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Microtopias: the post-apocalyptic communities of Jim Crace's *The Pesthouse*

Happiness was in the east. Wasn't that what everyone believed?
(Jim Crace, *The Pesthouse*)

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent collapse of communism in the former Soviet bloc, the concept of utopia was blighted with the stigma of Stalinist totalitarianism. Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin's despotism at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in 1956 revealed the Stalinist-communist utopia to be a brutal experiment in institutionality and caused many thinkers and writers on the Left to withdraw their support, as manifested by a sharp rise in dystopian and anti-utopian fiction and commentary. The ensuing identification of utopia as synonymous with State totalitarianism – the dangerous 'grand narrative' of a programmatic and enforced approach to social organisation – was further bolstered with the rise of multiculturalism and identity politics, and their accompanying discourses of pluralism, fragmentation and social heterogeneity.

Minor utopian moments of transformation

More recently, however, academics and political commentators have argued that this view of totalitarian utopianism is finally being reversed: heralding a re-entry of a positive understanding of utopia into the discourses of liberal democracy, the 'end of history,' and aggressively globalising capitalist expansionism. As Bill Ashcroft notes, 'utopian theory has undergone a vigorous renaissance during the post-Cold War period of global empire.'¹ Academic debates over the 'death of utopia'² or the 'post-utopian moment' are increasingly being waged in a language that mixes the rhetoric of multiplicity and difference with the (post-)Marxist concepts of collective political agency. The move towards a restitution of utopia – that can incorporate the localities and singularities minority identity politics fought hard to platform – can be seen, for instance, in Jay Winter's call in *Dreams of Peace and Freedom* (2006) to distinguish 'minor' utopian 'moments of possibility' from the catastrophic dreamworlds of mass utopianism.³ Drawing on Susan Buck-Morss's influential study, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*,⁴ Winter's 'minor' utopias thus enact what Fredric Jameson has recently called the need for 'anti-anti-Utopianism.'⁵

Another notable exercise in 'anti-anti-Utopianism' can be seen in Marianne DeKoven's study *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (2004). DeKoven argues that although the notion of any stable, universal idea of utopia as encompassing the collective desires of an entire nation or class has been irreversibly splintered in postmodernity, this does not denounce the critical potential of utopia *per se*:

the modern utopian impulse does persist in postmodernism/postmodernity. It is neither underground nor invisible; rather, it is both visible and also pervasive, though no longer revolutionary, and very much altered and constrained. It is still critical, still a motivating factor for progressive change, but it has become "limited": muted, partial, local, diffuse, multiple, sceptical, complicit, displaced, and significantly refunctionalized.⁶

DeKoven's notion of a limited yet still critical and motivating utopian impulse thus offers a viable anticipatory vocabulary capable of articulating the necessity for social change during a period of intense academic fascination with the fragmentation of alliance-based activism, political cynicism and the decisive withering of communal ideals. This atomisation of larger social formations into reified and isolated consumerist micro-identities in identity politics has thus generated what Jameson calls a plurality of 'autonomous and non-communicating Utopias'⁷: thus in the post-Cold War period the grand, structural utopias of total social change have been whittled down decisively.

This notion of 'minor' or 'limited' utopian alternatives can, in fact, also be traced back to Ernst Bloch. In *The Principle of Hope Vol. 3*, Bloch talks of the 'tick-tock of small scale happiness' in his discussion of the utopian potential of friendship, even solitude, arguing that although the space of 'French' happiness – the good life of fireside armchairs and fine French burgundy – 'has the effect of scaling down, it is not in the least scanty, on the

contrary.’⁸ In this vein, John Stephens and Robyn McCallum note that contemporary representations of utopia demonstrate a ‘tendency to shift the utopian ideal (and its inverse) from the domain of state institutions to the domain of individual subjectivity.’⁹ This apparent shift towards the notion of a plurality of scaled-down utopian ‘moments’ even to their most minor or minimalist level thus poses a different set of relations with regard to the scale of utopian possibility, begging the question: how small can utopia be?

Such a declension of the utopian ideal, the contraction of ‘mass,’ state-led utopian organisations into a heterogeneous number of ‘minor’ or local, synchronic historical moments of utopian transformation – through small-scale expressions of happiness, otherness and hope – draws also on a tradition in literary analysis that adopts a critical attitude towards utopia. These analyses accentuate the fictional and frequently self-reflexive nature of the totalising reconciliations at work in utopian narratives, which serve to reveal discursive and thematic contradictions by the very posing of their own fictionality in a way that exposes the limits of the utopian synthesis. As Stephen Crook notes, the ‘[m]yths of the Golden Age, Cockaigne, Paradise and the Millennium are important elements in the history of utopia but are not themselves utopia.’¹⁰ These fictional, discursive maps and plans of utopia are, as Jameson writes, ‘to be read negatively,’ since ‘it is a mistake to approach utopias with positive expectations, as though they offered visions of happy worlds.’¹¹ Louis Marin argues similarly that through attempting to stage a figurative reconciliation – a ‘totalizing gaze’ that synthesises multiple, incongruous spaces – utopian discourse actually engenders the ‘spatial play’ of contradictory elements, signalling the ‘fiction’ of its reconciliation within the text.¹² Jameson’s assertion that a ‘new formal tendency’ is emerging in utopian literature – one which foregrounds ‘arguments about the nature and desirability of Utopia as such’¹³ – echoes Peter Ruppert’s earlier critique of utopian fiction, which argues that such texts gesture self-referentially towards their own failure to inaugurate the dreams they propose.¹⁴ Similarly, Tom Moylan in *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (1986) outlines his concept of the ‘critical utopia,’ which ‘keep[s] the Utopian impulse alive by challenging it and deconstructing it within its very pages.’¹⁵

Utopia, dystopia and the (post-)apocalyptic imaginary

Underpinning these analyses is the insistence that the utopian imagination is, as Krishan Kumar notes, ‘in the first place a piece of fiction’¹⁶ and as such is distinguished from political theory by its powers of anticipation and its inherently speculative nature. Crucially, these discussions of the self-referential, critical or even negative attitude towards utopia further complicate the already thorny issue of distinctions between utopian and dystopian imaginaries. As Crook reminds us:

