

Phenomenally Affective: Kass Morgan's *The 100* and the Apocalyptic Politics of Care

Hannah Nelson-Teutsch

ABSTRACT: This essay confronts a growing consensus that the apocalyptic mode is the wrong way to tell the story of climate change. Contrary to the widely held belief that an apocalyptic framework invites apathy and political disengagement, I contend that the apocalyptic mode can in fact serve as a vital locus of highly differentiated and deeply felt engagements with the embodied experience of dwelling in crisis. An ecocritical reading of what I term 'phenomenal apocalyptic narratives'—like Kass Morgan's *The 100*, which I will explore in detail—reveals an impulse to care that is avowedly political in nature.

KEYWORDS: Climate Change; Apocalypse; Ecocriticism; Storytelling; Affect; Care; Commoning; *The 100*

Storytelling at the End of the World

After decades of dire warnings and plaintive calls to action, writers of the climate crisis have reached a consensus: there is a desperate need for new ways to tell the story of climate change.¹ This argument can be identified throughout both scholarly and popular climate writing, manifesting perhaps most influentially in the work of Jonathan Safran Foer and Amitav Ghosh.² Ghosh begins his non-fiction confrontation with climate change, *The Great Derangement*, with a section titled "Stories," in which he concludes that understanding the stories that we tell about climate change "may well be the key to understanding why contemporary culture finds it so hard to deal with climate change" (9). Embedded within Ghosh's critique of the narrative framing of the climate crisis is a condemnation of the kinds of stories that have centered the climate crisis thus far, and these stories are—by and large—apocalyptic.

Critically acclaimed novels such as Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012), Margaret Atwood's *The MaddAddam Trilogy* (2013), Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017), and John Lanchester's *The Wall* (2019) are just a few of the most recent examples of apocalyptic climate writing that has captured the public imagination. The apocalyptic mode has become by far and away the most popular and prominent framework for representing the climate crisis; and yet, ecocritics and environmentalists consistently dismiss and demean

¹ See for example: Simon Estok, "Narrativizing Science: The Ecocritical Imagination and Ecophobia" (2010); Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, "Stories Come to Matter" (2014); Mithra Moezzi, et al., "Using stories, narratives, and storytelling in energy and climate change research" (2017); and Dylan Harris, "Telling Stories about Climate Change" (2019).

² See also: Mike Hulme, *Why We Disagree About Climate Change* (2009); Adam Trexler, *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change* (2015); and David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth* (2019).

the apocalyptic mode as a narrative response to the climate crisis. Invariably, criticism of the apocalyptic mode suggests that this particular form of storytelling stymies collective action to mitigate the threat of climate change by representing environmental cataclysm as a foregone conclusion.³ This reading of the apocalyptic mode ignores a long history of politically potent apocalyptic environmental writing, the latest iteration of which is, I argue, an apocalyptic narrative that foregrounds the affective experience of dwelling in crisis. I term this particular strain of affective apocalyptic writing ‘phenomenal,’ thereby drawing on theories of entanglement and intra-action with roots in new materialism and intersectional feminism in order to emphasize the ways in which these texts so deftly attend to what it feels like to “become-with each other” (Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble* 4). Phenomenal apocalyptic texts—like Kass Morgan’s YA novel *The 100*—reveal the power of the apocalyptic mode not only to represent differentiated and diverse embodied engagements with environments in crisis, but also to suggest a humble, restorative, and communal approach to environmental regeneration and resurgence through care.

In making a case for the phenomenal apocalyptic narrative, I offer both a provocation and a proof of concept. The provocation I tender here develops in three stages: first, I surface the revolutionary inheritances of contemporary apocalyptic writing; then, I call together the cluster of subversive apocalyptic texts I term ‘phenomenal apocalypstics’; finally, I engage theories of affect and care to stake out a distinct political claim for the phenomenal apocalyptic mode. Although ecocriticism has been slow to develop an affective affinity, I contend that the affective resonances and careful practices of the phenomenal apocalyptic novel are essential to narrating and enduring the climate crisis.⁴ In order to move beyond provocation and offer some proof that the phenomenal apocalyptic mode is vital to ecocritical engagements in the Anthropocene, I will close with a careful reading of Kass Morgan’s *The 100*.⁵ Morgan’s apocalyptic Young Adult romance begins in space, three generations after a thermonuclear apocalypse, as the last remaining descendants of the human race cling to life on decaying satellites in orbit around the Earth. As life in space becomes increasingly untenable, “a hundred lucky criminals” (Morgan 8) are sent to Earth to test whether the planet might once again be able to sustain human life. The narrative is relayed through the voices of Clarke, Bellamy, Wells, and Glass, for whom the very idea of a “return” (Morgan 27) to an apocalyptically imagined Earth is inextricably bound up with the

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

⁴ For more on ecocriticism’s lagging engagement with affect, see Alexa Weik von Mossner, *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative* (2017) as well as Kyle Bladow and Jennifer Ladino, *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment* (2018).

⁵ Following Paul Crutzen, I understand the Anthropocene to be a geological age defined by the effects of human transformations at a planetary scale (17). In that the climate crisis can be attributed to these transformations writ large, I utilize climate crisis, environmental crisis, and the Anthropocene to function interchangeably when discussing a temporal moment defined by a certain scale and type of ecological violence.

romantic love that consumes a vast quantity of the affective space of the narrative. Throughout *The 100*, the experience of dwelling in crisis is mediated and made meaningful not in isolation, but by virtue of entanglement, romantic and otherwise. By attending to what it feels like to ‘become-with’ a complex more-than-human host on a planet in peril, *The 100* surfaces practices of caring about and caring for the Earth and each other that are radically political.

