necessary component of the apocalyptic narrative if the creator expects readers or viewers to be able to extrapolate any message from the text. The disaster shows the cracks in

the current civilization and blows them apart, sometimes literally, to create space for something new. All this destruction works to create an imaginative space in which the author can explore new possibilities. The apocalyptic genre allows artists to take a recognizable version of the world and apply stress until it breaks. Once civilization has broken, these narratives allow both their creators and their consumers to step back from the society they exist inside and then imagine possibilities beyond or outside of that society.

Humanity has a long history of longing for a simpler, more natural life, and that longing finally gets realized in the apocalyptic narrative. Technology began encroaching on nature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, industrialization had swept through England and was well on its way to becoming the basis for the American economy (Marx 179). The machine was supposed to improve life and advance history by bringing about equality and prosperity, but technology proved insufficient for the task of perfecting society and instead planted the seeds of technophobia that would come to fruition in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries (196, 185). By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people began to seriously push back against industrialization and instead seeking simpler lives.

As people became increasingly disillusioned with their industrialized society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the desire for simpler living grew. Countercultural movements in the 60s and 70s pushed organic, subsistence agriculture in response to increasingly industrialized agriculture that used machines and chemicals to produce food. Twenty years later, the same desire to live simply has worked its way into mainstream culture. The cover story of *TIME* magazine in April of 1991 focused on

the idea of living simply. The article found that 69% of Americans wanted to live a simpler, slower life. The economic uncertainty of the late 80s and increasing disillusionment with a competitive, high-speed, technology-laden way of life pushed Americans, at least for a short time, into a simpler and less consumption-oriented lifestyle (Castro and Blackman). If people wanted to live more simply twenty years ago, they have even more cause to want a slower, simpler life.

Moving twenty years further from the 1990s into the 2010s shows that people have more reasons than ever to push back against so-called civilization. In 2013, many people carry phones in their pockets that have more computing power and functionality than the desktop PCs of the late 80s and early 90s. Near-omnipresent Internet access and cellphone reception ensures that many people constantly stay connected, and pictures of what someone is having for lunch can reach people all over the world in a matter of seconds. At the same time, other aspects of life have become increasingly opaque to the average person. Figuring out where food comes from or what chemicals and additives get slipped into it becomes almost impossible as new, unpronounceable additives from such bizarre sources as crushed bugs and beaver rectums get combined with meats, vegetables, and grains imported from across the world to produce something manufacturers pass off as food.

People have started to push back, but the end results remain to be seen. The organic food movement and lifestyles such as the 100-mile diet encourage people to buy healthy, local food. First Lady Michelle Obama appeared in PSAs encouraging children to leave the television and video games and instead exercise and play



outside to combat the sedentary modern lifestyle contributing to the obesity epidemic. Last year, the world even saw the emergence of the Phone Stack to counteract the problem of people paying more attention to their phones than their friends. Everyone at dinner puts his phones in a stack on the table, and the first person to check his phone and disturb the stack pays for dinner (The Week Staff). Affluent Westerners may be fighting back, but the battle against technology and its resulting culture of alienation from nature and other people does not seem winnable.

The problem people quickly run up against when pushing for a simpler life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that the trappings of civilization cannot easily be disposed of. Gerry Canavan sums up the impending sense of doom when he writes, “There is no hope for liberal individualist consumers living in the pseudo-utopia of late capitalism; our system—and the subjectivities and ideologies it produces, to say nothing of its material excesses and cold consumer comforts—is genuinely doomed” (154). Some members of Western culture recognize the need to make life simpler and get back to a more natural, sustainable lifestyle, but they cannot find a clear path to implementing these changes. Simply put, Westerners cannot get away from capitalism and its related structures even though they want to (138). Cellphones, computers, and the Internet for example, probably will not go anywhere, and if the last thirty years of rapid technological development and adoption give an indication of the future, the problems of capitalism and Technologism will only get worse as new technologies become integral parts of modern life. Other problems cannot easily be removed, either. For example, while organic and local food movements

push for more responsible food, that organic infrastructure currently could not support anywhere near every person in the United States. The shift toward local, organic food would require a complete overhaul of the industrial agriculture system and would likely become an uphill battle against a number of very wealthy and influential interest groups. The consumer culture in general cannot be sustained, but it cannot be shifted, either. People increasingly recognize that capitalism is “an economy of unpaid costs,” but no one has found a way beyond it (Kapp qtd. in Canavan 139). This difficulty, however, also makes the apocalyptic text appealing.