Utopianism and dystopianism are very closely linked ... A critique of the existing social order can proceed from a projection of either its worst or its best features on to an imaginary society.¹⁷

Dystopian fiction is not, then, anti-utopian, since the underlying political or allegorical purpose of its creation of a dystopian world achieves the utopian function of offering the reader a radical alternative that reflects upon contemporary society. Moreover, if we venture into apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fictions, the interaction between the apocalyptic end-of-the-world and the millenaral inauguration of a New Jerusalem 'mixes horror and hope, nightmare and dream, destruction and creation, dystopia and utopia.'¹⁸

In light of these associations between the satiric impulses of theoretical as well as literary utopianism, its vacillations with dystopia, and (post-)apocalyptic imaginaries, it is interesting to note that corresponding to a recent surge of interest in utopia in academic debates there has also been a rise in post-catastrophe or post-technological British fictions. Although often seen as largely the province of American writers, disaster fictions do have a long tradition in secular British literature, dating – according to most accounts – back to Mary Shelley's publication of *The Last Man* between 1826 and 1833. British post-apocalyptic novels, we might say, have emerged in three temporal clusters: firstly, post-disaster, speculative and nuclear holocaust fictions written in the 'Golden Age' of SF during the Cold War and the 1950s;¹⁹ secondly, the more 'people-centred' approach of novels written during the 'New Wave' in SF of the 1960s and early 1970s, which distanced themselves from traditional 'genre' SF in favour of avant-garde literary experimentalism;²⁰ and, thirdly, post-apocalyptic and speculative fictions of the last decade, which has seen a rise in the number of award-winning 'literary' novelists tackling the genre.²¹ Examples in this last cluster include: Doris Lessing's, *Mara and Dann: An Adventure* (1999) and *The Story of General Dann and Mara's Daughter, Griot and the Snow Dog* (2005); David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004); Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005); Will Self's *The Book of Dave* (2006); and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007).

One recent example of 'literary' post-technological or post-apocalyptic novels in British fiction – Jim Crace's *The Pesthouse* (2007) – offers an ideal opportunity to begin thinking about the complex interrelationships between utopia, dystopia and the apocalyptic imaginary as modes of critique. Moreover, Crace's is the only novel in this recent cluster of interest in SF and post-apocalypticism that might be called a 'utopian' novel. As Ursula K. Le Guin has recently (and wryly) observed 'everybody is writing science fiction now'²²; but for Lessing, Mitchell, Ishiguro, Self and Winterson, these post-apocalyptic/speculative futures are figured in manifestly dystopian terms, a far cry from any imagining of future utopian alternatives. Furthermore, Crace's novel has interesting parallels with recent accounts of utopianism in academic debate: as with the literary and critical studies mentioned above, *The Pesthouse* interrogates the notion of mass utopianism as a suspicious or dangerous ideal without losing any of utopia's value as what Lyman Tower Sargent has called 'social dreaming,'²³ albeit at a minor key. *The Pesthouse*, then, serves as a useful case study in examining the ways in which utopian(ising) fiction – in defiance of proclamations heralding the 'end' or 'death' of utopia – continues to assert its persistence as a literary mode, even if, as Anthony Stephens writes, this has 'largely ceased to be written with any confidence.'²⁴

The Pesthouse is set at a time of exodus, charting the depopulation of a futuristic, rural America as its inhabitants reverse the myth of manifest

destiny to return to the east coast in the hope of catching boats to Europe and a better way of life. Crace invites us to read contemporary America into the novel as a fallen empire, following an apparent decline of technology, literacy and historical documentation that fails – in its complete absence from the world of *The Pesthouse* – even to be remembered. This remarkable inability to comprehend our present-day world in the novel, this absence, or failure of technology, thus recalls what Fredric Jameson has called ‘our inability to imagine an alternative’²⁵ in the irreversible period of globalised economic homogenisation.

The complete absence of the present-day, technologised world of the America known to Crace’s readership might therefore be interpreted as an effort to achieve through the distancing strategy of parable what, it seems, cannot be represented through direct reference. The deliberate omission of any explanatory narrative framework which would connect this present world with the futuristic landscape thus exposes the inability of fiction to address directly the climate of contemporary, globalised and hyper-technologised social and political relations.²⁶ I would like, then, to draw out two areas of inquiry in Crace’s novel that pose important questions in the development of new strategies of reading apposite to utopian(ising) fictions like *The Pesthouse*: firstly, how can we reflect upon what is lost or taken away from our own contemporary world – the world in which America stands as a giant of technological progress and international development? And, secondly, what does it offer us as readers to know so much more about America’s history than the protagonists of *The Pesthouse*?

Since the award-winning publication of his first novel, *Continent* in 1986, Jim Crace has distinguished himself as a writer *par excellence* of other-worldly landscapes: from the imaginary seventh continent in this novel to the community on the cusp of the Stone and Bronze Ages in *The Gift of Stones* (1988); from a utopian cityscape in *Arcadia* (1992) to the imaginary early nineteenth-century coastal town in *Signals of Distress* (1994); from Jesus’ pilgrimage in *Quarantine* (1997) to the putrefaction of two dead bodies in *Being Dead* (1999).²⁷ Crace has confirmed in interview that several of his earlier novels are concerned with societies ‘at a time of change,’ ‘communities on the edge,’ metamorphosing civilisations in which people have otherwise ‘absolutely nothing in common.’²⁸ Similarly, his premise for *The Pesthouse* was the conceit of ‘the shared abandonment of people with nothing in common except illness,’ which he wanted to use to depict a world that is ‘almost pre-modern and yet in a constant state of transition.’²⁹ A reading of *The Pesthouse* must take seriously Crace’s aesthetic recourse to the pre-modern; a world of pre- rather than post-technological pastoralism that operates as if the modern and the postmodern *never even existed*. Since Crace is a self-titled ‘old fashioned moralist,’³⁰ we are thus brought to ask: what moral codes are at work in the pre-technological framework of the novel?