Revolution and Resurgence: The Political Power of the Apocalyptic Mode

Apocalyptic writing finds its origins in theological prophecies—texts that proclaim an imminent and catastrophic end to the world that is both preordained and essentially prologue to the manifestation of a heavenly new world that shall be inhabited by the true believers.⁶ In that the sine qua non of apocalyptic narratives is an unavoidable and cataclysmic end, it is not surprising that most scholars of the climate crisis perceive the apocalyptic mode to be the narrative manifestation of apathy—the functional opposite of thinking that engages constructively with the causes of our current crises or that which proactively proposes an alternatively-imagined future. Donna Haraway likens the apocalyptic mode to “a position that the game is over, it’s too late, there’s no sense trying to make anything any better, or at least no sense having any active trust in each other in working and playing for a resurgent world” (*Staying with the Trouble* 3). Haraway is not alone; contemporary scholars of the climate crisis have overwhelmingly dismissed the apocalyptic mode. “In discussions about climate change,” Rebecca Evans observes, “the popular tendency toward the apocalyptic is matched only by the popular tendency to critique apocalyptic rhetoric as fatalistic” (501). However, the casual, unthinking certainty with which the apocalyptic mode is rendered politically problematic fails to take into account the revolutionary impulses inherent in apocalyptic writing.

Historically, the apocalyptic mode has been deployed as a rejection of the status quo. Biblical apocalypticism is widely acknowledged to be a form of revolutionary imagining otherwise—a way of writing back against hegemony and claiming space for a radical insurgency.⁷ After all, the powers that be have no interest in the end of the world; only a dissatisfied minority invested in the potential for transformative change would dedicate

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

⁷ Judy Diehl describes the Book of Revelation as “the most unambiguous and blatant example of confrontation between the early Christians and the Roman Empire in the New Testament” (168). Examples of this sort of dissident apocalypticism have also been identified throughout the ongoing process of settler colonialism, from the nineteenth century Paiute prophet Wovoka’s Indigenous re-inscription of the rhetoric of the Book of Revelation in the Ghost Dance Movement, as described by Mark Rifkin in *Beyond Settler Time* (2017), to the contemporary promise of apocalyptic hip hop described in James Ford’s “When Disaster Strikes: On the Apocalyptic Tone of Hip Hop” (2018).

themselves to a narrative framing of time and space that posits an immanent end and a radical new beginning.

Apocalyptic representations of the climate crisis are just the most recent manifestation of a long history of revolutionary apocalypticism. And indeed it is only logical that climate activists would invoke a sense of environmental apocalypse given that “very similar rhetorical strategies have provided the green movement with some of its most striking successes” (Garrard, “Environmentalism and the Apocalyptic Tradition” 49). In fact, the apocalyptic mode has become utterly vital to environmental discourse (Garrard, *Ecocriticism* 104). Lawrence Buell even goes so far as to suggest that “apocalypse is the single most powerful master metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal” (285).

An apocalyptic framing of the climate crisis is essentially a rebuke to the dominant discourse, which refuses to acknowledge the differentiated and radically unequal ways in which individuals experience environmental violence. Understanding apocalyptic ecofiction as revolutionary requires a dismantling of the subtle logic that universalizes the end of the world. The same rhetoric that naturalizes a singular ‘end’ to a singular ‘world’ produces a homogenized and undifferentiated human race in jeopardy. This logic fundamentally ignores the inequalities that have always been inherent in apocalyptic visions of catastrophe and are notably resurgent in apocalyptic engagements with climate change. In fact, apocalyptic renderings of a planet in peril can be interpreted as both a logical and fundamentally clearheaded response to the structural transformations at work in a warming world; what Rebecca Evans terms “an ideologically honest reckoning of how deeply the logics and material practices that produce climate change are rooted in Western modernity” (505). Read in this light, the systemic antipathy toward apocalypticism represents not a vested interest in new imaginative possibilities, but rather a denial of the revolutionary challenge to the status quo manifested in the apocalyptic mode.

The denial of apocalypticism’s revolutionary tendencies is evident in Erik Swyngedouw’s suggestion that an apocalyptic framing of the climate crisis “produces a thoroughly depoliticized imaginary, one that does not revolve around choosing *one trajectory*, one that is not articulated with specific political programs or socio-ecological project or revolutions” (Swyngedouw, “Apocalypse Forever?” 219, emphasis added). Like so many others, Swyngedouw dismisses the political impact of the apocalyptic mode by insisting that apocalyptic environmentalism is not conducive to uniting a globalized human race in political action against a threat imagined universally. I don’t disagree; however, I do contend that a radical and even revolutionary political power can be located in phenomenal apocalyptic narratives that do not revolve around choosing ‘one trajectory.’

From the Margin to the Center: Staking a Claim for Phenomenal Apocalyptic Imaginaries

Rather than positing the need for a unified human race to take up political arms against a status quo that consistently and recklessly refuses to acknowledge the dynamic, individual, and networked relationships between people and environments in peril, phenomenal apocalyptic narratives engage affectively with environments in crisis and in so doing reveal an impulse to care that is avowedly political in nature. In suggesting that phenomenal apocalypses represent a new kind of radical and revolutionary apocalyptic writing, I want to begin to define my terms in dialogue with a diverse community of feminist scholars. Rather than isolating and deploying the theory of others in service of my own work, I intend to engage in the very work of commoning that defines the phenomenal apocalyptic novel by developing the definition of the phenomenal apocalyptic dialogically.⁸ This communal approach begins by anchoring the phenomenal apocalyptic narrative in the intersectional feminist tradition before incorporating a new materialist investment in being as becoming-with the more-than-human world.

