

Change the Narrative: Empathy in Post-Apocalyptic Fiction

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ABSTRACT

*In post-apocalyptic fiction, the concept of empathy often is depicted as a weakness that the characters cannot afford if they hope to survive. This depiction leads to harmful perceptions on the value of empathy and its ability to avert apocalyptic catastrophes. By examining David Clement-Davies young adult novel *The Sight* through theories of narrative empathy and through James Berger's theories of post-apocalyptic representation, this essay argues that by representing empathic understanding, fiction writers have the power to influence positive changes in real world situations. By representing the need to teach empathy for all people, regardless of their differences, and the harm a lack of empathy can cause on both a personal level and on a large societal scale, this novel encourages future generations to seek peaceful and empathic solutions instead of repeating the cataclysmic mistakes of their forebearers.*

Post-apocalyptic fiction has often been criticized as a source of fear mongering and of dangerous fantasization about the end of the world. Critics such as James Berger have argued that this imagining of the end times diverts too much attention towards the perceived horrors of an uncertain future rather than focusing on the real problems of the present. As Berger states in *After the End*, “The most dystopic visions of science fiction can do no more than replicate the actual historical catastrophes of the twentieth century” (xiii). Though this argument definitely highlights the importance of actually taking action once a real threat has been understood, it fails to recognize the important role that narratives—particularly fiction narratives—play in developing a person’s perception of the apocalypse and of the empathy required to prevent it. The ability to empathize with other people is critical for an individual’s motivation to take action in correcting societal problems. In this paper, I examine *The Sight*, a young adult novel by David Clement-Davies, and its themes of empathy and apocalyptic thinking. In essence, *The Sight* presents a powerful message on how stories construct the future. I will explore how post-apocalyptic fiction can help inspire empathy and bridge the gap between understanding and activism. In addition, I will emphasize the importance of moving the focus of post-apocalyptic fiction away from messages of inevitable catastrophe and towards opportunities for social change.

In most post-apocalyptic fiction, the story is based around the struggles for survival after a cataclysmic event, but the reality of apocalyptic events is that they have already occurred all around us. From the Holocaust to natural disasters, large-scale wars, and devastating plagues, our world has already seen one apocalyptic event after another, many of which have served as the inspiration for these after-the-end kind of stories (Berger, *After the End* xii-xiii). *The Sight* presents a sort of paradox among post-apocalyptic fiction as its own story touches on the repetitive history of apocalyptic events, dipping even into a near-metafictional narrative at times as it contemplates the driving social forces behind apocalyptic events and their recurrence throughout history. During the whole of the novel, the characters question whether the story's central prophecy is really a prediction of the future or if it is a memory of the past repeating itself, bringing out an apocalyptic event that has been seen before and has been passed down through the generations as story and legend.

Many people think of the apocalypse as a single destructive event that overshadows all the horrors of before—a true end of the world and all we know—but as James Berger states in *After the End*, “Very few apocalyptic representations end with the End. There is always some remainder, some post-apocalyptic debris, or the transformation into paradise” (34). In essence, for the post-apocalypse to exist, the world must continue to exist even after the cataclysmic event, and therefore it is in the real world history of horrors that we find the true “world ending” events of post-apocalyptic fiction.

The irony about these kinds of events is that no matter how horrifying or eye-opening they are at the time of their occurrence, the human race has the remarkable, and often detrimental, ability to erase the evidence of what happened. Cities that were bombed in warfare are rebuilt and made to look exactly as they had before the destructive event (Berger, *After the End* 20). Genocides are quickly forgotten within a few generations, either being covered up or justified as a necessity, often by some nationalistic or religious agenda. Manifest Destiny was a common excuse for the genocide of Native Americans, and as the last of the Holocaust survivors pass away, we are already beginning to forget the stories they've told, the agony of the horrors they faced, and the dangers of allowing a prejudiced tyrant to seize control.