Ethical codes and the dialectic between optimism/pessimism in *The Pesthouse*

Several thematic elements of *The Pesthouse* compel us to place Crace’s novel within the corpus of post-apocalyptic fiction: most notably, its realist depiction of an agrarian distant future in which the scattered remnants of

technology litter the novel's landscape. In addition, the novel's construction of close-knit familial groups as the prime signifiers of communal attachment – pitted against marauding bands of slave-traders and 'people rustlers' (132) – reinforces the larger-scale breakdown of any civilised social structure. However, Crace goes to great lengths to demonstrate that this post-technological, paradoxically pre-modern America is far from being without the values of civility, hospitality, ethical practices or codes of polite behaviour. These are 'pressured times' (102), 'where everything has been bludgeoned out of shape' (77), in which – despite the characters' formalities – 'conventions and proprieties [don't] count for much' (102). And yet, even in the face of harsh adversity, many of the emigrating characters in *The Pesthouse* cannot shake off their habits of 'observing rules of precedence that could no longer have any value' (204-5).

The ethical schemes of *The Pesthouse* are established through the novel's portrayal of the decision-making processes its characters undergo to justify their own actions, choosing between selfishness for purposes of survival and self-sacrifice with its rewards of communal bonds of affection. The novel's protagonists – Franklin and Margaret – meet at the eponymous Pesthouse where Margaret is exiled as a result of a pestilential illness. Franklin's decision to stay near Margaret despite her obvious sickness and to nurse her into convalescence contravenes the Darwinistic code of self-survival that underpins the novel's mantra 'Only the crazy make it to the coast' (10, 79, 92, 279):

Franklin could have – should have, almost certainly – abandoned Margaret at this point, now that he was so well equipped and so enriched. Any sensible man would have (79).

Despite the bleakness of its prospect of 'hard times' (175) in a futuristic, depopulating America peopled with sadistic slave traders and press gangs *The Pesthouse* is, however, not a bleak novel and has been described by Crace himself as 'unambiguously, generously optimistic.'³¹ The novel's underscoring of the emigrants' vacillations between faith in a paradisaical land beyond the ocean and their fears that this unknown destination will prove less than perfect, comparable or even worse than their present situations offers a continuation of the dialectic between optimism and pessimism explored in Crace's earlier novels.³² Crace justifies this dialectical tension, arguing that '[o]ptimism is only worth having if you visit the dark corners of the universe.'³³ Both are modes of satiric critique that reflect upon the blemished world of reality and what Darko Suvin terms its '*more perfect*' as against its 'absolutely perfect'³⁴ latent potentialities. In fictional narratives, however, the dystopian strain of satire has been given pre-eminence as a more satisfying mode of narrative development, as Crace notes: 'fiction doesn't like love; it likes despair. Fiction doesn't like good fortune; it likes dismay, preferring pessimism to optimism.'³⁵ Similarly, David Ketterer argues that 'utopian writing is of little fictional interest unless embodied as a motif in mimetic or apocalyptic literature.'³⁶

The emigrants who desperately struggle to the eastern coast in *The Pesthouse* are forced, then, to believe in the possibility of a better way of life across the ocean to legitimate the enormous sacrifices they have made, whilst being haunted by the nagging possibility that life beyond the sea will not

afford them anything better. Guided only by rumour, ‘dreaming of the ruined, rusty way ahead and all the paradise beyond’ (3), many are ‘crushed between the fears of going forward and the dread of going back’ (9). Franklin, for instance, knows nothing of the ocean passage and compensates with imaginative, mythopoeic embellishments:

‘I’ve heard,’ Franklin said [...] ‘that on the far side of the ocean, no one uses bows and arrows. Hogs run through their woods ready-roasted with forks sticking out of them. All you have to do is take a slice whenever you’re hungry’ (106).

‘That’s what you hope,’ replies Margaret, to which Franklin rejoinders: ‘That’s what we have to hope’ (106). The dialectic of optimism and pessimism in the novel is thus mediated through storytelling practices as evidenced by the exchange of rumours between emigrants in Ferrytown – dichotomised into ‘the liars and teasers’ and ‘the worriers’ (41) – revealing stories ‘[n]o two versions [of which] were the same’ (41). Franklin’s brother Jackson, however, refuses either position, settling instead for the less imaginative prospect that what lies ahead will prove to be as mundane as the terrain they already know: ‘Tomorrow, he was thinking, as he fell asleep, will be like yesterday’ (44). Jackson’s sentiment serves to demythologise the wildly fantastic, utopian stories shared between emigrants. His preference for the platitudinous over the speculative or fantastic thus foreshadows Margaret and Franklin’s scaling down of their own utopian ambitions at the end of the novel and their rejection of the mass utopian myth of emigration.

Pastoral post-apocalypticism

The novel’s ethical scheme and codes of polite behaviour also serve to connect this paradoxically futuristic and yet pre-modern America with its not-so-distant past. Margaret, for instance, remembers a time in her youth in which people did not live with fear, a romanticised America of abundant hospitality: ‘the old America’ (42), ‘the America that they had all been born in’ (141), ‘a land of profusion’ (42), which ‘used to be the safest place on earth’ (7). This remembered pastoral idyll is sharply juxtaposed against the post-apocalyptic America of the novel’s present, in which an anthropomorphised Nature – as if reacting against the emptying out of its human inhabitants – has started ‘living only for itself’ (169), a land in which even the rivers hurry seaward ‘as if [they] too were tired of flowing through America’ (294). This America has become rife with rumour and superstition, circulating expiatory prophecies by way of symbolic restitution, as evidenced in the distantly-remembered figure of Abraham Lincoln who ‘would come back to help America one day with his enormous promises’ (27) and reverse the process of apocalyptic decline:

The past was burning at their backs. The fire was in the west, and not ahead. Hadn’t that always been the prophecy, that mother would abandon daughter to the ashes, that father and son would depart from one another in flames, that before the doors of Paradise could open there would have to be a blackened, hot and utter silence in America, which could be

quenched only by the sea and would be survived only by the people of the boats? (82-3).