First and foremost, I contend that phenomenal apocalypses in general, and *The 100* in particular, are examples of what Frederick Buell dismissively terms “women-centered” apocalyptic fictions, which feature “dramas of relationships” in contrast to the “male-centered survivalist action-adventure that, unsurprisingly, stands at the center of many post-apocalyptic fictions” (18).⁹ Buell’s gendered division of apocalyptic fictions is telling for the ways in which it convincingly locates the “women-centered” dramas at the periphery.

Thinking with bell hooks it becomes clear that much if not most of the dominant climate crisis narrative emerges from those at the center “whose perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of women and men who live in the margin” (hooks Preface). The earliest frameworks established to narrate the climate crisis—texts such as Bill McKibben’s *The End of Nature*—write from the center with a ‘species view’ of human agency that denies the individual (and the marginalized) in favor of a loosely-defined global ‘we’ who are all at once and somehow equally to blame for the monumental transformations at work:

⁸ Silvia Federici defines commoning in acutely political terms: “Though differently articulated—*commoning*, *el común*, *comunalidad*—the language and the politics of the *commons* are today the expression of this *alternative world*. For what the commons in essence stands for is the recognition that life in a Hobbesian world, where one competes against all and prosperity is gained at the expense of others, is not worth living and is a sure recipe for defeat. This is the meaning and the strength of the many struggles that people are waging across the planet to oppose the expansion of capitalist relations, defend the existing commons, and rebuild the fabric of communities destroyed by years of neoliberal assault on the most basic means of our reproduction” (Federici 1).

⁹ Donna Haraway identifies in the rather abstract category of women-centered apocalyptic texts “a rich topography of combinatorial possibility” that “none of the narratives of masculinist, patriarchal apocalypses” provide (“The Promises of Monsters” 327). This idea of apocalyptic possibility has been explored further by Rebecca Evans, who suggests that “forms of open-ended and hybridized apocalypse [...] leverage the apocalyptic impulse to create a role for apocalyptic imagination without historical foreclosure” (Evans 520).

[...] by changing the weather, we make every spot on earth man-made and artificial. We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's independence is its meaning; without it there is nothing but us. (54)

McKibben is alarmingly prescient in his assessment that now there is 'nothing but *us*.' The dominant climate crisis discourse that evolved in the decades following the publication of *The End of Nature* has consistently and perniciously assigned both blame and responsibility for the transformations underway to a universally imagined 'us.' Even more insidiously, the universalizing impulse that takes shape in narrating the climate crisis posits that 'we' are all equally victims of the transformations at work. According to Erik Swyngedouw's analysis,

the climate change conundrum is not only portrayed as global, but is constituted as a universal humanitarian threat. We are all potential victims. "THE" Environment and "THE" people, Humanity as a whole in a material and philosophical manner, are invoked and called into being. However, the "people" here are not constituted as heterogeneous political subjects, but as universal victims, suffering from processes beyond their control. ("Depoliticized Environments" 268)

The discursive construction of the universal victim that Swyngedouw identifies is emblematic of a willful ignorance of the disproportionate and radically unequal ways in which environmental violence shapes individual experiences.¹⁰ Texts in the phenomenal apocalyptic mode begin to write back against the homogenizing 'we' that abounds throughout climate writing with a more intimate and embodied 'I.' In so doing, these phenomenal apocalypses affectively (and effectively) surface the lived experience of radically unequal distributions of violence and upheaval meted out in a warming world.

In choosing the term 'phenomenal' to represent this cluster of apocalyptic writing, I draw on Karen Barad's new materialist theorization that "'individuals' do not preexist as such but rather materialize in intra-action" (Barad qtd. in Kleinman 77). These intra-actions, which Barad terms 'phenomena,' are complex, multi-species entanglements (Barad 815), and engaging Barad in designating this subset of apocalypses 'phenomenal' emphasizes the ways in which these texts are radically relational and fundamentally more-than-human. That which is phenomenal is, in the new materialist sense, emergent in moments of intra-action. That which is phenomenal is also woman, in the words of Maya Angelou, "phenomenally. Phenomenal woman, that's me" (8). In deploying the term phenomenal, I am conscious of an intellectual debt to generations of Black women who staked claims for the vital significance of identities rich, complex, and distinct from that of the White, Western, male subject.¹¹ The intertextual richness of the term phenomenal can be identified not only in the

¹⁰ Scientific evidence of these disparities abounds throughout the literature. See, for example, Jalonne White-Newsome et al., "Climate Change, Heat Waves, and Environmental Justice: Advancing Knowledge and Action" (2009); Barry S. Levy and Jonathan A. Patz, "Climate Change, Human Rights, and Social Justice" (2015); S. Nazrul Islam and John Winkel, "Climate Change and Social Inequality" (2017); Thomas et al., "Explaining differential vulnerability to climate change: A social science review" (2018); and Matthew Hauer et al., "The Path of Least Resistance: Projections of Social Inequalities as a Result of Climate Change in the United States" (2020).

¹¹ Here I am thinking particularly of Kimberlé Crenshaw who coined the term intersectional "because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, [and thus] any analysis that does

influence of new materialism and intersectional feminism, but also in the affective emphasis of phenomenal as a superlative. That which is phenomenal is extraordinary, incredible, wonderful, and it is ascertained as such via the senses, that is to say, affectively. Ultimately, in calling together a cluster of phenomenal apocalyptic texts I mean to suggest that the political potency of these narratives can be identified in the affective connections between individuals and environments in crisis. In other words, phenomenal apocalyptic narratives take up the challenge of representing what it feels like to dwell in environmental crisis as entangled, intersectional, intra-actional beings.