In *Trauma and Memory*, Dennis A. Foster's review of Berger's *After the End*, Foster states, “What Berger wants to produce, and what he wants other historians to produce, is ultimately not the meaning or significance of the apocalyptic event—such terms displace the event and lead to its forgetting—but its continued presence as the most true thing in our

world” (740-741). Though critics and writers of post-apocalyptic fiction differ in opinions on what this genre actually accomplishes, these scholars essentially want the same thing: to see our world turn away from the harmful paths it has taken so far and to avoid the terrible futures many have grown to fear. Not heeding the warnings of authors and critics would, in itself, be a dangerous path towards the ever-present threat of an apocalyptic future, but the line between bringing the horrors of real apocalyptic events to light and indulging in the fantasy of wiping the slate clean is a fine one to tread; however, this is a line that I believe David Clement-Davies’ *The Sight* balances with thoughtful precision.

In this paper, I am arguing that *The Sight* deviates from traditional apocalyptic fiction by focusing on the social forces that build up to the inciting cataclysm rather than on the consequences and hardships of the post-cataclysm world. *The Sight* represents an optimistic perspective of how empathic understanding can be used to avert apocalypse rather than relying on the traditional scare tactics that many post-apocalyptic stories seem to employ in the hopes of avoiding catastrophe. Within this paper I will discuss how post-apocalyptic fiction can motivate readers to take action against dangerous potential futures, but I will take it a step further by arguing that this fiction has a responsibility to advocate for change and to provide guidance for the proposed action. In the first section of this paper, I will introduce the plot, the key characters, and the major themes within *The Sight*, and I will examine how it both fits within and deviates from typical apocalyptic literature. The second section will discuss representations of empathy in *The Sight* and the potential that narrative empathy possesses for inspiring social activism. Finally, I will conclude the essay with a suggestion for how authors of post-apocalyptic fiction can work to change the future by redirecting the focus of the narratives they tell.

THE STORY OF THE SIGHT

The story of *The Sight* follows Larka and her family, a pack of intelligent wolves caught up in the middle of a brutal period of civil war. On one side, Larka’s aunt Morgra, the main antagonist, is trying to fulfill a world-ending prophecy. The prophecy can only be fulfilled by an individual who wields the psychic powers of the Sight. Whoever fulfills the prophecy and claims the ultimate power of the Sight will gain the power to control others in mind and body and will also release the Vision for all living creatures to see, a knowledge that all need to possess. On the other side of the conflict, the Rebels band together in opposition of Morgra, proclaiming that all who believe in or speak about the superstitions of the Sight are enemies of the wolves and should be treated as allies to Morgra. For the

purposes of this paper, I will be focusing on the stories of Larka and Morgra and the ways their two stories intertwine. Each of them faces violence and persecution at the hands of others, and both are born into a world that fears, and doesn't understand, the powers of the Sight that they are born with. Their stories parallel each other in many ways, and at times it appears that their worldviews are very similar, but there is one key difference that changes the course of their stories: while Morgra is always forced to suffer alone, denied the basic need of all social creatures to be accepted, understood, and shown empathy, Larka is always surrounded by friends, family, and allies. Even as Larka is violently ripped away from her companions, she is never alone, immediately being enveloped into the comfort and support of new allies or else being reunited with old friends and family. The differences in their stories can be seen in the opportunities they are given to heal from the traumas they faced, and in turn this show of empathy (or lack of it) influences the ways they treat others.

The Sight itself is a psychic ability that certain individuals are born with, and the truths surrounding its existence are steeped in controversy, misinformation, and distress. While many fearful rumors circulate among the wolves about what the Sight is actually capable of, the confirmed powers of the Sight include the ability to see through the eyes of other animals; the capacity to view distant realities of the past, present, and future in reflective surfaces such as water; and the power to heal the minds and bodies of others. In some legends, those possessing the Sight are said to have the power to call spirits of the dead from an alternate world and the ability to travel to that other world themselves, as well as the capacity to curse and even control other living creatures. The Sight is viewed by some as mystical or even evil, while others view it as natural and believe that long ago all living creatures could harness its powers.

