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A POST STRUCTURALIST APPROACH TO *THE BOOK OF DAVE* BY WILL SELF

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Abstract

The ideological representations housed in one of the post-apocalyptic narratives are considered. A poststructuralist lens is used by drawing key points from Foucault (1972) and Grossberg (1992) to explicate how post-apocalyptic narrative articulates and legitimates discursive formations of thought. This article identifies social critique and the circulation of emotion, drawing from these theorists in drawing stable points of entry in theorizing post-apocalyptic traces in their culturally situated context. Social critique can often help explain which of the various sociopolitical conditions this story is emerging out of. Emotion, when conceived of as culturally political, brings discussion of the reader into the analysis and explores more ideological themes. The 2006 novel The Book of Dave represents a different attitude towards both emotion and social critique. Also, the text is unique in its use of post-apocalyptic remains, which is useful for rounding out the discussion of their roles in post-apocalyptic narratives. Overall, an argument is suggested that post-apocalyptic traces, as a crucial constituent of post-apocalyptic narrative, articulate the social critique and emotion in ways that allude to the purely textual nature of the apocalypse in order to situate stories about after The End within discursively bound context.

Keywords: Post-Structuralism; Post-Apocalyptic; Narratives; Knowledge; Social Critique.

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1. Introduction

Will Self's2006 novel *The Book of Dave* is one of the post-apocalyptic narratives that lead to consideration on the constituted and articulated discursive statements based on the cruciality of the post-apocalyptic remains. Three classifications of these remains including rituals, cultural knowledge, and material items will be considered. The article provides an in-depth examination of the event that takes place after the perceived end of the world, and the cultural artifacts that are theorized in the novel, and passed through the apocalyptic event from the contemporary times as well as the legitimate cultural discourse contained in the ideological transmogrification based on where the text emerges.

Apocalyptic remains are a fantastical construction of utopian idealism focusing around the rebirth, renewal, and restructuring of humans' relations with the world and one another; or as dystopian wastelands in which humans must suffer to subsist and are often denigrated to a smattering of scattered, fragmented gangs and lone survivors that constitute the decaying vestiges of the failed project of modernity. But visions of post-apocalypse are far more complicated than this reductive utopian-dystopian dichotomy, around which a great deal of scholarly activity has congregated, because of the necessary involvement of the audience in the process of meaning-making within a text (Bartter 150). A typical post-apocalyptic narrative inevitably contains elements of utopian longing alongside the corruption of anarchy or an oppressive state. The two elements coexist and interact to create an amalgam of propounded social critique that can never fully shed itself of either element. As well, utopian and dystopian texts can fall outside the realm of post-apocalyptic narrative.

2. Background Information

The deployment of spectacular and horrific imagery has become part of the political sight of our humanity. We then obtain an allegory of these corporeal images in many films from which we learn resistance and political control as part of the human body and the body-politics (Cleave). In post-apocalyptic science, such as imagination of disaster in addition to referring to the past hard times opens our understanding to the continuum of history in our society. Most apocalyptic representations are shocking events and the continued production of such films in our society is a hard memory reminder of the events that may have occurred in the past. And thus, while such events increasingly bear the past events, they also somehow conceive what is prevalent in our society today (Gannon 108). Therefore, the present and the past in such as allegorical film moment is compressed in the immediate from which the instant history is produced by modern representation technologies.

Apocalyptic imagery has been proliferated in the imagination of the human race for millennia, articulating it most notably within the confines of religious texts. Nonetheless, the recent past has seen an enormous number of cultural artifacts from popular culture in traditional narrative forms that propound imagery of the end times (Barra C04). Perhaps more accurately put, they articulate visions of the world after a final cataclysm, distinguished as post-apocalypse (Ahmed 30). The essence of keeping the lights on is seeking to distinguish between post-apocalyptic narratives and dystopian-themed stories or simply survival-themed stories.