Affect and Care in a Warming World

With intellectual inheritances that date back to the mid-twentieth century, affect has been defined differentially according to varying traditions of scholarship emanating from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, on the one hand, and critical interpretations of Sylvan Tomkins by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, on the other (Bladow and Ladino 4-5). However, at its core affect is consistently associated with the embodied experience. Affect, according to Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, “is the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing” (1). There is a tendency to translate the visceral and embodied concerns of affect theory with an interest in emotion, and although Teresa Brennan defines emotions as “sensations that have found the right match in words,” she convincingly argues that “there is no reason to challenge the idea that emotions are basically synonymous with affects (if more an evidently physiological subset)” (18).

In attending to affect, a notable rift emerges with regard to where various strands of scholarship locate affect. Affect-oriented scholarship in the hard sciences has emphasized the experience of individual bodies, whereas scholarship in the humanities tends toward a conception of affect as a networked and more-than-human state of becoming (Bladow and Ladino 5). Like the new materialist ‘phenomena,’ which effectively destabilize notions of being that have been central to Humanist thinking in the Eurocentric tradition, affect theory “disrupts both discrete notions of embodied selfhood and static notions of environment, encouraging us to trace the trajectories of trans-corporeal encounters that are intricate and dynamic” (Bladow and Ladino 8).

The kinds of disruptions inherent to affect theory are vital to ecocritical engagements in an age of climate crisis. For all of the scholarly work that has been done to narrativize the effects of climate change on individuals, communities, and the planet as a whole, there has been far less interest in stories that explore the embodied experience of climate change. By

not take *intersectionality* into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated” (Crenshaw 140). And, I am conscious that the phenomenal apocalyptic texts Audra Mitchell and Aadita Chaudhury term “BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) futurisms”—texts which propose “plural worlds that vastly exceed white visions of ‘the’ end of ‘the world’”—are among the most popular and influential challenges to “increasingly influential literature on ‘human extinction,’ ‘global catastrophic risks,’ and eco-apocalypse” (310, emphasis added).

depicting the visceral experience of dwelling on a planet in peril, phenomenal apocalyptic texts offer a vital representation of the dynamic relationships between individuals and environments in crisis. I contend that in these affective representations of individuals becoming-with environments in crisis, phenomenal apocalyptic narratives reveal a deeply political impulse towards care. Care, according to the seminal definition produced by Bernice Fisher and Joan Tronto, is a “species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (40). This broadly defined ‘species activity’ requires an integrated conceptualization of care as both a disposition (feeling) and a practice (labor). The dispositional dimension of care is often associated with affect (love, affection, concern, worry, or taking responsibility for the well-being of another); however, the material practices of care can also be considered affective in their embodied engagements with maintenance work and care-giving (Tronto 105-08). I align myself with Fisher and Tronto in defining care as both disposition (caring for) and practice (caring about).

For decades, matters of care as both disposition and practice have been integrated into feminist writings on environmental justice.¹² Indigenous environmentalists have also foregrounded the ways in which care work contributes to the kinds of transformations associated with justice in a warming world. Chief Arvol Looking Horse, Keeper of the Sacred Buffalo Calf Pipe writes that “to us, as caretakers of the heart of Mother Earth, falls the special responsibility of turning back the powers of destruction” (qtd. in Estes Chapter 1). “This caretaking,” suggests Elizabeth DeLoughrey, “particularly its feminized and Indigenous constellations,” is the “untold story” of centuries of environmental engagement (196). And, although I follow DeLoughrey in asserting that care as a transformative environmental disposition and practice has largely been ignored in favor of large-scale techno-fixes and globalized social movements, I contend that it is possible to locate a radical and transformative politics of care within one very particular kind of story—the phenomenal apocalyptic narrative.

When it comes to explorations of a politics of care within phenomenal apocalyptic literature, it is necessary to ask, as Maria Puig de la Bellacasa insists that we do, “what happens to our work when we pay attention to moments where the question of ‘how to care?’ is insistent but not easily answerable” (7). Phenomenal apocalyptic texts such as Kass Morgan’s *The 100* offer just such a potent site for observation. By examining how care is meted out in disposition and in practice within the space of one particular phenomenal apocalyptic text, I hope to solidify the theoretical claims I have made for phenomenal apocalypics as a cluster and to initiate a *careful* re-reading of the apocalyptic mode as a potent textual form in the Anthropocene.

¹² Carolyn Merchant’s 1996 text *Earthcare* proposed a “partnership ethic of earthcare,” which identified women’s maintenance work as a uniquely potent form of environmental intervention in the struggle for sustainability (16).

The Apocalyptic Politics of *The 100*

From Recognition to Resistance

The radical political potency of *The 100* is manifested in the attentiveness of the text. Whereas Tronto defines attentiveness as a moral prerequisite for care that is as simple as “recognizing the needs of those around us” (127), the attentiveness that I identify in *The 100* is an act of care unto itself—a form of engaged curiosity that Maria Puig de la Bellacasa describes as “thinking with care” (92). By attending to the embodied experiences of young people (young women in particular) on a planet in peril, *The 100* centers the experiences of individuals who are not well-represented in the homogenizing discourse on climate change. And yet, three of the four narrators (Clarke, Wells, and Glass) are wealthy and politically empowered, while the eponymous one hundred criminals sent to earth as unwitting test subjects hail from “the colony’s poor outer ships, Walden and Arcadia” (Morgan 2). While still aboard the satellites in orbit around the Earth, both Clarke and Wells probe the ethics of sending minors criminalized by virtue of class to a risky and uncertain future on a post-nuclear planet Earth. When Wells confronts his father, The Chancellor, about the scheme—“with all due respect, you’re the one who convinced the Council that nuclear winter was over. You said it was safe” (Morgan 16)—the reply is galling but not surprising: “‘Yes. Safe enough for the hundred convicted criminals who were going to die anyway,’ the Chancellor said, his voice a mix of condescension and disbelief. ‘I didn’t mean safe for my son’ (Morgan 17).” The Chancellor’s casual othering of marginalized citizens of the satellite colonies is in many uncomfortable ways mirrored in the novel’s investment in the elite teens as savior figures. I highlight this as one of the many ugly and casual incidences of privilege asserting itself throughout the text.