As James Berger states in *After the End*, "Trauma is the psychoanalytical form of apocalypse, its temporal inversion. Trauma produces symptoms in its wake, after the event, and we reconstruct trauma by interpreting its symptoms, reading back in time" (20). Larka and Morgra both are exposed to traumatic events that shape their future personalities. For Larka, the formative events of trauma, loss, and sorrow lead her to seek an understanding of others and drive her to show mercy and forgiveness even towards those who consider her an enemy. Morgra, on the other hand, grows bitter and resentful from her experiences, which in time turns her towards a destructive path as she seeks revenge in her pursuit to fulfill the prophecy of the Sight. This show of empathy and compassion is denied to Morgra from the time of her birth. Her abilities with the Sight are feared by her pack, eventually leading to the false accusations that cause her banishment and her first steps towards seeking the

fulfillment of an apocalyptic end.

Larka often questions what the purpose of the Sight really is and what the responsibilities of wielding its power are. She discovers the wonderful ways it can be used to communicate with others, from seeing through the eyes of a bird and experiencing their way of life, to seeing into the hearts of others to understand—and even try to heal—their pain. Ultimately the Sight itself is determined as neither evil nor good but simply as a source of knowledge, and therefore of power, to be used however the wielder chooses.

Morgra also is forced to undertake this journey to discover the meaning of the Sight, but her experiences lead her to a different conclusion. Because she is cast out from her pack and banished for a crime she doesn't commit, she harbors much bitterness. In the first scene from Morgra's point of view, Clement-Davies says,

Resentment was her birthright. Long before she had been driven out they had feared her for her strange ways, even as a cub. How she had yearned for affection, and as she grew, she had craved cubs of her own. She had ached to share so much with others, to be a pack wolf and share the secrets she was learning about the Sight. About Life. She had ached to be allowed to love something. (184)

Though Morgra craves connection with others, she often suffers great pain and injustice instead. Instead of being shown empathy in the critical moments, she is treated with fear, resentment, and hatred. The pain and isolation she feels as a child, knowing that her family views her as strange, even dangerous, is devastating to her perception of self. As Morgra's anger and bitterness grow from the betrayals that follow her throughout her life, she begins to accept the only identity that is allowed her. As such, the fear and resentment she feels transform into malignant anger, until the only thing she believes in anymore is the power to control and manipulate others, hoping that at least in this she can't be hurt again. These feelings drive her to seek the fulfillment of the prophecy, an act which in itself is a final, misguided, and desperate attempt to obtain the empathy she craves. Like many who are denied empathy when they need it most, she lashes out at those who she perceives to have hurt her, feeling that if they won't share love with her, then she will make them all feel her pain.

The prophecy that *The Sight* revolves around is closely related to concepts of memory and empathy, and to the power both have to change the course of history and, by extension, the world itself. The prophecy itself talks about empathy and understanding as a means to overcome fear, hatred, and despair. Some of the most critical lines of the prophecy say, "And only a family both loving and true, / May conquer the evil, so ancient, so new. / As they fight

to uncover what secrets they share / And see in their journey how painful is care” (Clement-Davies 175). These lines specifically speak of the need for empathy and for the understanding of the traumas others have experienced in order to conquer the true evil which the next line speaks of: “Beware the Betrayer, whose meaning is strife” (Clement-Davies 175). The Betrayer becomes a source of anxiety throughout the novel, always coming up at critical turns as the characters each fearfully wonder who will betray them. In the end, Larka says to Morgra, “Don’t you know yet who the Betrayer really is? Hate is the Betrayer, Morgra, for it feeds on itself. Hate and its mother, Fear” (Clement-Davies 446).

The presence of the prophecy in the story functions as a symbol of how the stories and knowledge passed down from one generation to the next influence the actions of future generations and how, in turn, those future generations impact the world.

Ironically, though Morgra is presented as a true believer in the Sight and in the prophecy connected to it, she also presents a bit of a paradox, actively scorning the family for believing in her curse and claiming they have become the curators of their own demise through their fear of it. She also scorns those who believe in a literal interpretation of the foretold events, openly acknowledging to her closest conspirator that even a symbolic representation of many of the required signs is enough to drive the course of history towards very real, and often deadly, consequences. As she actively pursues the prophecy, she makes use of the fear and superstition among the wolves to manipulate events behind the scenes, exploiting these legends, even though she does not believe in them, as she drives the world towards a terrible end in which, as the prophecy claims, “[n]one shall be free” (Clement-Davies 207).