Numerous frames come together here to place the post-apocalyptic remain within a larger theoretical picture. Primarily, Michel Foucault 's (1972) framework for discursive formations and Larry Grossberg 's (1992) theory of articulation explicate how modes of discourse create and connect cultural artifacts to themselves and their audience. These two perspectives on post-structuralism help in establishing the text on post-apocalyptic fiction as well as place the ever-present elements of social critique and emotion within a system of knowledge that acknowledges its constructed nature.

The apocalyptic narratives have really grown in popularity and this steady rate has offered the potential for explanations (Heffernan 150). The actual apocalyptic event predominantly focuses on the representation of societal fears and thus the main goal of this project is to reflect on the

adaptation of the new landscape and how the characters influence human beings. The new society landscape and the apocalyptic landscape are two alienated worlds but in the same decentered world (Beckett 11). Collectively, this facilitates engagement initiatives in community building as well as the need to recognize and appreciate others in a world of strange landscape and alleviated anxieties. The way relationships are revealed subverts a greater sense of the community and the globe.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1972) proposes his theory of discursive formations; in a general sense, discursive formations are defined as the relations between statements. Statements, the silent, interwoven proclamations of legitimacy in a particular cultural context, are constructed alongside the development of that culture. Each statement is a single node within a network of other statements, and that network is concerned, in other words, they develop and legitimize various levels of meaning among signifiers within a particular formation. In different formations, the same signifier can represent vastly different concepts. While it is often quite simple to sort through these interconnected cultural factors to find the most likely meaning, the complex interactions between statements, which are ever-evolving in the first place, becomes a matter of concern for Foucault (Heffernan 179). Therefore, he initially insists that the statements be grouped according to some system. He outlines four distinct hypotheses to explain the specific groupings of statements, and subsequently rejects each of them. But Foucault concludes, after an examination of the concept madness, the objects do not exist independently of discourse.

On the other hand, in defining a theoretical basis for cultural studies, Grossberg (1992) echoes many of the principles Foucault outlines. He becomes suspicious of any principle of interiority or essentialism which locates any practice in a structure of necessity and guarantees its effects even before it has been enacted. He opts for a socially determined and polysemic network of statements and objects. Clearly, Grossberg is operating within a poststructuralist paradigm of meaning, and his theory of articulation is an expansion upon the theories of Foucault whose work in this area is, in Grossberg's estimation, inadequate in describing either the complex multidimensionality of structure, or of the active process by which such structures are constantly constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in history. For this reason, Grossberg (1992) proposes the idea of articulation. In other words, the process is concerned less with the discursive formation as a whole or particular statement themselves and more with the links that connect each statement with another statement, object, or formation.

Grossberg (1992) seeks to define the mode of articulation, and, rather than putting too much emphasis on context. His approach is based on the belief that, rather than treating the discursive object post-apocalypse separately from the conditions that allow its existence, the bridge between the two should be mapped and explained. Thus, while examining post-apocalypse, we must give consideration to the hegemonic principles that govern our discursive practices.

Essentially, Grossberg's theory plays an essential part in this analysis because it avoids the slippery nature of poststructuralist critique. But unlike Foucault, Grossberg seems to be demanding that we ask why the elusive nature of meaning and knowledge is relevant. In our engagement with cultural artifacts, what benefit might we gain from a profound understanding of our contextual binds? The power play that motivates articulations to develop and atrophy in particular ways, and that motivates the subject to become a part of these articulations, begs some interesting questions regarding the usefulness of post-apocalyptic narrative and the remains within those stories (Beckett

13). In accordance to these revelations, much literature is available on apocalypse and post-apocalypse. The phenomenon has attracted increased scholarly attention in myriad ways, and each approach seems to narrow its focus on one aspect or another of post-apocalyptic narrative. Many texts have critiques of religion, but these are not the same as a religious apocalypse.