The 100 is far from perfect, and many failures of the text—notably a colonial impulse and an unexamined White privilege—undermine the phenomenal possibilities inherent within the text.¹³ *The 100* is a text that writes from a minoritarian position by centering young, female voices while simultaneously ignoring and thereby silencing racially, sexually, and economically marginalized individuals.¹⁴ *The 100* fails utterly and phenomenally when it

¹³ Although my reading focuses on Morgan’s novel and not the television series, I want to note that the TV series has been associated with a persistent anti-Blackness that manifests most explicitly in depictions of violence perpetrated against the series’ Black characters and in the positioning of White female characters as savior figures in relation to the savage inhabitants of the earth. LGBTQ fans and activists have also been influential in reacting against the brutal and surprise killing of the romantic lead’s lesbian partner immediately following the first intimate love scene between the two; a killing that came in the wake of a prolific PR campaign for the show featuring the queer couple (Stanfill 1).

¹⁴ There are many examples of BIPOC futurities that hew closer to the promise of representation and transformation that characterize phenomenal apocalyptic narratives. I am thinking here in particular of Octavia Butler’s extraordinary novel *Parable of the Sower* (1993), which writes in the voice of a complex Black female character who is uniquely gifted (or plagued, as the case may be) with hyperempathy. Butler’s text may in fact be the epitome of what phenomenal apocalyptic novels can achieve in writing *affectively* against the climate crisis, and it is for this exact reason I have chosen not to take up this text as an example here. Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* is already regarded as a canonical work of SF and climate writing. I am interested in *The 100* because it represents the type of writing that makes up the vast majority of

casually reinforces the structural violences that are amplified on a planet in peril; however, when *The 100* does engage intersectional and embodied experiences of becoming-with, the novel demonstrates the political possibilities of care as a strategy for resistance and resurgence.

The Audacity of Joy

In the wake of a hazardous forced relocation to earth, the protagonists intra-act with the environment in privileged yet shifty assemblages of the human and more-than-human. Clarke, staring up at the trees with tears in her eyes, recalls her parents and remarks: “I feel closer to them here [...] They spent their lives trying to figure out how to get us home” (Morgan 264). Moments later Clarke and Wells share a kiss, and for Wells

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

For Clarke and Wells, the visceral and embodied experience of an environment in crisis is manifested in the tangle of girl, boy, log, ground, skin, scent, damp air, and dreams. It is exactly these sorts of entanglements that exemplify the ways in which phenomenal apocalyptic texts revel in and thereby reveal what it feels like to live on a planet in peril.

On occasion, *The 100*’s attentiveness to more-than-human being as becoming-with reveals the challenges of individual endurance in the face of global environmental cataclysm. When Wells observes that “tonight, the clouds covering Earth didn’t remind him of a shroud—they were merely a blanket. The planet hadn’t died, it’d only slipped into an enchanted sleep until the time came for it to welcome humanity home” (Morgan 141), he begins to acknowledge the degree to which individual human life is reliant upon a vibrant and healthy global ecosystem. Before even making it to Earth, Clarke overhears a conversation on the dropship concerning the toxicity of the Earth atmosphere and acknowledges that “there was no point in speculating. The trip to Earth would be short—in just a few more minutes, they’d know their fate” (Morgan 44). Transmitting this sense of transcendent ecological forces at work is one vital function of the phenomenal apocalyptic mode. People are, every day, put into jeopardy by rising tides, warming climates, poisoned waterways, melting glaciers, and lingering storms; and, the most precariously perched are inevitably communities marginalized by race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, geography, and mobility. This sense of ecological precarity is not experienced equally in the Anthropocene, but it is reflected in Wells’ observations of the clouds and Clarke’s meditations aboard the drop ship.

phenomenal apocalyptic narratives—texts that are broadly popular, particularly among women, and often at the cost of any serious critical consideration. In making a case for caring about phenomenal apocalyptic narratives, I believe it is vital to stake a claim not only for serious works of Literature but also the popular fiction that Ken Gelder suggests “is best conceived of as the opposite of Literature” (11).

Ultimately, when Clarke does arrive on Earth the experience is one of ‘welcome’—an expansive and ‘joyful’ celebration of homecoming:

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

The desire for this joy, this welcome, this sense of networked belonging must be recognized as a powerful political claim. The opportunity for joy and belonging are fundamental to the political impulses of care as a disposition and a practice. Without the capacity for joy and belonging, the future is foreclosed upon and change feels impossible. Affective engagements with environments in crisis that center joy and belonging suggest that transformation is not only possible, it is palpable. The simple act of living joyfully in the moment is an act of investment in the earth, a form of caring for and about the more-than-human environment that closely resembles Haraway’s conception of “staying with the trouble” through “serious and lively” engagements that are neither hopeful nor despairing (*Staying with the Trouble* 4).