The imagery of apocalyptic destruction by fire and its paradisaical, cleansing restitution by water offers a binary opposition heavily overloaded with eschatological symbolism; with Abraham Lincoln as a millennial Christ-like figure remembered (unlike America's distant history) through myth, a messiah of American paternity who can help open 'the doors of Paradise' and inaugurate a utopian eternity through parousia.

Crace's pre-modern landscape in *The Pesthouse* might, then, display some generic narrative characteristics shared by other post-apocalyptic fictions but it is very different in the optimistic, almost-human depiction of its pastoralised Nature. Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), by contrast, constructs a dull, lifeless post-nuclear holocaust world suffused with colourless 'carbon fog' and 'dull carbon light'³⁷ in which the sun is 'unseen,' 'alien' and 'indifferent.'³⁸ The characters in *The Road* are constantly presented in dehumanising language, 'like farm animals,' or 'blind dogs,' 'like rats on a wheel.'³⁹ A relentlessly brutal post-apocalyptic landscape is also explored by Doris Lessing in *Mara and Dann* (1999)⁴⁰ and the sequel, *The Story of General Dann and Mara's Daughter, Griot and the Snow Dog* (2005).⁴¹ Here the central characters are haunted by the knowledges and technologies they have lost during a period of extreme environmental change. Reduced to living like animals, hunting food in a world ravaged by desertification, Mara and Dann yearn nostalgically – unlike Franklin and Margaret – to know more about their ancestors and 'tales 'from long ago, no one knows how long.'⁴²

The landscape of *The Pesthouse* is a far cry from the ravaged, desolate environments depicted by McCarthy and Lessing: indeed, it appears lush and forgiving in comparison, apparently reversing the 'doom and gloom' that critics identify as characterising many British SF and (post-)apocalyptic narrative worlds.⁴³ Several critics⁴⁴ have noted the recent vogue for award-winning British literary authors to utilise generic elements borrowed from the SF 'genre' tradition, particularly the sub-genre of post-apocalypticism. We might speculate, then, that this recent surge in the number of 'literary' novels dealing with apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic and dystopian issues discloses an index of the escalating perceived likelihood of ecological disaster.⁴⁵ Moreover, as Michael Chabon argues, post-apocalypticism is one of the few genres of SF 'that may be safely attempted by a mainstream writer without incurring too much damage to his or her credentials for seriousness.'⁴⁶

The Pesthouse is thus situated within an expanding milieu of futuristic, speculative and disaster novels hitting the bookshelves in Britain and America, authored by writers who do not profess to write science fiction. In fact, Crace goes so far as to suggest that he is attempting 'to retell and correct science fiction':

Science fiction, and I'm generalising here, tends to see the future as one in which society expands, and technology increases, and the possibilities of human kind get even greater. That doesn't tell us anything about our dependence on technology, it's an inflated *status quo*.⁴⁷

By decorticating those technological and social underpinnings of globalised, competitive capitalist production and consumption that constitute 21st-century life, as epitomised by America, Crace thus unfurls a neutral, imaginary space in which to explore the elemental, human traits of his characters: their perseverance, their capacity for love, and, above all, their resources of hope. It is in this last particular that Crace's novel distinguishes itself from the other recent speculative and post-apocalyptic novels by such acclaimed authors as Doris Lessing, David Mitchell, Kazuo Ishiguro, Will Self and Jeanette Winterson – as well as, by such non-genre writers as Cormac McCarthy and John Updike in America and Michel Houellebecq in France.⁴⁸ In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, once more, the idea of hope comes to seem, for one reader, 'like a kind of doom,' while Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* delineates, says M. John Harrison 'the steady erosion of hope.'⁴⁹

Hope in *The Pesthouse* is tested against an omnipotent and almost human depiction of Nature, creating an ambiguous world of pastoral intentionality – the lake, for example, is described as 'heavy with itself' (295) – that has the power both to punish and forgive. What Philip Tew has identified throughout Crace's novels as the 'characterized presence'⁵⁰ of landscapes is demonstrated in *The Pesthouse* through pathetic fallacy and the anthropomorphic portrayal of Nature. Examples abound: 'the valley raised its voice' (33); 'the dawn seemed tired and hesitant' (45), Franklin 'felt as inundated as the landscape he was pushing through' (96). Moreover, the landscape appears to have the power to pardon Franklin and Margaret's attempts at emigrating from it, and compensate for its harshness towards them on their journey east with more congenial weather conditions as they return west:

It was as if the country that had once been hostile to them was regretful for it, and was now providing recompense – fewer dangers, warmer nights, softer going in a season that was opening up rather than closing down. It even decorated the way with flowers (290).

Such correspondences between the mood of the natural world and that of its human inhabitants suggests the necessity of man's co-operation with Nature and recognition of its powers. The utopian possibilities of what Ernst Bloch has called 'this place on earth of arrived-at Being, of world as homeness, homeness as world'⁵¹ thus seem pregnant at the end of the novel as Franklin and Margaret begin their westward journey, finally recognising the abundance that the landscape can offer them:

They could imagine striking out to claim a piece of long-abandoned land and making home in some old place, some territory begging to be used (309).

The countryside, 'begging to be used,' to be valued and appreciated, suppresses its 'taints and perils' (278) and rewards Franklin and Margaret so that they no longer '[feel] defeated by America' (287) and their return west – full-circle in both a literal sense and in terms of the familiar American myth of manifest destiny – to the hill on which the Pesthouse stands at the end of the novel is a return home:

It still appeared the safest acre in America, a place of remedy and recovery where, surely, they could at least spend the night or spend the month or spend eternity (306).