3. The Book of Dave

The analysis posits both the familiar and romantic love in a cynical light and thus reproduces problematic ideological values. The main argument is that satirical deconstruction of fathers in patriarchy obliterates any remaining hope for a better life that is based on any of the faiths of our fathers, and in this manner attacks what he holds are the sources or mainstays of oppressive situations. In satirical post-apocalypse, the motive of deconstruction may be crucial to understanding how we perceive life after the end. The combination of self-reflexivity and deliberate destruction may make for a text that is more self-aware, but it also makes for a text that is only interested in destroying. This, ultimately, is the downfall of the satirical post-apocalypse: the world is supposed to be a blank slate and, like the academic who is uninterested in proposing something different and constructing nothing in the wake of the hated world, the satirist's support of progress is obviously limited by their own futuristic vision (Self & Steadman 98). Ultimately, the recognition of the cultural politics of audience is the response to satire. Satire does have its benefits irrespective of the partial complicit due to participation in satirical destruction.

Generally, *The Book of Dave* leads one to easily make connections with the ideologies of other post-apocalyptic texts by examining similar systems of both religion and governance. Often, the melding of church and state is an almost always oppressive entity that seeks to control the lives of a redeveloped society. The fictional world is something of a caste system, a form of governance that ensures the stability of social standing for better or worse, that is ruled by the church (Barra C04). The study therefore opts for an integrated approach that demonstrates the coexistence of these two components.

Collectively, in *The Book of Dave* the basic assumption is the deliberate development of ideological constructions in these pieces. Commentary on family, religion, and language is an implication of personal but unarticulated beliefs. We can infer that theocracy is a poor excuse for governance and this is precisely what critics mean when they argue that satire only destroys, and rarely creates. As a result, authorial intent appears to matter less. The reader may get the sense that based upon what is being brought down; the authors are left-leaning on the facts. Therefore, the section is demarcated the main themes deconstructed: theocracy, familial dynamics, and linguistics. Each of these is presented in *The Book of Dave* in a way as to lay bare the ideological assumptions of the reader in a progressively thorough fashion. In the first, religious interpretation melds with the epistemology of governance to create an absurd society predicated on faulty religious interpretation that audiences are likely to want to distance themselves from (Ahmed 26). In the second, audiences are asked to question the ethics of familial dynamics in our divorce-ridden, Western, contemporary moment. In the third, audiences must deconstruct language itself, and the basic understanding of the world in deriving how power structures mediate and influence our norms.

Cultural, ritual and material knowledge each plays an important role in understand the world and helping the inhabitants of post-apocalypse as well as influence the textual interaction with the audience (Bogel 21). The novel truly is an ontological detective story, but for the reader rather than the characters, who are hopelessly steeped in their own ideology. The type of cognitive play dabbled with in other texts becomes an outright game in *The Book of Dave*, to the extent it causes complete exhaustion after the first chapter. The reason of course, is that so much of our own world has been carried into the post-apocalyptic one in a distorted fashion, prompting the reader to connect the present to the future in unique ways. The analysis section depicts that the post-apocalyptic remains, mostly ritual and cultural knowledge, help develop this experience via the most important remain, The Book itself, which is clearly material (Self & Steadman 99). Overall, the argument is that the author's requirement that audiences reflect on their own ideological values enhances the audience-text articulation so principally engrained in the genre, but that the inherency of destructiveness in this satirical post-apocalyptic narrative unnecessarily distances the audience from the satirical object, a process that is referenced as being profoundly hateful. Perhaps the satirical form exists as the most significant way to conceptualize the post-apocalyptic remains by envisioning careful destruction in one of its physical incarnations.

Based on this line of thoughts, *The Book of Dave* is a material remains that obviously stands in for other religious texts. Placing it as he does, Self intends to demolish one of the load-bearing structural supports for religion at large: the official interpretation of religious texts, whose divinity can then be easily challenged as well. Perhaps this leads the structure of existential spirituality to falter as well but, regardless of the extent of consequence, the first destructive blow has been dealt by the material post-apocalyptic remains. The main character, Dave Rudman, is a cabbie operating within the heart of contemporary London. His father influences him to take up the trade, and was likewise a part of the troubling cabbie culture in which Dave is integrated. The audience in the first chapters is introduced into Dave's life, complete with the vernacular of the cab drivers' preferences, his own bigoted inner thoughts drawn from this culture's well of hatred, and his life with what was supposed to be a one-night-stand and the byproduct of said night. The picture we are given of Dave is not pleasant, and depicts the transformation of a somewhat depressed and unsure young London cabbie into an older, worn thin, psychotic raving lunatic. The cab driving in the story serves as a useful tool to demonstrate the notoriously rough culture, allowing this sort of madness to ferment, undetected under the guise of regular hatred as well as the myriad encounters of people and driving through different parts of the city with different ethnic cultures. A spate of hateful thoughts constantly issues him as he drives through the neighborhoods. This variety of interaction allows a constant stream of craze to slide in and out of his thoughts, enabling the audience to track the extent of his descent from one moment to the next.