Apocalyptic narratives provide a simple, effective solution to capitalism and its attendant structures: kill enough people to collapse society. The end spells doom for billions of people, but it gives the survivors the advantage of being freed from the old structures of society. Manjikian says it most clearly when she writes, “The apocalypse provides a space where the ground is clear and life (and its institutions) can begin anew” (134). Manjikian argues that people secretly wish to see civilization, progress, and capitalist production destroyed because they cannot see a way out of or beyond these structures without completely dismantling or destroying them (136). Western civilization has built itself around industrialization and perpetual growth, meaning the very Technologism that has created this technophobia and discontent with the direction of modern civilization also acts as the irreplaceable cornerstone of that civilization. The constant development and perpetual growth economy have to go, but they cannot be removed without collapsing the rest of society. The apocalypse, however, lets Western civilization break away from capitalism and the structures that go along with it by breaking

these structures. The apocalypse gives humans little choice in the matter. Instead, it forces them to give up their old ways of living and the technology that enabled those lifestyles (Buell 285). And, by destroying the old social order, the apocalypse creates the potential for a new future. The apocalyptic pandemic offers a particularly appealing future by destroying human civilization while leaving the natural world intact.

The world looks very different after an apocalyptic plague, even in comparison to other apocalyptic scenarios. Apocalyptic plague breaks culture in an interesting manner; instead of widespread destruction or obstruction of current systems, it simply removes the humans necessary to keep the social, economic, and governmental structures operating. The plague does not have to destroy Capitol Hill and Wall Street when it can instead empty these structures of the humans who power the government and economy. The massive human losses render recovery impossible despite the continued existence, at least in the short term, of the infrastructure. Without people to even maintain basic utilities such as power plants and water treatment centers, human technology and, as a result, modern civilization, effectively get pushed back hundreds of years. This return to a more primitive, simple lifestyle for the survivors makes the apocalyptic genre compelling.

Apocalyptic pandemic creates one of the best scenarios for escaping technology and beginning environmental recovery, making them particularly compelling environmental narratives. Because disease strikes so precisely, apocalyptic pandemics allow for the restoration of the natural world (Gomel 408). A properly deadly pandemic disease removes enough people to render consumer

capitalism and its attendant structures impossible, but it does not destroy the human race entirely and leaves the rest of the natural world virtually untouched. Instead, the apocalypse clears away the old and makes space for a new version of civilization that exists more in tune with the natural world (Manjikian 134). Atwood, for example, puts her survivors in a new, idyllic pastoral. Many of the remaining God's Gardeners gather into a tribe of sorts. When Ren and Toby find the Gardeners, they first see a man named Croze wearing sunglasses and a bed sheet and carrying a big stick like some version of the shepherds from a church Christmas pageant, and he watches over a veritable rainbow of genetically engineered, multi-colored, long-haired sheep formerly used to grow living wigs (Atwood *YotF* 385). The scene looks a little odd with sunglasses and Technicolor livestock, but it harkens back to a much simpler time in comparison to the malls, spas, and brothels of the recently destroyed world. Croze hardly looks like the perfect Arcadian shepherd, but he comes much closer to the simple, pastoral ideal than anything made by the Corporations.

*Survivors* presents a slightly less bizarre world, but it proves equally primitive and idyllic. In the first episode, a survivor named Greg expresses his wish to simply head out to the country and take up farming to support himself. While the other survivors convince him to stay, the next episode sees the group commandeering some unclaimed chickens and attempting to build a pen in order to keep them (*Survivors* 1.1, 1.2). They have little experience preparing them to become agrarians—their chicken coop keeps falling apart and letting chickens escape—but they quickly attempt to fall into the new role anyway. Both narratives

put the surviving characters into a simpler, more natural lifestyle, but people do not have to go completely primitive after the pandemic.