However, the landscape is not viewed as not entirely invincible. As Siddhartha Deb notes in a review of *The Pesthouse*: 'As Franklin and Margaret see their country, they also create it in some sense.'⁵² This tension between natural and man-made forms of creation is underscored by the economy of value in the novel, setting machine-produced metal in opposition against nature, a nexus that corrodes both materials, as when metal is buried in the ground: 'The soil itself was dark with rust and stains' (212). Franklin and Margaret witness the subjugation of Nature's abilities to burgeon or produce amid the rubble of the 'metal fields' (3):

Hardly anything grew amid the waste. The earth was poisoned, probably. Twisted rods of steel protruded from the masonry. Discarded shafts and metal planks, too heavy to pull aside even, blocked their paths (118).

Metal, in this instance, far from providing anything of value or use to the emigrants, obstructs their paths as well as the natural environment's own abilities to produce vegetative growth.⁵³ The interaction between Nature and metal therefore betrays an antagonism between two historical forces. Firstly, man's technologisation – the distant past of the novel, in which the technological present-day world of Crace's readership is expunged. And, secondly, Nature's ever-evolving growth – the novel's present, which poses an alternative history in which Franklin and Margaret can co-exist with a sentient, agentive Nature. This reconceptualisation of Nature seems aligned with Bloch's understanding of a utopian impulse for that existence in which 'man [is] not alone in his environment, however inhuman.'⁵⁴ This second historical force speaks directly to contemporary concerns and anxieties over climate change and the fate of the planet: through the notion of a personified Nature Crace thus educates us into conceiving a different understanding of the natural world. In this reformulation, humans can achieve agency only in co-operation with natural elements, approaching what John Urry has called an 'embodied' concept of agency, which, he argues, can account for 'the ways in which the physical world and artefacts are sensuously experienced by humans.'⁵⁵

Microtopian communities

As with many post-apocalyptic or post-disaster novels, *The Pesthouse* is centrally concerned with the nature of communal social relations, opposing brutal, marauding gangs of slave-traders with small, fearful groups of emigrants. However, Crace also explores the benefits and shortcomings of a utopian community in the novel – known as the 'Ark' and run by a religious sect called 'Finger Baptists' – to which Margaret turns for shelter over the harsh winter months. The Finger Baptists have renounced all forms of metal as 'the Devil's work' and 'the cause of greed and war' (184), thus exemplifying

the novel's juxtaposition between metal – as embodying the machinic presence of technology in the novel – and soil, or Nature. Despite the utopian management of this 'odd but organized community' (189) in which there are no possessions of any value, no one steals and no one is unprovided for, the Ark, it transpires, does not offer a safe place of refuge. Its renounced metal valuables, buried outside the fortified wooden compound, are sacked by the 'people rustlers' and the religious figure-heads of the community brutally slaughtered.

Another community Margaret encounters in the novel is the 'sisterhood' of abandoned wives living in penury at the coast: women who have not been accepted onto the boats, who have been abandoned by their husbands and children and forced into prostitution as their only means of employment. They recognise the survivalist code of 'safety in numbers' (260) and offer Margaret a place in their community if she is left behind by Franklin, whom she has been alluding to as her husband. One of the abandoned wives, Joanie, bitterly laments how she'll 'always have to be American' (257). Joanie's desolation at the inescapable enforcement of her American nationality thus ironically reverses the cultural imaginary of the American Dream: the grand utopia of freedom and democracy to which the characters in *The Pesthouse* are tenuously connected through Margaret's old coin; the inscribed words of which, however, she cannot read. This reversal of manifest destiny thus reflects upon the trope of what 'America' has meant in terms of new beginnings and modernisation: from John Locke's 'in the beginning all the world was America' to Stuart Hall's description of postmodernism as 'the way the world has dreamed itself "American."' ⁵⁶ And in this sense we can identify Franklin and Margaret as striking a chord in our contemporary public consciousness, offering a 'new start' to a disgraced America. ⁵⁷

By the end of the novel, then, Margaret and Franklin have learned by bitter experience not to solicit company or 'seek out strangers' (289), using their shaven heads – obvious signs of the plague-like 'flux' – to keep inquiring stragglers or vicious mobs of slaver-traders at bay. Despite everything Margaret has lost by the end of the novel – her family, her home, all her possessions and her dream of emigrating – her adoptive family of Franklin and Jackie (a child she has inadvertently adopted in the course of her travel) provide ample restitution for such sufferings. As she thinks to herself: 'What greater compensations could there be?' (308). The familial unit thus proves to be the safest mode of community in *The Pesthouse* and is depicted with heavy utopian overtones in Crace's description of 'the final family on earth' (300) reclaiming America at the end of the novel. We might observe, then, that Crace's micro-utopian community achieves the mediation between these individuals and their small collective requisite to fulfilling the needs of both. As Bloch notes: 'the triumph of community [...] is equally the salvation of the individual.' ⁵⁸ Crace's little family in *The Pesthouse* can thus be seen as embodying the dissolution of the 'mass' utopia into its 'minor' or minimalist fragments or new beginnings. As Franklin reveals, the utopian dream of crossing the sea does not appeal to him anymore: 'even if [he] could persuade himself that there was Paradise at the far end of the sea – [he] was no longer convinced that it was worth the journey' (247). 'Dreams of Leaving' (258) are replaced by Margaret and Franklin's own utopian ambitions – modest, and informed by experience rather than the fabulist excesses of storytelling and

superstitious rumour. As Franklin tells Margaret: 'I've dreamed of walking back onto our land, poor though it is' (278).