EMPATHY AND THE APOCALYPSE

The Sight is told from the viewpoint of intelligent wolves who live in an imagined civilization that mirrors various dominant human cultures and religions. The wolves’ civilization lives alongside real historical humans of Transylvania and the surrounding areas, but their civilization is unknown to the humans, who are too preoccupied with their own conflicts to recognize the value in the lives of others. To the humans, the wolves are mere animals, and the events of *The Sight*, with its world-ending prophecy, pass by unbeknownst to the human world, just as many human apocalypses pass by unbeknownst to people who are not directly affected by the atrocities committed against people of other cultures or in other places of the world.

Though the story of *The Sight* does include humans in specific key instances, the

majority of the action and plot is performed by the wolves themselves and centers around their conflicts with one another. *The Sight* works as a commentary upon human catastrophes by creating a story that parallels these real world histories. The narrative of real world atrocities is repeated in the story of the wolves as they turn on one another in a brutal civil war that is born from nationalistic pride, which is itself a fearful response to a world-ending prophecy. In his essay, “Introduction: Twentieth-Century Apocalypse: Forecasts and Aftermaths,” James Berger says,

In representations after the Second World War, the apocalypse became, to a greater degree, a matter of retrospection. It had already happened. The world, whether it knew it or not, was a ruin, a remnant. More destruction could occur, but it could only be more of the same. Nothing more could be revealed. All subsequent, post-apocalyptic destruction would be absolutely without meaning, mere repetition. (390)

The flaw I see in this representation of apocalypse is the concept that it is the destruction that creates or inspires meaning and revelation. *The Sight*, by contrast, counters this concept by suggesting that it isn't the pain, trauma, or destruction of apocalyptic events that gives it meaning but rather the ways in which people respond to that trauma. The choices people make in how they treat one another—friends, loved ones, enemies—define what future generations will learn from the experience and whether or not the mistakes of the past will be repeated once more. The lessons people learn from apocalypse can be ones of fear and anger, or they can be ones of empathy and understanding.

Reading fiction has long been credited with the ability to instill empathy in readers, and by extension, to motivate change in how they view the world, themselves, and others. These changes in view influence readers' actions and choices and can make a lasting impact on how they interact with the world around them. According to Suzanne Keen,

Narrative empathy means feeling with fiction. A common experience of immersion readers, a frequently, though not universally, cultivated effect of fictions, and a desired outcome of many novelists, filmmakers, and storytellers, narrative empathy features in accounts both of emotional triggers in imaginative experiences of reading and of empirical studies of shifts in readers' feelings while encountering literary texts. (296)

A book like *The Sight*, which follows the narrative of multiple characters, provides an opportunity for a wide range of narrative empathy. Because the story closely follows characters on all sides of the conflict, it allows readers to see from different perspectives

and creates an opportunity through which they can understand the thoughts, emotions, and motivations of each character. These individual representations help readers to understand each character on a more rounded level than many narratives provide, encouraging readers to feel empathy for the pain or love the characters feel and encouraging an understanding of character motives, even when readers don't agree with their actions.

According to P. Matthijs Bal and Martijn Veltkamp in "How Does Fiction Reading Influence Empathy," reading fiction that inspires an empathic response (known as narrative empathy) can have a longer-lasting impact on the thoughts and views of readers than many other kinds of writing, including non-fiction accounts of real events. Often the impact doesn't manifest immediately after the reading occurs, but emerges later in a phenomena known as the "absolute sleeper effect" (Bal and Veltkamp 3). The absolute sleeper effect occurs when the mind has time to mull something over in its subconscious, and it is the reason why walking away from a difficult problem for a time helps many people solve it with ease once they return (Bal and Veltkamp 3-4).

When applying the theory of the absolute sleeper effect to the influences of reading fiction, Bal and Veltkamp believe that "the effects of fiction reading on empathy will increase over time rather than present itself directly after the experience" (3). As Bal and Veltkamp say, "When people are transported into fictional narratives, they are better in remembering the story, because they were more intensely involved in reading the story, which enables mental representations afterwards. Hence, fictional narratives as mental simulation of real world events deepen the readers' general tendencies to feel empathy with other people" (3). When a story like *The Sight*, in which the core message is to learn and express empathy for others, succeeds in transporting the reader into the narrative, it provides an opportunity to create a message in readers' minds that they are more likely to carry into their daily lives.