As Croze's sunglasses suggest, the survivors of a plague get to keep the best parts of the destroyed civilization. They move back towards a more natural world, but they necessarily keep the most useful parts of the old world because, even after the end, that world still influenced their knowledge and development (Watkins 123). Post-apocalyptic humans have the chance to discard the harmful, undesirable aspects of their previous culture and technology, while keeping only the beneficial and benign. Atwood's *God's Gardeners* have a big advantage in this area. They have built their lifestyle around salvaging and repurposing objects throw out by the consumer culture, and the apocalypse has left a lot of stuff without owners (Malewitz 535). By the time Ren and Toby arrive at the makeshift camp, the group has already set up chemical toilets, a cookhouse, and duct tape hammocks, and they have begun working on rigging up solar power (Atwood *YotF* 389; 399). *Survivors* goes even further by showing an entire self-sufficient compound. Abby stumbles across this place while searching for her son, and it appears to be a virtual utopia. Built to be self-sustaining even before the plague, the compound has a sustainable food supply, green source of electricity, and a water supply (*Survivors* 1.3). As long as the survivors kept their population limited, they could likely live in that facility for decades. While the characters cannot escape techno-science entirely, they can ensure that they only use the best and least harmful parts (Watkins 123). With technology, though, comes problems, too.

Unlike the apocalypse presented in Revelations, secular apocalyptic narratives do not establish a perfect future. Instead, apocalyptic narratives create a start and new possibilities, nothing more (Knickerbocker 359). Atwood argues that, if an apocalyptic narrative is to avoid satire, it has to endorse the idea that humanity can be improved (“Everybody is happy now”). However, even the targeted destruction of pandemic disease does not automatically make everything perfect; it simply creates a space in which people can improve themselves and their society. In *The Year of the Flood*, for example, Croze carries a spraygun—a futuristic machine gun that uses power cells instead of bullets—with his shepherd get-up (Atwood *YotF* 385). The weapon appears to be a necessity in the post-apocalyptic world. Croze says that pigeons keep attacking the camp to raid the vegetable garden, and a group of genetically modified, ultra-vicious guard dogs attacks the camp shortly after Ren and Toby arrive (390-93). *The Year of the Flood* also shows the possibility of violent survivors. The God’s Gardeners rescue Amanda from a pair of armed, violent criminals who captured her and use her as a sex slave, and, if the surviving Gardeners have managed to find these dangerous people within the small area of the book’s setting, more violent survivors likely exist elsewhere in the world (416-419). With its strong focus on the post-pandemic world, *Survivors* repeatedly emphasizes the theme of conflict after the apocalypse. The last surviving elected official in the UK, Samantha Willis, leads a group of survivors living at the self-sustaining compound, and she quickly slides toward tyranny in the post-apocalyptic world. Her group catches a pair of looters in their compound while Abby is visiting, and Willis quickly runs a kangaroo court and executes one of them herself (*Survivors*

1.3). In later appearances, she has drafted violent survivors into her group to act as her enforcers, and she is far from the only problem in the new world (1.6). Later episodes have members of the protagonist band getting kidnapped, shot, and forced to labor as slaves in a coal mine by a former Oxford professor (2.4). Disease narratives may fix an astounding number of problems simply by ending a consumer capitalist culture, but unlike the Judeo-Christian apocalypse, pandemic illness does not spell the imminent end of evil (O'Leary 6). The apocalypse may not be a cure-all, but it does put the survivors in the position to create a new world.

Despite the lack of utopia resulting from the pandemic apocalypse, the remaining humans in *The Year of the Flood* and *Survivors* find themselves in an interesting position. Atwood's characters appear to be well on their way to creating a new society based around primitive agrarianism and animal husbandry. While they still have to worry about dangerous animals and violent survivors, they have already started creating the ultimate realization of the hippy commune in the post-apocalyptic world. Atwood's novel ends less than fifty pages after Ren and Toby join the camp, leaving the future open to the survivors. At that point, they have more members spread out finding supplies and even more survivors, and if they build some defenses to keep out the pigeons and mutant dogs, the remaining God's Gardeners have a good start on their post-apocalyptic community. The group in *Survivors* exists in a less distinct space. Cancellation at the end of the second season left the show on a cliffhanger ending. Abby finally reunites with her son, but the group has to work on a cure for the new strain of the virus and still has not found a safe, permanent settlement (*Survivors* 2.6). Still, Abby has her son, the group is

working on a cure based on her blood, and they have escaped from every dangerous group encountered so far. If they can find a cure, Abby can take her son and the rest of the survivors to find a safe place to settle down and start a new, agrarian life. Both groups, despite the hardships they face, have the chance to create a new and simple life with a community of similar individuals. It may not be a perfect future, but the survivors have a chance to start lives away from the capitalism-oriented structures that dominate current civilization.