Commoning and Care Work

Although the joy and celebration of Clarke’s first intra-actions on Earth can be read as a humble and transgressive act of staying with the trouble, the ‘almost inconceivable’ amount of space on the ground that Clarke identifies in those first moments of entanglement is equally suggestive of one of the fundamental promises and premises of the apocalyptic mode: the possibility of a new beginning. There is a lurking and vicious potential in the apocalyptic new beginning, a sort of populism that regards the other as inherently dangerous and perceives the future as belonging solely to a certain subset of humanity. Rachel Wagner has described this apocalyptic tendency as “cowboy apocalypticism [...] a simple mythic solution to complex global problems: Violently wipe the slate clean, it says, and let the survivors demonstrate their mettle on a new frontier” (Wagner). In its application to the environment, the ‘new beginning’ has historically been yoked to devastating ideas of a pristine landscape devoid of its former inhabitants and open to productive transformation by new (that is, White, Western, Settler) occupants. The violent emptying and subsequent offering up of space to a select few is one of the most insidious functions of apocalyptically imagined environments.¹⁵

Within *The 100* there is a persistent return to the idea that the affective experience of dwelling on Earth is an experience of rebirth or renewal. However, that idea is repeatedly and explicitly complicated. The start the hundred do get on Earth is as brutal as birth:

The cabin was dark and silent. Smoke billowed out of a hole where the control panel had been, and the air grew thick with the smell of melting metal, sweat, and blood [...] Clarke limped forward, gritting her teeth at the pain that shot up her leg. She

¹⁵ See for example W.M. Denevan “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492” (1992); William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground* (1995); and Gerald Horne, *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism* (2017).

reached the door and pulled as hard as she could. She took a deep breath and slipped through the opening. (Morgan 46)

The drop ship crashes and the human survivors emerge bruised and bloodied, immediately forced to contend with the smoldering wreckage of their own making. This carefully rendered intra-action is a far cry from the figurative cleansing implied in the proto-typical apocalyptic new beginning. This is a beginning that is dominated by collective practices of care work. Clarke spends her first day caring for those individuals who are injured in the crash landing. Bellamy is consumed with caring for his sister and the labor of gathering supplies and building shelter. Wells is given over to caring for the group as a whole, working to ensure that the camp is established to the benefit of all. The kinds of care work on display in these first moments of intra-action on Earth constitute what Silvia Federici has termed “commoning” (1), whereby practices of maintenance and repair are deployed in the service of a better world. Humble and reactionary though they may be, these collective practices of care work must be recognized as political in that they are deliberately constitutive of a new and better world. Although the return of the hundred to Earth is frequently referenced as an opportunity for a fresh start, the idea of this new beginning as a baptismal washing away of sins is quickly rejected—“the rain was only water, and there was no such thing as a clean start” (Morgan 233)—in favor of the idea of a new beginning as a matter of care: an opportunity that hinges upon the active pursuit of a better world rather than a do-over with no strings attached. The sister, Octavia, whom Bellamy came to earth to protect, expresses this desire most efficiently: “I know a lot of us have done things we’re not proud of, but we’ve been given a chance for a new beginning [...] I’d like to start over—to become a better person, to help make Earth the world we want it to be” (246). The sentiment expressed by Octavia reflects a frequent refrain throughout the text: “we have a chance to do better” (249). The distinction between the desire for a ‘clean start’ and ‘a chance to do better’ reflects an affective investment in the labor, the *care*, required to remake the world.

Resistance and Resurgence

As an apocalyptic rendering of environmental crisis, *The 100* reflects both the awareness that structural forces at work have produced devastating changes beyond the scope of human intervention—a two-headed deer, luminous butterflies that populate this familiar, yet undeniably altered Earth—and the belief that it is through care that individuals can become a force for transformative change. When Wells suggests that “maybe, here in the ruins of the old world, they could start something new,” he is reflecting not a *promise* but a *possibility* (Morgan 224). The possibilities of care-work in *The 100* are humble, yet they are also radically political. Care can be identified, for example, in the simple pleasures of maintenance work—the rigors of bathing become for Bellamy “one of his favorite things about Earth, how mundane stuff like washing your feet suddenly felt like a huge deal” as well as in the investment in building permanent structure, a process that littered the grass “with wood shavings and pieces that had been discarded after false starts” (319). Clarke’s interest in care-giving as a healing practice manifests most evidently in her work to attend to the injuries that arise in the wake of the crash: “There weren’t many serious injuries, but

there were enough to keep Clarke busy. For nearly an hour, she used torn jacket sleeves and pant legs as makeshift tourniquets, and ordered the few people with broken bones to lie still until she found a way to fashion splints” (53). However, it is only when she finds her best friend “lying on the ground, nestled against the roots of a tree” that it becomes clear how intimately the Earth itself is implicated in these practices of care (54). The Earth that somehow ‘makes [...] mundane stuff like washing your feet’ significant; the Earth that welcomes and cradles the vulnerable teens in need of protection; that same Earth is bound up in the work of care-giving Clarke embarks upon as she discovers Thalia, with “blood gushing from a wound on the side of her ribs, staining the grass beneath her dark red, as if the earth itself were bleeding” (55). In an instant, the impulse to care is reflexively transformed from a human concern to a networked, more-than-human affair, echoing Maria Puig de la Bellacasa’s call to “think of care as an obligation that traverses the nature/culture bifurcation without simply reinstating the binaries and moralism of anthropocentric ethics” (13).