It is this concern that causes some people to view apocalyptic literature as a negative influence, fearing that the representation of world-ending conflicts represents an underlying desire for such events (Berger, *After the End* xiii). Suzanne Keen cautions in "Readers' Temperaments and Fictional Character" that "failing to confront the potentially negative effects of vicious or Machiavellian applications of narrative empathy" could potentially lead to readers identifying with the justifications of conflict (297). I think it is worth acknowledging that if *The Sight* were written in a way that glorified its conflict or Morgra's violent and manipulative behavior, it very well could create an opportunity for readers to draw a harmful message from their reading. However, I believe there is immense value in

showing even antagonists as victims and in telling the story from their perspective, not to justify their actions, but to show the real pain and suffering they experienced. Through this understanding, I believe people can learn from the mistakes of the past by better understanding the impact their own actions have on others.

In *The Sight*, the perspective of Morgra, among other antagonistic characters, shows the cultural and historical hurts that have been passed down to her, and it highlights the empathy she should have been offered in order to prevent her sorrow and bitterness. This representation neither glorifies nor condemns her for what she suffers but instead demonstrates that, while the way she is treated is wrong, her suffering does not excuse her actions in hurting others. Morgra never should have to suffer the way she does, but like real apocalyptic events, her trauma is not inevitable. It is made possible because of other people's choices, which are influenced by cultural fear.

James Berger addresses the idea that no historical event is inevitable. On this subject he states in his book *After the End* that “no event can be understood on the basis of prophetic signs and portents, and that history moves on the basis of contingencies, choices, accidents, and possibilities” (21). The term that Berger gives to this phenomenon is “sideshadowing,” which refers to “the description of historical alternatives, the other things that could have happened but did not, and an empirical—not a retrospectively prophetic—analysis of why the catastrophe occurred” (*After the End* 21). The stories of Larka and Morgra demonstrate sideshadowing, for the story of each parallels that of the other as an alternate possibility and shows numerous moments when the story could have changed as their individual choices—and the choices of others—alter the course of history.

When it comes down to the final deciding moment—when it is certain that one way or another the prophecy will be fulfilled—Larka steps in to claim the Sight's ultimate power before Morgra can, and she discovers that it is not at all what the wolves had expected. The truth of the ultimate power was knowledge of the world itself, from the moment the planet was formed to the evolution of life, and the knowledge that humans are animals too. The Vision continues to show how one day, human ingenuity would create wondrous creations but how it would also make weapons of mass destruction. The Vision shows the horrors of future conflicts from genocides to nuclear warfare and the ways in which humans have already begun to destroy the world around them. The Vision ends with a total destruction of the world's environments as the planet floods and freezes, leaving the world covered in ice.

In this moment, Morgra tempts Larka to use the power and knowledge she's acquired to control all of nature so that she might wipe out the human race before it can destroy the

world. Her aunt challenges her to use the powers of the Sight for destruction and violence, claiming that it is the only choice left to save all of life. For a despairing moment, Larka truly considers the option her aunt presents, but it is in another way of thinking that Larka finds the solution. All throughout the novel, Larka has sought an answer to what the purpose of the Sight really is, and in this moment she knows. The Sight is the ability to see the truth of the world in all its horrors and beauty. When Larka's closest friend, Kar, despairs in the knowledge that everyone dies one day, she consoles him by saying, "Perhaps only when we know that can we truly begin to live. To see the wonder of it all, not the darkness" (Clement-Davies 458-459). Larka shows that it is the ability to empathize that has the true capacity to change history. By seeing through the eyes of others and learning compassion for them, she learns that all life is worth valuing. The Sight is the power to use knowledge and compassion to change the future for the better, and it is in this that she places her faith.

After seeing the Vision and the destructive power of humans, Larka proclaims, "If this is their freedom, I do not want it" (Clement-Davies 442). In this moment she realizes how terrible a responsibility it is to have the power to alter the world and to control the lives of others, and so she accepts the knowledge that the Vision has given her but refuses to use the final power to control other living creatures, even when doing so would have saved her own life in a final tragedy that claims both her and Morgra.