What we might call the 'microtopia' of Franklin, Margaret and Jackie at the end of the novel therefore combines the function of the 'critical utopia' as outlined by Moylan with Jay Winter's concept of 'minor' utopias. Critical utopian narratives, Moylan argues, reveal an 'awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition ... reject[ing] utopia as blueprint while preserving it as dream.'⁵⁹ Unlike the static, totalising, 'traditional' literary utopias, critical utopias thus focus on 'the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within utopian society itself.'⁶⁰ This self-reflexive awareness of the limitations of utopia as a generic literary concept can be seen in Crace's own deconstruction of the emigration myth at the end of the novel, as well as in Margaret's relief at leaving the utopian community of the 'Ark.' Moreover, Crace's figuration of the micro-utopian familial unit offers a far from unproblematic representation of utopian desire, and in this sense we can identify the triadic community Franklin/Margaret/Jackie as critical of the larger social formations or collectivities traditionally associated with utopian fulfilment. Since, as Jameson writes, the utopian logic of the small group 'does not seem to have accommodated itself to the narrative apparatus of the classical Utopia,'⁶¹ Crace's novel offers a way of rethinking the utopian community in what we might call 'post-classical' literary utopias. As James Q. Wilson writes in *The Politics of Hope*, '[t]hose who flee the family flee the world';⁶² in this sense we can identify what Jameson calls the 'factionalism'⁶³ of the microtopian familial unit established in this novel as negotiating the small-scale group ties requisite to mediating between individual agents and the social totality.⁶⁴

Crace's triadic logic of community represented by Margaret/Franklin/Jackie thus enacts a crucial structural move towards reconstituting social affiliations at a minor level in modern literary utopias. However, this group is united not by biological necessity as Jameson suggests in *Archaeologies of the Future*,⁶⁵ but, rather – and astonishingly, given the harsh post-apocalyptic landscape of the novel – by the simple, persistent desire for community itself. This is Crace's most daring narrative gesture: where, as Jameson notes, in other modern literary utopian fictions the family 'persists like a foreign body within the new society,'⁶⁶ Crace's family is connected not by blood but by the utopian processes of companionship and selflessness. The narrative framework of *The Pesthouse* thus has some very important implications for the study of contemporary literary utopias, particularly with regard to the scale of their possibility. As Maria Varsam argues, the 'big picture' of literary depictions of totalised utopian/dystopian societies – replete with competing economies, technologies, developed modes of social organisation and political power struggles – have received wide critical interest at the expense of the 'little picture' or 'micro-level,' in which the particularities of individual characters give nuance to a mere utopian/dystopian dichotomy.⁶⁷ Crace's deconstruction of the mass utopian myth of emigration thus serves to reveal the microcosmic scale at which a successful logic of community can operate in the novel, profoundly questioning the nature of the utopian dream of emigration as 'uncompromisingly optimistic, hopeful beyond reason' (5-6).

‘Another dream’: reflections on the ‘critical’ nature of the otherworldly microtopia

The development of the dialectic between optimism and pessimism in *The Pesthouse* settles around the crucial unknowability of the utopian destination that lies across the ocean, a destination explored through the practices of storytelling. As both a geographical ‘elsewhere,’ ceaselessly in flux, and a metaphorical ‘beyond’ metonymic for utopia’s otherworldliness, the sea in *The Pesthouse* thus represents the storytelling of utopia as bridging the ultimate unknowability that articulates and limits the migrants’ (Sea Dreamers’ (62)) lives and hopes.⁶⁸ Michel De Certeau identifies the role of storytelling as an act of ‘delimitation,’ or transcendence of limits,⁶⁹ and in this sense we can understand the role of storytelling in *The Pesthouse* as offering a symbolic bridge between reality and utopian unknowability. By figuring themselves in a positive relationship with the sea – ‘you know it ‘like an old friend’” (145) – the characters in *The Pesthouse* are able to transcend the limits of their knowledge and experience in a way that allows them a sense of control over their own futures. Meanwhile, the sea in *The Pesthouse* also embodies the limits of the utopian imagination and, paradoxically – given its constant and ‘baffling’ (253) movement – proves to be both literally and metaphorically static: ‘unproductive’ and ‘never seeming to progress’ (236).

At the same time we can observe that although Franklin’s stories offer a bridge between the legitimate space of his own experience and its alien exteriority, or unknowability, this bridge remains a spurious one. As Crace writes, ‘[t]here was too great a gap between his near bank and his far’ (209). Franklin cannot, therefore, make a connection between his storytelling fantasy and his real life. This ‘false’ bridge of storytelling thus raises the question of what kind of new world can be constructed in *The Pesthouse*. Through his pastoral, post-apocalyptic landscape Crace offers us an unknown world ignorant of its own past, in which any records of the nation’s history or geography have been unaccountably lost. Unlike the harsh ecological futures of Doris Lessing’s post-disaster novels, there are no books, no fragments of paper, no literacy and few technical skills. In addition, there are no attempts to convey knowledge between generations, save for superstition and the rumour-mongering of fabricated storytelling narratives. Through Franklin and Margaret’s imagining of the ‘other’ elsewhere – across the ocean – we are invited to read Crace’s futuristic, rural landscape as an attempt to blot out our own present and reflect on what has been lost in this non-technological, non-literate world. The parallel utopian landscape of *The Pesthouse* thus reconstructs America as if the modernisation of the 19th and 20th centuries did not, in fact, occur and in this sense the difference between the knowledge of Crace’s readership and that of Franklin and Margaret is starkly juxtaposed. However, Crace sees this distancing from our contemporary historical present as central to his exploration or critique of the world of his readers:

What I’m interested in is to learn the nature of our 21st century existence by ... taking away those things that define the 21st century: science, technology, the abandonment of belief [...] I wanted to set this book in the hot seat of technological, and business development, which is America, and return it to a

medieval past, although it never had one, to give it a medieval future, to examine something about ourselves.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, like Franklin, we might feel that Crace himself risks 'too great a leap between his near bank and his far' (209); since by taking away science and technology, by peeling back the structural underpinnings of the twenty-first century, he leaves us without the means by which to reach the 'far bank' of his 'medieval future.' We should not read this disjunction between *The Pesthouse's* otherworldliness and the empirical world of its readers as an aesthetic shortcoming, however. Rather, this parabolic distancing – the 'minor' or minimalist nature of this 'critical' utopian desire – can be seen as signalling what contemporary fiction *cannot do*, what it is *not able to say* directly. Such a reading might help us focus on the ways in which utopian fictions like *The Pesthouse* can offer educative opportunities, constructing new strategies of reading apposite to our contemporary socio-political environment.