The highlight is the bigoted rant while advising his son about such things as gender roles and family. Dave evidently stores away the idea to engrave his book onto metal plates, and goes on to actually have the book engraved, at a great cost, and proceeds to bury it in the front lawn of his ex-wife's lover's house. An important part of this psychotic period is the increasingly shaky relationship he has with his son. Dave's mental problems spurred a restraining order that demarcates a forbidden zone, a term usefully employed in the post-apocalyptic sections of the novel. Carl eventually reaches adolescence, as this continues, and seems to begin the process of pushing Dave out of his life. Later in the contemporary arc, Dave meets a woman who begins turning his life around (Self & Steadman 20). Doctors realize that the medication he's been taking

is causing his insanity and quickly diagnose. He and the woman move out of the claustrophobia of the city, Dave quits cabbing, and he slowly regains his wits and his sanity. He however does not remember writing the book, or at least believes it was a delusion. In a moment, though, it suddenly occurs to him that the book actually exists, and he frantically rushes to retrieve it. The family has unfortunately built a porch over the spot in which he had buried the book, and thus he is only able to recover it after the apocalypse.

The Book of Dave eventually comes at a later point in his life and takes a prophetic doctrine that defines their formal rules and influences the informality of everyday life. They begin structuring a society based on its teachings, and audiences notice that the most psychotic fragments of Dave Rudman's book have been the most profoundly influential to the development of ideology on a new society. In line with the interpretations of *The Book of Dave*, a number of misogynistic and generally oppressive laws inform a curious conception of everyday rituals. There is an area of land on the island called the Ferbiddun Zön, which is unsurprisingly forbidden to enter, in which the discovery of *The Book of Dave* occurred. This area is what had been left of the broken down remains of London. The narrative arc in these sections of the book is somewhat inconsequential as compared to the larger message of the book, but nevertheless helps the audience experience the extent of The Book's influence. The engagements of Carl in a quest take him all the way from the Ferbiddun Zön, in search of his father, to the city of Nú Lundun.

Interestingly, *The Book of Dave* bears stranglehold on the semantics of religious doctrine and thus the ability of the religion to enforce mind control. The approach thus seeks to understand the interpretations of the punishment for defiance which by the time the reader enters this post-apocalyptic world, this coercion has mostly transformed into normalization. Mostly due to geography, the delay in official theocratic control of the island defines the extent to which the public officers rely on the suppression of small-community ideology to expand its control over the minds of the people. The commentaries on ideological development and religious interpretation in this complex relationship between events demonstrate the trouble with carrying post-apocalyptic remains meaning from the present to the future (Ahmed 30). The consequent interpretation stems from readings of the texts in the early stages of their own religious devotion to The Book. They operate with this interpretation for hundreds of years though the power of the formal entity of governance allows them to monopolize the semantic interpretation of The Book, imposing meaning where meaning was previously lacking. Thus, as the influence of the structure of governance systematically infiltrates the lives of the Hamsters, their consciousness must change to conform to the more norms. The society thus increasingly relies on the authority of the theocratic regime to find meaning where one is lacking while also distancing from the basic guidance text on their existence.