In weaving together intimate, more-than-human *cares*, *The 100* establishes itself as one kind of answer to the question Federici poses as she explores the limits of commoning: “can we imagine reconstructing our lives around a commoning of our relations with others, including animals, waters, plants, and mountains” (8)? By imaginatively constructing “commons of care [as] communities of resistance,” (Linebaugh qtd. in Federici xvi), phenomenally affective novels like *The 100* reveal “not the promise of an impossible return to the past but the possibility of recovering the power of collectively deciding our fate on this earth” (8).

In Conclusion

A historical exploration of the apocalyptic mode’s revolutionary impulses reveals phenomenal apocalyptic narratives like *The 100* to be just the latest in a long line of apocalyptic confrontations with the status quo. As texts that write back against homogenizing representations of environmental crisis, phenomenal apocalypics embed themselves within the political sphere wherein individuals enact “the right to dissent, the right to argue against a particular consensus, the right to engage in antagonistic relations, the right to be alternative” (Kythreotis 549); the right, one might add, to be entangled.

Throughout *The 100*, the diverse, embodied, entangled experiences of dwelling on a planet in peril are depicted in the intra-actions of juvenile offenders and a vibrant earth. In caring about and for one another, these shifty assemblages manifest an approach to becoming-with that is radical in its commitment to a humble, sustained resurgence. Rather than exhibiting an impulse towards apathy, *The 100* reveals the ways in which phenomenal apocalyptic narratives develop a claim to the agency of the individual in the face of a homogenizing climate crisis discourse. By attending to the cares that structure each intimately differentiated experience of dwelling in crisis, phenomenal apocalyptic narratives move beyond the politics of representation to stake a radical claim for political resistance and resurgence through care.

Resistance and resurgence in phenomenal apocalyptic novels like *The 100* may not manifest in “specific political programs or socio-ecological project or revolutions” (Swyngedouw, “Apocalypse Forever?” 219, emphasis added); resistance is nonetheless evident in the affective and material practices of care throughout *The 100*. Staking out claims to joy and belonging on an environmentally devastated Earth is an act of political resistance; laborious investments in maintenance and repair is an act of political resistance; developing a more-than-human commons is an act of political resistance, and each of these political acts can be identified throughout Morgan’s phenomenally affective novel.

Of course, by staking the political claims of the phenomenal apocalyptic to the unique and particular accounts of individuals, this provocative repositioning of the apocalyptic mode begins to confront the problem of scale. What good, after all, are intimate and modest acts of resistance when the scale of the climate crisis is planetary? How can humble and local transformations contribute to ecological resurgence globally? While I cannot easily reconcile an intimate, intersectional, intra-actional strand of apocalyptic thinking with the global scale of contemporary environmental crises, I contend that the political possibilities inherent in the phenomenal apocalyptic mode demand an expansive engagement with the ways in which these narratives write back against the devastations of the Anthropocene.

Works Cited

- Angelou, Maya. *And Still I Rise*. Penguin Random House, 1978.
- Atwood, Margaret. *Maddaddam*. Bloomsbury, 2013.
- . *Oryx and Crake*. Bloomsbury, 2003.
- . *The Year of the Flood*. Bloomsbury, 2009.
- Barad, Karen. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke UP, 2007.
- Berger, James. *After the End*. The U of Minnesota P, 1999.
- Bladow, Kyle, and Jennifer Ladino. *Affective Ecocriticism: Emotion, Embodiment, Environment*. U of Nebraska P, 2018.
- Brennan, Teresa. *The Transmission of Affect*. Cornell UP, 2004.
- Buell, Frederick. “Post-Apocalypse: A New U.S. Cultural Dominant.” *Frame*, vol. 26, no. 1, 2013, pp. 9-29.
- Buell, Lawrence. *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing and the Formation of American Culture*. Harvard UP, 1995.
- Butler, Octavia. *Parable of the Sower*. Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993.
- Cohn, Norman. *The Pursuit of the Millennium*. 1957. Revised and Expanded Edition, Oxford UP, 1970.
- Collins, John J. *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*. vol. 14, Scholars Press, 1979. *Semeia*, Society of Biblical Literature.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, Iss. 1, Article 8, pp. 139-167.

- Cronon, William. *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1995.
- Crutzen, Paul. "The Anthropocene." *Global Change Newsletter*, vol. 41, 2000, pp. 17-18.
- de la Bellacasa, María Puig. *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More Than Human Worlds*. U of Minnesota P, 2017.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. U of Minnesota P, 1994.
- DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M. *Allegories of the Anthropocene*. Duke UP, 2019.
- Denevan, W.M. "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 82, no. 3, 1992, pp. 369-385.
- Diehl, Judy. "'Babylon': Then, Now and 'Not Yet': Anti-Roman Rhetoric in the Book of Revelation." *Currents in Biblical Research*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2013, pp. 168-195.
- Estes, Nick. *Our History Is the Future*. Verso, 2019. Scribd Digital Library, <https://www.scribd.com/book/402610966/Our-History-Is-the-Future-Standing-Rock-Versus-the-Dakota-Access-Pipeline-and-the-Long-Tradition-of-Indigenous-Resistance>. Accessed 23 May 2021.
- Estok, Simon C. "Narrativizing Science: The Ecocritical Imagination and Ecophobia." *Configurations*, vol. 18, no. 1-2, 2010, pp. 141-159.
- Evans, Rebecca M. "The Best of Times, the Worst of Times, the End of Times?: The Uses and Abuses of Environmental Apocalypse." *ASAP/Journal*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2018, pp. 501-522.
- Federici, Silvia. *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. PM Press, 2019.
- Fisher, Berenice and Joan C. Tronto. "Toward a Feminist Theory of Care." *Circles of Care: Work and Identity in Women's Lives*, edited by Emily Abel and Margaret Nelson, State U of New York P, 1990, pp. 35-62.
- Ford III, James Edward. "When Disaster Strikes: On the Apocalyptic Tone of Hip Hop." *ASAP/Journal*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2018, pp. 595-622.
- Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. Routledge, 2004.
- . "Environmentalism and the Apocalyptic Tradition." *Green Letters*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2001, pp. 27-68.
- Gelder, Ken. *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field*. Routledge, 2004.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Great Derangement*. U of Chicago P, 2016.
- Gregg, Melissa, and Gregory J. Seigorth, editors. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Duke UP, 2010.
- Haraway, Donna. "The Promises of Monsters." *Cultural Studies*, edited by Lawrence Grossberg et al., Routledge, 1992.
- . *Staying with the Trouble*. Duke UP, 2016.
- Harris, Dylan. "Telling Stories About Climate Change." *The Professional Geographer*, vol. 72, no. 3, 2019, pp. 309-316.
- Hauer, Mathew, et al. "The Path of Least Resistance: Projections of Social Inequalities as a Result of Climate Change in the United States." *SocArXiv*, 6 Jan. 2020, doi:10.31235/osf.io/7jtrn. Accessed 23.05.2021.
- Hoggett, Paul. "Climate Change and the Apocalyptic Imagination." *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, vol. 16, 2011, pp. 261-275.
- hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. South End Press, 1984.