Though the story of *The Sight* follows the concept of an end-of-the-world prophecy, even this prophecy is revealed to not be what it seems. The message that *The Sight* presents is that there is no predetermined future. Instead, it is the choices made by each person, their actions, and how they choose to treat others that shape the future. The future can be apocalyptic or peaceful, but no matter what happens, there is still hope. No matter how bad things get, the world can still change and recover. Life can go on. *The Sight* shows that it is never too late to make the right choice: a person can choose to change their path if they let go of their fear and anger and learn to accept help and empathy when it is offered, and by doing so, people can learn to empathize with others, to forgive instead of hate, and to overcome their fear of difference.

Some, like Morgra, never break the cycle, their fear driving them to reject the empathy that is shown them, as they have forgotten how to have empathy for others. Morgra's path is not a set or predetermined one, but it is one that she walks for so long that she no longer feels that she has the power to change her view of the world. *The Sight* presents our worldview as the place where our actions start, determining how we treat others, ourselves, and the world around us. Additionally, it is through our worldviews that

we pass on values to the next generation. Through our stories, actions, and words, we leave an impact on the world and on the future generations who inherit it. That impact in turn influences how each successive generation will shape the next, stretching indefinitely into the future.

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE

Throughout history it has become easy, and even encouraged politically and socially, to retell stories of violence, anger, and fear in a concept known as “conflict-supporting narratives.” According to Daniel Bar-Tal et al., who are scholars of social psychology, “conflict-supporting narratives play a major role not only in the eruption of conflicts, but especially in their persistence—as well as in the use of violent means that often violate moral codes of conduct, and in the difficulty in resolving them peacefully” (662-663). Bar-Tal et al. describe these narratives as a means to justify the conflict by dehumanizing and delegitimizing the rival group, glorifying the “image of the in-group” while also presenting the in-group as the sole victims of the situation (665). All of this is done to create a justification in the minds of the in-group for the conflict that “serves as a psychological permit to harm the rival group” (665). Reasonably, if narratives for supporting a conflict employ methods of dehumanizing and therefore reducing empathy and understanding for the rival group, then the attempts to prevent future conflicts must include a desire to tell stories that facilitate an understanding of and empathy with others, even when their goals, values, or way of life may seem in opposition to that of the audience and storyteller.

In the author’s note that David Clement-Davies wrote for *The Sight*, he states that the story’s dark progression was inspired by the war-torn history of Romania and surrounding lands, particularly the war that erupted in Yugoslavia at the end of the twentieth century. In relation to this, Clement-Davies says, “It was a war in which so many symbols of the past were used to manipulate and destroy, so a major theme became how all of us are bound up in the past, not only in terms of family myths but the stories we tell to interpret the world, and how that can keep us in negative cycles. How, too, so many of the borders of fear we erect between one another are about competing narratives” (555). These competing narratives are often the sources of the uncertainty that generate doubt and fear in conflicting cultures; from that doubt and fear stems a driving need to reestablish a feeling of certainty in one’s own beliefs, culture, and way of life, often to the detriment and destruction of cultures and peoples whose worldviews contradict or even slightly deviate from their own.

Much like Clement-Davies’ own message in *The Sight*, Berger concludes the

introduction to *After the End* with the following message: “I hope . . . not only to describe the overwhelming, often denied traumatic presences of the past that characterize our post-apocalyptic/‘postmodern’ present but also to suggest ways for ‘coming to terms’ with the past, for moving toward a future with moderate hopefulness, yet without amnesia” (xx). The final power of the Sight is tied to the idea of memory, a power that the novel often acknowledges as serving humans better than the animals, which in itself is an ironic concept given the final revelation that humans are animals too. It is forgetfulness that is said to hamper the animals, and it is the power of memory that gives humans the greatest ability to alter the world around them. The need to remember history is the need to remember the stories of pain, injustice, and wrongdoing so that future generations can learn empathy for those who have been made to suffer in the past. The hope is that, through remembering these stories, future generations will be able to move forward in a way that teaches people to be conscious to not hurt others in the way those of the past were hurt.