The book presents us with somewhat oppression in forcing ideological conformity in spreading and perpetuating religious doctrine since it is often done contrary to the will of those individuals. Whereas ideologies are purposefully shifted to metamorphose into something more usefully exploited by the religious state, coercion of one's body often comes despite resistance. The story's cultural knowledge of the audience interestingly enough sides with the public officers for once, considering that the bioengineered creatures are unreal (Self & Steadman 85). In addition, the anointing of infants has caused enormously high infant death rates. Nevertheless, audiences may very well recognize that some of the rituals we engage in today are killing us by the tens of

millions, but resistance to governmental intervention in these arenas might indicate that coercion, even under the guise of founded paternalism, is heartbreakingly oppressive. The ultimate scene of the novel depicts the helplessness as representatives of the public officers strip the act of its ritualistic significance, the economic and communal livelihood (Ahmed 36). There are other examples of body control, whether through knowledge or ritual, within the text, but the most profoundly familiar to audiences is likely the nature of the penal system. Ritual forms of the post-apocalyptic remains are taken here and involve embracing the satirical way in which punishment in the society is implemented.

The approach thus reinforces tradition of a coercive to making bodies in a prison useful and docile though it is necessarily not identical to the current Western structure of prisons. In this case, Symon is docile as a speechless, exiled freak and useful as an example of potential consequences for opposing formal governance and religious interpretation. The purpose and ritual of the prison serves an identical purpose in Self's post-apocalypse as it does in the minds of the audience. While in some ways less structured, councils are framed as mostly effective and overwhelmingly representative of communal standards. Self-governance, the localized negotiation of punishment for the violation of community norms, is starkly contrasted to the brutality of the public officers as a means to name governmental coercion for what it is or, for us, as a means for satirically devaluing post-apocalyptic remains as cultural knowledge and ritual.

In *The Book of Dave*, there are structures representation of the aftermath of The Event and this tactic is employed to direct hate towards institutions of organized religion as theocratic governing entities. While the most profoundly influential post-apocalyptic remain in *The Book of Dave* is The Book itself, the society sprouted from its pages nevertheless takes a somewhat familiar form, with similar rituals and knowledge. Organized religion is also conceived of as the intangible form of the public officers, an entity without identity. Similar to organizing hatred, the approach makes it easier for the audiences to conceptualize their hatred for this oppressive force that we cannot exactly pin to the bulletin board. As the process of sinking into the author's world gradually continues, and as audience members may begin to ground themselves in his overt critique on religion, the deconstruction process continues as the critique on familial structure solidifies.

The views of the author are different from the critique of theocracy on gender roles and the nature of familial structure. Generally, hatred, the abject and the disgusting all require that we distance ourselves from their presence. In essence, the author ensures that we understand the extent to which even one of our perceived basest emotions, hate, is organized around its own politics. Therefore, the examination of familial structure is allowed further into our consciousness because it is not organized around the principles of hatred; it does not distance us as much from what we are examining. Part of the reason for this is that, unlike the intangibility of the public officers, familial structures are intimately associated with living, breathing human beings. They can be able to facilitate constructive interactions and is easy to understand motives within the circle.

Like the last section detailed, Ham is a unique case study in this world because the more communal tendencies of the Hamsters' traditional practice remain harbored behind the facade that appeases the driver's orthodoxy (Self & Steadman 86). Therefore, action and ideology have not been melded quite as significantly and the communities the reader comes on this journey, which appears more thoroughly and unconsciously integrated into the officer's theocratic laws as we near the city.