This critical utopian desire is manifested in Crace's assertion that for Franklin and Margaret '[t]here had to be another dream' (269), since '[t]here was no Promised Land' (167). However, the 'more comfortable, more settled' (89) domestic vision of their life together does not depict Margaret and Franklin's utopian ambitions in entirely unproblematic terms. Franklin's dream of the past, combined with his timidity and fear of sea passage – revealed from the beginning of the novel – seems at times less a utopian revelation than merely retrogressive. In addition, the hyperbolic, utopian mood at the end of *The Pesthouse* reveals the problems of any fictional reconciliation within a single narrative direction. Crace's elevated rhetorical tone in the final paragraph of the novel, for instance, self-referentially discloses the impossible status of its utopian longing: 'Going westward, they go free' (309). We know, however, that the journey west will be blighted by dangers and perils. By posing the fictional resolution of a riding-off-into-the-sunset ending reminiscent of the traditional Western, the utopian reconciliation of a 'happily-ever-after' is at once posed and negated. Crace's meditation on the nature of utopian desire in the novel thus resists any final resolution: by problematising the utopian synthesis of Franklin and Margaret's journey west at the end of the novel, Crace offers us a critical utopian ambition that forecloses the possibility of its own realisation through the novel's self-reflexive narrative tone.

Meanwhile, *The Pesthouse* can be identified as reacting to the impossible complexities of contemporary globalised capitalism through its expression of an alternative world in which technologies no longer exist. In this sense, the novel offers not just an alternative ending to our current mode of production with a revolutionary, new beginning, but, parabolically, a *different history altogether* in which this new pastoral world would be possible. *The Pesthouse* thus addresses contemporary concerns over hyper-technologisation and the exploitation of natural resources for profit in our current period of globalisation.⁷¹ This 'different history altogether' seems more conceivable in an alternative past than an alternative future. The novel's critical reflection on utopian desire thus becomes clear through the very impossibility of identifying Margaret and Franklin's journey west as a utopian reconciliation, since this future is, in many ways, a retreat into their pasts.

The main question the novel poses is how we can conceive of an ‘American’ future that has blanked industry and scientific and technological development: a future assembled, that is, out of a fabricated ‘medieval’ past. The issue, therefore, lies not *inside* the terms of the novel’s world but in finding the bridge that can connect (our) unwanted dystopia of an alternative, pre-technological future with the beneficent possibilities of an agentive, pastoralised ‘America’ in such a way that this becomes a feasible alternative mode of life. Crace’s project is thus particularly apposite to a utopian reading, since America has a long relationship with utopian imaginaries. As Marianne DeKoven reminds us: ‘Utopianism, like postmodernism, has been seen as a quintessentially or characteristically American phenomenon.’⁷² However, as Darko Suvin argues, the utopian otherworldliness requisite to any embodied utopian – or even dystopian – speculative future must critically reflect upon our own real, empirical world. That is, it must construct a ‘this-worldly other world,’⁷³ imminent within the contemporary world shared by the readers of ‘estranging’ utopian fiction. But since the America we know today remains consistently absent throughout the novel, the ingredients out of which we might build such a bridge between our own world as readers and Crace’s futuristic narrative world are apparently unavailable. The question of agency, ‘how do we get from here to there?’ remains, therefore, unanswered.

I would argue, however, that the ‘Other World’ of *The Pesthouse’s* pastoral post-apocalypticism – replete with its microtopian familial communities, sentient, anthropomorphised Nature, and demythologisation of the mass emigration myths of the good life across the ocean – would lose its strongly suggestive powers of allegory and its critical reflection upon the 21st century if it was associated any more directly with our own contemporary historical ‘moment.’ As Theodor Adorno notes, art’s inherent resistance to the political and economic processes of capital production and accumulation lies in this very opposition or ‘otherworldly’ position. Thus, ‘[t]he notion of a ‘message’ in art, even when politically radical, already contains an accommodation to the world.’⁷⁴ At an even more prosaic level, as Jonathan Bate observes with reference to Will Self’s *The Book of Dave*, the success of speculative fiction depends precisely on its parabolic distancing: ‘The problem with futuristic fiction ... is that it can all too easily be overtaken by events.’⁷⁵

Such a project of allegorical or parabolic moralism risks, as Jameson notes, failing to achieve a ‘meaningful relationship’ between the work of art and its outside world.⁷⁶ The ‘failure’ in this respect of *The Pesthouse* can be understood as a *productive* failure which tells us something about the possibilities and impossibilities of utopian writing in the twenty-first century. This failure, as Ruth Levitas observes, is not limited to fiction but pervades social imaginaries at every level of our contemporary life; as a consequence, ‘utopia moves further into the realms of fantasy.’⁷⁷ Crace’s ‘bridge’ of storytelling, the agency ascribed to the natural (non-human) world, and the questionable nature of Franklin and Margaret’s utopian return west – these narrative problematics act as meditations on the nature of utopian desire, deconstructing any final textual reconciliation or synthesis. Moreover, such narrative problematics offer not only the critical tools with which to rethink the relationship between contemporary fiction and strategies of utopianising, but also speak to academic debates concerning the limitations upon what DeKoven calls ‘[p]ostmodern, post-sixties utopia’: that is, the ‘local-particular,

embodied, multiple, diffuse, provisional; contained, subdued, partial, and incorporated'⁷⁸ qualifications any utopian project encounters today. Such issues thus foreground the 'critical' as well as 'minor' nature of the utopian moments of possibility explored in *The Pesthouse*, contributing to what Moylan calls 'the open space of opposition,' 'the act of negating the present'⁷⁹ that is central to the project of literary critical utopias.

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Notes:

¹ Bill Ashcroft, 'Critical Utopias', *Textual Practice* 21, 3 (2007), pp. 411-431 (p. 411); see also Phillip E. Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2002), pp. xv-xvi; Poulod Borrojerdi, 'Rattling the Bars: Review of Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future*', *New Left Review* 48, (2007), pp. 109-123 (p. 109); Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), p. 106.