The final message which the realization of the prophecy brings is this: if humans can’t curb their destructive ways and learn to empathize with and understand one another, then they will surely bring about their own destruction as they destroy the world around them. In order to move towards a different future, one in which humans can avoid foreseeable catastrophes, people will have to learn to move past their own fear and the hatred it inspires and will have to learn to find ways to work together and to value and preserve all life. David Clement-Davies presents a hopeful view of the future in *The Sight*, one that shows a possibility frozen in time, like algae waiting for the ice to thaw after an icy apocalypse so that life could begin again (443). Even when the path ahead seems to grow too narrow, leaving no other way out, it is never too late to change course. The choices that people make every single day about how they treat others and how they accept the kindness of others in return dictate the future.

In the conclusion of the story, David Clement-Davies leaves the reader with two final messages in an attempt to provide direction from which to break the cycle of violence and avoid an apocalyptic future. The first is when Larka speaks to one of her family, Kar, in a dream after her death, saying, “I did not escape the legend . . . for it was its own kind of trap, as Man’s freedom will be if he doesn’t learn. But life is not a legend or a story. Reality is far more precious than a story. And to love one another we must begin to see one another properly” (Clement-Davies 547). In this passage, Larka seems to be saying that by pursuing the prophecy, whether with the intent to fulfill it or in fearful desperation to stop it, she became entrapped by it. This moment seems to convey that, by the wolves allowing

themselves to get trapped within these stories and fearful predictions of the future, they had allowed themselves only one path forward, one that would lead to the death and destruction they feared and yet were trying so desperately to avoid. The only way out was to learn compassion and to start viewing each other in a way that promotes understanding instead of fear. Only then could they escape the trap of these apocalyptic stories repeating themselves time and time again, and all of it began with the final message: that the stories people tell now will influence the future.

After Larka appears in the dream, Kar begins to view the world in a different way, and through that new worldview, he learns to heal the sorrow and pain within himself. The final pages of the story end with the telling of stories and legends to a new generation of young wolves, but as the young ones ask to be told the stories that had contributed to the widespread fear and ignorance surrounding the prophecy, Kar pauses and thinks better of it. These were the stories that had bred hatred among the wolves and that had spurred on the violent conflicts of the novel, and so he tells them, “No . . . But I will tell you a better story” (Clement-Davies 464). He begins a story about the world at its very beginning, before there was life or conflict, and how its very existence was important and should be valued. He changes the stories from ones that spread fear to ones that encourage the new generation to look around them with wonder and to value all that they see in the world, both living and not.

I hold the belief that writers of post-apocalyptic fiction, like Kar, also have a responsibility to change the narratives they tell. Post-apocalyptic authors can continue to spread tales of fear and hatred, or they can change the focus. Like *The Sight*, they can still tell tales warning about dangers in our future, but like James Berger and David Clement-Davies both suggest, these stories need to be told without forgetting what has already happened. Berger’s conclusion to *After the End* emphasizes the need to “[m]ake the perception new, but recognize that damage is long-standing, symptomatic, haunting, and historical” (218) and that

[t]o see a world as post-apocalyptic is to recognize its formative catastrophes and their symptoms, and to identify the ideological sutures that hide the damages and repetitions. It is also, finally, to recognize and create narratives that work through these symptoms and return to the apocalyptic moments that traumatize and reveal. At that point, new—more healthy and more truthful—histories and futures may be possible. (219)

The message of *The Sight* is that the traumas of the past can’t be undone, but that this fact

doesn't mean it is ever too late to change course, to choose a different path and work towards making the future better. There is no changing what has already come to pass, but that doesn't mean that people have to keep making the same disastrous decisions.

Learning to value the diversity in the world, and teaching future generations to value it too, is the path that will help this world avoid the catastrophic futures so many fear. Individuals and cultures alike have to learn to show empathy towards others and to try to understand people who lead different lives or who have had different experiences than their own, because it is only by being shown empathy that others learn to do the same. Writers should tell apocalyptic stories, but they should also remember they aren't just writing about what they fear the future could become. They are writing a history that has already been, and with that in mind, they should remember that what they write now, the stories they pass on, will live on long beyond the memory of the actual writing. The ideas and themes presented in post-apocalyptic stories will be remembered even when future generations have never laid eyes on the pages of their origin. So ask yourself this as you build the stories of the future: what do you want the future to remember?

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