While the apocalyptic pandemic destroys modern civilization and causes widespread death, it also creates new possibilities. It does not return the world to a utopian or edenic state, but it does release the survivors from technology and a capitalist society. By violently freeing them from the technology and social structures they cannot otherwise escape, the apocalypse creates a new space in which people can work out new modes of living. They can break free from the tyranny of modern technology and, at very least, fight to make something better in the new, post-apocalyptic world. Plague frees the surviving humans and allows them to at least attempt to realize the underlying Western desire to live more simply in communion with nature.



## CHAPTER 6. THE FUTURE OF DISEASE NARRATIVES

The disease narrative opens many interesting possibilities and reveals a number of underlying fears and desires in Western culture. Disease proves to be both terrifying and oddly attractive in 21<sup>st</sup> century narratives and real life. The modern news media and fictional narratives such as *28 Days Later* bombard people with the horrors of infectious disease and remind them of the increasing likelihood of serious pandemic illness in the future, creating a culture steeped in the fear of a deadly pandemic illness. As long as humans continue to follow the patterns of excessive consumption, globalized capitalism, and largely unchecked corporate and military research, people will always have to live under the threat of deadly new diseases.

Technophobia in reaction to a Technologicistic economy will continue the examination of such technology in science fiction and speculative fiction. The ever-present threat of a new pandemic illness created, spread, or otherwise enabled by modern technology and the globalized economy ensures that fictions exploring those scenarios will remain relevant. Unless medical researchers find the panacea to cure all illness or at least figure out how to efficiently respond to and contain emerging diseases, the threat of a deadly pandemic will continue to loom over human civilization, spurring increased awareness of these dangers and the creation of more stories exploring them. Disease is not going anywhere, and narratives about it likely will stay, too.

The last novel of Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy will be released in September of 2013, and this book is likely far from the last disease narrative in the works.

Perhaps the Technologists will find vindication in the discovery of technologies that create a sustainable utopia and provide enough for everyone, but if the pattern of the past few centuries continues, the sudden appearance of a utopian-inducing technology does not seem likely. If the continued path of resource over-exploitation and nearly unchecked technological development continues, though, creators of the technophobic apocalyptic narrative and the pandemic variety of the narrative will have plenty of new material and motivation for creating their stories.

Instead of vanishing, disease narratives will continue to respond to changes in the surrounding culture. Increasingly publicized incidents of contaminated food and medicine, for instance, may inspire narratives utilizing these methods of infection as artists explore a system that continually creates these problems and try to imagine a world beyond them. Unless humans finally manage to create the perfect world, apocalyptic narratives will remain just as relevant in the future as they have been in the past. For the foreseeable future, at least, people will continue to create disease narratives and other apocalyptic scenarios in reaction to the imperfect civilization they see around them and out of a desire to imagine better possibilities for the future.

As long as modern civilization continues its technologist ways and pushes people further from the simple, natural life they wish for, the apocalyptic narrative will continue to provide a space in which people can imagine possibilities outside of the system. Since the disease narrative offers a particularly appealing future after the end, it will likely remain relevant if for no other reason than that it creates this optimal space in which to begin rebuilding civilization. The technophobia,

increasing likelihood of pandemic disease, and attractive, possible futures offered by the pandemic apocalypse all suggest that people will continue creating pandemic apocalyptic narratives for the foreseeable future.

By exploding the current civilization, revealing its weaknesses, and allowing people to explore patterns of living beyond the end of modern technology and capitalism, the apocalyptic text and the disease narrative in particular create a compelling imaginative space. The disease narrative explores real-world fears and desires, making it a relevant text to study and understand in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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