

A Hool's Hope

“I yomp across the red, choke-filled earth under the red, choke-filled sky and squint at the cads lying puff-less in the dirt. They used to be hools, those cads. They used to be full of puff. They used to yomp like me.” – A Hool’s Hope.

A Hool’s Hope is not merely an experiment in expression, it is a dual commentary on the future of humankind and its language. As my young protagonist ‘yomps’ through the barren landscape of his post-apocalyptic world, across the ‘choke-filled earth, under the red, choke-filled sky’ I invite readers to join a confrontation with one plausible human fate. Set in a post-apocalyptic world ravaged by environmental disaster, my narrative follows one survivor’s journey through a landscape razed by wild fires and dying under the sun’s blazing heat. To convey the decline of civilisation, the story is delineated by a language which has also devolved; a language which simultaneously defines and attempts to describe the landscape I anticipate.

The potential for humankind to annihilate itself entered the global consciousness during the Cold War as the world’s superpowers stood on the brink of nuclear warfare. As an extension of this HSC English (Extension 1) concern, the fear of self-destruction is reoriented in my text to reflect the paradigmatic concerns of the 21st century. In 2017, the National Academy of Sciences proclaimed that “All signs point to ever more powerful assaults on biodiversity in the next two decades, painting

a dismal picture of the future of life, including human life.”¹ These modern concerns about the future of human life, also voiced in Oxford University’s publication *Global Catastrophic Risks*², have been extrapolated to their extreme conclusion in my text as I depict a world which has been rendered inhospitable as a result of the 21st century failure to proactively protect the environment. My text thus targets a modern audience whose preoccupation with consumerism has led to environmental neglect.³

My hypothesis depicts the end of the world and the end of intellectual civilisation with it. As such I have created a language distinct to a post-apocalyptic setting to symbolise the decline of the civilised world. In the future I anticipate, language has devolved to reflect the context; my protagonist has neither the capacity nor the inclination to actively retain the English of the previous era as he inhabits an uncivilised world in which sophisticated language has been rendered redundant. Kristjan Mavri in his work *Memory and Language in Post-Apocalyptic Fiction* hypothesises that a ‘new language must emerge’ in the aftermath of an apocalypse to ‘mirror the desperate situation humankind has found itself in’.⁴ My text has hypothesised one such ‘new language’, a condensed, largely onomatopoeic vocabulary congruent with humanity’s diminished state. In this language, the word ‘walk’ has developed connotations of despondency as it becomes ‘yomp’, the sound of which encapsulates my vision of the protagonist: a pragmatically nihilistic young

¹ Ceballos, G., Ehrlich, P. and Dirzo, R. (2017). *Biological annihilation via the ongoing sixth mass extinction signaled by vertebrate population losses and declines*. [online] PNAS. Available at: <http://www.pnas.org/content/114/30/E6089> [Accessed 21 Jun. 2018].

² Bostrom, N. and Ćirković, M. (2008). *Global Catastrophic Risks*. Oxford University Press.

³ P. Rose and J. Noonan, *Environmental Philosophy and its Onto-Ethical Problems: Ancient, Medieval and Contemporary Worldviews*, University of Windsor, Canada, NA. p. 10

⁴ Mavri, K. (2018). *Cormac McCarthy's The Road Revisited: Memory and Language in Post-Apocalyptic Fiction*. Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana.

man whose obdurate trudging through the inhospitable landscape is a grim and relentless action for which the word 'walk' is an inadequate descriptor. If language is, as German philosopher Max Muller insisted, subjected to a 'gradual process of decay'⁵, it is logical that my vocabulary is constructed as a deteriorating derivative of the past. My protagonist doesn't consider himself a 'person' but a 'hool', a derivative of the word 'hooligan' which encapsulates the anarchy characteristic of apocalyptic survivors. My Major Work's title 'A Hool's Hope' reiterates the foolishness of the 'hool', not only by association with hooliganism, but also as it establishes the futility of hope through its similarity to the idiom 'a fool's hope'. My text delineates a dystopian future devoid of modern societal constructs, and the language I employ is a reflection of this decline.