Alongside the secondary interpretations of the definition, the breakup demands that mummies and dads have no emotional or physical interaction at all, an obvious leftover ritual from the estrangement Dave endured throughout both his marriage to and divorce from Michelle. According to the Breakup, the children are expected to bridge this emotional gap by spending Wednesday through Sunday with mummies and the other half of the week with the dads, but there is little indication that they ever could manage to negotiate the detriments of patriarchal separatism. Carl is thus imposed to often venture inside his mummy-self in order to reflect, because it is the only discursive space in which he can question what is supposed to be self-evidently righteous (Self & Steadman 88). This follows the comprehension that his apprehensions cannot be voiced beyond his intrapersonal reflections with regard to the ideologies he believes and the actions he performs. Among the most unique aspect of *The Book of Dave* is its use of language. The author has managed to create his own phonetic version of contemporary broad cockney. Alongside the aforementioned renaming of the world, the dialogue in the post-apocalyptic narrative arc is often written phonetically. The exercise of language creation, following the principles of satire, attempts to tear down the audience belief in the inherency of meaning within language, and tries to uncover the articulation between words and ideologies (Jenkins 56). Because language is one of the primary forms of the symbolic mediation of meaning, the author digs even a level deeper in his goals of unseating the reader's ideological worldview by explicating the arbitrariness of perhaps the most pervasive form of cultural knowledge. The ontological detective story that necessarily ensues as a result of such linguistic exercises creates a sense of amusement.

Eventually, as one progress with further reading the text, the reader feels the author's world slowly begins to sink in and, before long; the reader is tempted to call the moon in our own world the, headlight. This gradual process both reveals the arbitrariness of words and asks the reader to engage in the ontological detective story, for it becomes obvious early on that the world has not been renamed in a random fashion. Audiences have cultural knowledge that they can recognize as being distorted by the process of interpreting the book, and the reinterpretation of that decipherment becomes a form of cognitive play. Perhaps more importantly to the ideological focus of this research, however, is the way in which semantics informs the articulations between words and other words, and words and power relations. While it might be fun to think of things universally encountered by everyone as having new names that all connect in ironic and comical ways, the association between the ideological constructions and cultural knowledge pulled from the present may slip past audiences.

One of the things that is clearly seen from this linguistic gymnastics' routine is the attempt to challenge audiences' grounding in what they might see as the inherency of meaning in language while simultaneously asking them to connect the dots. Because the novel is so self-aware, readers may get the sense that the novel is written for them rather than for the narrative (Bartter 166). This third satirical theme, language, underwrites Self's satiation of the satirical form by his, once again, very careful and contrived placement of linguistic post-apocalyptic remains, which can easily fall into the cultural knowledge category. It is this line that makes the reader question the aspects of the book such as how things came to be named after understanding this connection.

The Book of Dave seeks to construct nothing with regard to language, family and religious governance (Self & Steadman 90). The author managed to pick up post-apocalyptic remains and carefully and deliberately deposit them into the post-apocalyptic world. Consequently, this leads

to the overt acknowledgement that the narrative is not only indebted to the present, but also relies almost completely on its principles to discover and define its ontology, while it averts the criticism of an ideological critique. The novel has thus been able to come out at the top through this combination of revealed religion and the ecological disaster.

4. Conclusion

As depicted in the analysis, the main study falls into three general categories: material items, cultural knowledge, and rituals. What these three disparate uses of post-apocalyptic remains explicate is that remains are inherently value-neutral. They may be somewhat loosely categorized into material, ritual, and knowledge-based incarnations, but the discursive implications of each categorized post-apocalyptic remain depends entirely on the ideologies undergirding its reemergence. The children on the island of Ham in *The Book of Dave* could pick it up on the shore and skip the lighter over the surface of the water back into the ocean. The lighter has been used as a complicated symbol in our own culture, signifying one thing at a rock concert, another in an elementary school, and yet another on a backpacking trip; it is no surprise that these complications can move with the item into post-apocalypse based upon the context.

The fluidity with which the remains can slip in and out of post-apocalypse as the consumption of texts commences allows for representation to construct itself in various ways, most often reflecting the dominant themes of their moment of creation. As the analysis has shown, many artifacts of contemporary popular culture do very little to challenge dominant discursive formations. But if post-apocalyptic remains are value-neutral, then we must be able to construct these worlds inside our feminist, and thus somewhat less troubling, discursive formations. The satirical post-apocalypse might be thought of as a step in the right direction, but its limitations preclude me from truly considering it progressive. For one, as reiterated throughout, satire only destroys. As well, in a genre so reliant on audience foreknowledge, Self 's world is perhaps too craftily constructed; we might question whether audience members are likely to decipher the complexities of his critique.

Acknowledgment

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