Ajockalypse Now

By The Unreliable Narrator

Gruinard “anthrax” Island, 2022 [image: The Independent]

Whether it appears in the form of anthrax island, a vibrating nuclear presence on the west coast, or, indeed, a deadly virus, each decade appears to unleash new potential for human devastation in Scotland and beyond. Waters rise, social unrest threatens, an invisible, digital, all-seeing eye tracks our every move – and so we go, edging towards dystopia.

Yet even when such threats feel palpable, we depart in our droves to fictional worlds of ravaged wastelands for comfort, no better highlighted than by the news in 2020 of book sales booming for tales about plagues, pandemics and panic. With a glint in their eye, post-apocalyptic and dystopian worlds offer us a shoulder on which to lean our weary heads in troubled times – but why do we turn to them?

Over the centuries, our understanding of ‘apocalypse’ has shifted. Now synonymous with a cataclysmic event hurtling civilisation at breakneck speed towards The End, the term originates from the Ancient Greek ἀποκάλυψις: apo- (*un-*) kaluptein (*cover*). Not a devastation, then, but a revelation. Perhaps it is this that leads writers and readers, generation upon generation, to fictions that imagine the earth on its knees and humanity in the bad place. Evidently these worlds serve as a warning, but in holding up a mirror to our deepest fears they also reveal what we’re capable of surviving. Whether we’re stranded before virus-ravaged lands or climate catastrophe, post-apocalyptic and dystopian tales often

teach us that when society is pushed to its limits, the best of humanity – a petri dish of good – can be salvaged from the embers.

Such works also remind us that humankind doesn't exist in statis. The corpse-clogged harbour of a post-apocalyptic Aberdeen in Edwin Morgan's impressively bleak 'Computer Error: Neutron Strike' is just one future reality envisioned in his *Sonnets from Scotland* sequence; a few pages later, the nation evolves into a golden age. Time is circular, peaks follow troughs, nothing lasts – this is what the post-apocalypse assures us: the end of the world means the beginning of a new one. Tribulation *and* triumph, chaos *and* order. Of course, that promise may be less comforting in halcyon days, but as we emerge fresh from the cold snap of another winter of discontent, perhaps this new issue of *The Bottle Imp* will offer some much-needed relief.

Opening this new issue is Petra Johana Poncarová, who explores the post-apocalyptic nature of post-Clearances poetry in Addressing Devastation in the Gaelic Literature of the Clearances. Novelist Rachelle Atalla beckons us down underground to dwell on what draws her to dystopia in Bunker Life, while Tim Baker battles with Scotpocalyptic narratives in a war-torn world in Strange Allegiance: Ian Macpherson's *Wild Harbour*. Finally, Marit Elise Lyngstad ends on a note of (almost) hope by contemplating YA fiction as a catalyst for change in Sustainability and humanity: what young readers can learn from Julie Bertagna's *Exodus*.

Upon Another Point, 2022 marked the centenary of one of Scotland's literary titans appearing in print for the first time – Alan Riach offers a personal tribute to his poetic and political legacy in One Hundred Years of Hugh MacDiarmid, while Paul Malgrati props up MacDiarmid's 'Drunk Man' to examine and challenge Scotland's so-called paradox in 'Antisyzygy': An Escape Route. Finally, whether you're in the market for more dystopian darkness or simply our top poetry picks, we have a fresh batch of book reviews, too.

Welcome to MacArmageddon!

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