In my text, language is no longer a symbol of civilisation but a symbol of survival in both its sound and imagery. Ash becomes 'choke', the action of choking becomes 'clug' or 'clugging', and when my protagonist is scared he is not fearful but 'shaky'. He no longer has the emotional capacity or the vocabulary to articulate his emotional state, and thus can produce only a crude rendering of his surroundings. He orients the reader in the aftermath of a fire, stating: "After a blaze, a cloud of little black dots twirl in the air. I call it choke 'cos that's what it does. It piles up on the ground 'till there's no ground left, then it twirls, twirls, twirls through the sky 'till the only thing left is choke." This imagery is critical to the creation of the landscape yet only two new words are introduced, both familiar to the reader. The words 'blaze' and 'choke' encapsulate with connotations of heat, smoke and suffocation the definitions of the

⁵ Aitchison, J. (2013). *Language change*. 4th ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

more conventional 'ash' and 'fire', and are more appropriate to my post-apocalyptic context. The language I employ is a product of the apocalypse but it is also the most authentic way to represent the landscape as every word embodies an image of deterioration.

Deterioration is a characteristic feature of the future I envision; as my character's language deteriorates, so too does his memory. My protagonist is a product of his post-apocalyptic present, and as the plausibility of human annihilation accrues, his concern about his mortality supersedes his desire to retain the past as it is no longer relevant to him. He can, however, elucidate three memories, each associated with the genesis of the apocalypse, a time when 'All was red. Roaring. Roiling.' The flashbacks are structural devices intended to broaden the reader's understanding of the world I depict, and justify the protagonist's mounting anxiety about his future and the future of humanity as a whole. In this way I offer a warning to a 21st century audience who has failed to consider the detrimental impact of its interactions with the environment⁶.

My protagonist is otherwise entrenched in the present, consumed by the need to fill the void of time. When companionship fails, he focuses on the 'Da-tat, da-tat, da-tat' of his boots as a source of diversion. He maintains a fascination with his footsteps because they are something tangible which irrevocably establishes the veracity of his existence. He is not walking in search of food and water; that goal is secondary. He walks for the sake of walking, as he finds the facade of purpose it bestows

⁶ Brooks, N. (2018). *Climate change, Syria and the conflicts to come*. [online] NICK BROOKS. Available at: <https://nickbrooks.wordpress.com> [Accessed 28 Jun. 2018].

adequate incentive to continue living. In Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*⁷, the centrepiece of HSC Extension 1 insights into postmodern existential anxieties, the two protagonists are suspended in a state of perpetual 'waiting'. As Beckett's tramps wait, my protagonist walks. Without the illusory purpose waiting or walking provides, these postmodern characters would succumb to nihilism. My protagonist keeps moving so he can cheerfully accept the imminence of his death as he distracts himself with sounds such as the 'Da-tat, da-tat, da-tat' of his boots, the 'c-r-a-c-k' of burning trees crumbling to the ground, or the 'Ai!' of a hool burnt by the blaze. The arrival of the red hools, a climatic moment in my major work, is heralded by an echolalia of 'Eee-aaa-oooh. Eee-aaa-oooh' which has an animalistic element reminiscent of the howl of a predator as it hunts its prey. It is, therefore, appropriate to my text which anticipates a world in the aftermath of civilisation's decline, when the sole function of language is to fulfil the base demands of communication. My text addresses the human desire for purpose through my protagonist's fascination with onomatopoeic language.

Despite its dystopian nature, my text retains hope. Literary critic M Charbon in his analysis *After the Apocalypse* claimed 'everyone knows how the world ends'⁸. He explained that a 'cataclysm kills most of humankind' and 'the remnants mutate, lapse into feudalism, or revert to prehistoric brutality...'⁹ My text, though it has adopted these tropes, is unique not only in its composition but also in the hope it proffers. Composers continue to reinterpret the fate of humankind, and while I describe a

⁷ Beckett, S. (2010). *Waiting for Godot*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd.

⁸ Chabon, M. (2018). *After the Apocalypse*. [online] The New York Review of Books. Available at: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2007/02/15/after-the-apocalypse/> [Accessed 25 Mar. 2018].

⁹ Chabon, M. (2018). *After the Apocalypse*. [online] The New York Review of Books. Available at: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2007/02/15/after-the-apocalypse/> [Accessed 25 Mar. 2018].

harrowing, dystopian future, my hope, the hope of the title, is that by responding to the concerns raised in literature humanity can avoid a fate similar to the one I depict. It is therefore fitting that my text concludes with a dream. My narrator explains: 'The teeny hools twirl in the rain.' My protagonist dreams of the joy of young children and the promise of rain in the aftermath of a drought; he dreams of hope for humankind.