- Horne, Gerald. *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism*. Monthly Review Press, 2017.
- Hulme, Mike. *Why We Disagree About Climate Change*. Cambridge UP, 2009.
- Iovino, Serenella, and Serpil Oppermann. "Stories Come to Matter." *Material Ecocriticism*, edited by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, Indiana UP, 2014, pp. 1-20.
- Islam, S. Nazarul, and John Winkel. *Climate Change and Social Inequality*. United Nations Department of Economic & Social Affairs, DESA Working Paper No. 152, Oct. 2017, https://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2017/wp152_2017.pdf. 2017. Accessed 23 May 2021.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. Oxford UP, 1967.
- Kingsolver, Barbara. *Flight Behavior*. Harper Collins, 2012.
- Kleinman, Adam. "Intra-Actions." *Mousse*, vol. 34, 2012, pp. 76-81.
- Kythreotis, Paul. "Progress in Global Climate Change Politics? Reasserting National State Territoriality in a 'Post-Political' World." *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 36, no. 4, 2012, pp. 457-474.
- Lanchester, John. *The Wall*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2019.
- Levy, Barry S., and Jonathan A. Patz. "Climate Change, Human Rights, and Social Justice." *Annals of Global Health*, vol. 81, no. 3, 2015, pp. 310-322.
- McGinn, Bernard, editor. *Apocalypticism in Western History and Culture*. Continuum, 1998.
- McKibben, Bill. *The End of Nature*. Anchor, 1989.
- Merchant, Carolyn. *Earthcare: Women and the Environment*. Routledge, 1996.
- Mitchell, Audra, and Aadita Chaudhury. "Worlding Beyond 'the' 'End' of 'the World': White Apocalyptic Visions and Bipoc Futurisms." *International Relations*, no. 34, 2020, pp. 309-332.
- Moezzi, Mithra, et al. "Using Stories, Narratives, and Storytelling in Energy and Climate Change Research." *Energy Research & Social Science*, vol. 31, 2017, pp. 1-10.
- Morgan, Kass. *The 100*. Kindle ed., Hodder & Stoughton, 2013.
- Rifkin, Mark. *Beyond Settler Time*. Duke UP, 2017.
- Robinson, Kim Stanley. *New York 2140*. Hachette, 2017.
- Safran Foer, Jonathan. *We Are the Weather*. Penguin Random House, 2019.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Duke UP, 2003.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky, and Adam Frank, editors. *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tompkins Reader*. Duke UP, 1995.
- Shellenberger, Michael, and Ted Nordhaus. "The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World." *The Breakthrough*, 2004, <https://thebreakthrough.org/articles/the-death-of-environmentalism>. Accessed 23 May 2021.
- Stanfill, Mel. *Exploiting Fandom: How the Media Industry Seeks to Manipulate Fans*. U of Iowa P, 2019.
- Swyngedouw, Erik. "Apocalypse Forever? Post-Political Populism and the Spectre of Climate Change." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 27, no. 2-3, 2010, pp. 213-232.
- . "Depoliticized Environments: The End of Nature, Climate Change and the Post-Political Condition." *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*, vol. 79, 2011, pp.253-274.

- Thomas, Kimberley, et al. "Explaining Differential Vulnerability to Climate Change: A Social Science Review." *WIREs Climate Change*, vol. 10, 2018, pp. 1-18.
- Trexler, Adam. *Anthropocene Fictions: The Novel in a Time of Climate Change*. U of Virginia P, 2015.
- Tronto, Joan C. *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. Routledge, 1993.
- Wagner, Rachel. "The Cowboy Apocalypse: 13 Ways of Looking at a Gun." *Robert Ryan Lecture*, 2019, http://events.ithaca.edu/event/robert_ryan_lecture_the_cowboy_apocalypse_13_ways_of_looking_at_a_gun#.XuDF0BMzaRs10.06.2019. Accessed 23 May 2021.
- Wallace-Wells, David. *The Uninhabitable Earth*. Tim Duggan Books, 2019.
- Weik von Mossner, Alexa. *Affective Ecologies: Empathy, Emotion, and Environmental Narrative*. Ohio State UP, 2017.
- White-Newsome, Jalonne, et al. "Climate Change, Heat Waves, and Environmental Justice: Advancing Knowledge and Action." *Environmental Justice*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2009, pp. 197-205.