² See, for instance, Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1979), pp. 21, 801; Northrop Frye, 'Varieties of Literary Utopias', in Frank E. Manuel (eds), *Utopias and Utopian Thought* (London: Souvenir Press, 1973), p. 29; Robert C. Elliott, *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp. x, 84-8; Krishan Kumar, *Utopias and Anti-Utopias in Modern Times* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 380; Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. xii.

³ Jay Winter, *Dreams of Peace and Freedom: Utopian Moments in the 20th Century* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 2.

⁴ Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2002).

⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), p. xvi; Jameson's call for 'anti-anti-utopianism' refers to what he calls Sartre's own 'ingenious political slogan' intended to mediate between 'a flawed communism and an even more unacceptable anti-communism' (p. xvi).

⁶ Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 25.

⁷ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 221; See also Lucy Sargisson's call for recognising a 'plurality of voices' in her concept of 'transgressive utopianism' in *Utopian Bodies and the Politics of Transgression* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 1.

⁸ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope, Vol. 3* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 936, 937.

⁹ John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, 'Utopia, Dystopia and Cultural Controversy in *Ever After* and *The Grimm Brothers' Snow White*' in *Marvels and Tales*, 16, 2 (2002), pp. 201-213, (p. 208).

¹⁰ Stephen Crook, 'Utopia and Dystopia' in Gary K. Browning, Abigail Halcli and Frank Webster (eds), *Understanding Contemporary Society: Theories of the Present* (London: Sage Publications, 2000), pp. 205-218, (p. 207).

¹¹ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 12.

¹² Louis Marin, *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (New York: Humanity Books, 1990), pp. 11-12.

¹³ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 217.

¹⁴ Peter Ruppert, *Reader in a Strange Land: The Activity of Reading Literary Utopias* (London: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), p. 4.

¹⁵ Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 46.

¹⁶ Kumar, *Utopianism*, p. 20.

¹⁷ Crook, 'Utopia and Dystopia', p. 210.

¹⁸ Kathleen Stewart and Susan Harding, 'Bad Endings: American Apocalypsis', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 28 (1999), pp. 285-310, (p. 285). The link between utopia, dystopia and the apocalypse has also been outlined by David Ketterer, who views correspondences between utopia and dystopia as 'exercises of the apocalyptic imagination.' Apocalyptic fictions, he argues, are utopian 'to the extent that all works of satire, while pointing to a normative state, often also point to a "utopian" alternative.' David Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974), pp. 93-4.

¹⁹ Examples include: John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), *The Kraken Awakes* (1953) and *The Chrysalids* (1955); Arthur C. Clark's *Childhood's End* (1953); John Christopher's *The Death of Grass* (1957); and Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957). Precursors to this cluster include M. P. Shiel's *The Purple Cloud* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1901) and John Collier's *Tom's A-Cold* (London: Macmillan, 1933); (The US edition was published as *Full Circle: A Tale* [New York: Appleton, 1933]).

²⁰ Such as J. G. Ballard's *The Wind From Nowhere* (1961), *The Drowned World* (1962), *The Burning World* (1964) and *The Crystal World* (1966); John Christopher's *The World in Winter* (1962), *A Wrinkle in the Skin* (1965), *Pendulum* (1968) and *Empty World* (1977); Michael Moorcock's *Legends from the End of Time* (1976) and *A Messiah at the End of Time* (1977) as well as the short stories "The End of all Songs" and "The Hollow Lands" in *The Dancers at the End of Time* sequence (1972-6); Brian W. Aldiss's *Greybeard* (1964); Christopher Priest's *Fugue for a Darkening Island* (1973); James White's *The Dream Millennium* (1974); Graham Masterton's *Plague* (1977); and Sir John Hackett Jr's *The Third World War* (1978).

²¹ One precursor to this third cluster of speculative, futuristic and post-apocalyptic 'literary' novels is Martin Amis's collection of short stories, *Einstein's Monsters* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987). We might note that contemporary British 'genre' fiction writers also continue to explore disaster, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic themes, for example: Philip Reeve's *The Hungry City Chronicles – Mortal Engines*, (London: Scholastic, 2001), *Predator's Gold* (London: Scholastic, 2004), *Infernal Devices* (London: Scholastic, 2006), *A Darkling Plain* (London: Scholastic, 2007); Adam Robert's *The Snow* (London: Gollancz, 2004); Neal Asher's *Cowl* (London: Tor, 2004); and Stephen Baxter's science fiction novels and short stories, including the *Manifold* series – *Time* (London: Voyager, 1999), *Space* (London: Voyager, 2000) and *Origin* (London: Voyager, 2001), *Phase Space* (London: Voyager, 2002), and more recently *Weaver* (London: Gollancz, 2008), and *Flood* (London: Gollancz, 2008).

²² Ursula K Le Guin, 'Head Cases', review of Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, *The Guardian Online*, 22 September 22 2007, accessed 27 August 2008: <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/sep/22/sciencefictionfantasyandhorror.fiction>>.

²³ Lyman Tower Sargent, 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', *Utopian Studies* 5 (1994): pp. 1-37 (p. 3).

²⁴ Eugene Kamenka (ed), E. (1987). *Utopias: Papers from the Annual Symposium of the Australian Academy of the Humanities* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1987): pp. 1-19 (p. 1).

²⁵ Fredric Jameson, 'Globalization and Political Strategy', *New Left Review* 4 (2000), pp. 49-68 (p. 56). Jameson also dwells on this theme in *Archaeologies of the Future*, where he writes: 'What is crippling [about the 'invincible universality of capitalism'] is not the presence of an enemy but rather the universal belief, not only that this tendency is irreversible, but that the historic alternatives to capitalism have been proven unviable and impossible, and that no other socio-economic system is conceivable, let alone practically available.' (p. xii).

²⁶ The issue of literature's inability directly to refer to the contemporary socio-political world in which it is produced is observed by Peter Brooker in his article, 'Terrorism and Counternarratives: Don DeLillo and the New York Imaginary', *New Formations* 57 (2005/6), pp. 10-25. Brooker reflects on the 'more oblique story telling' narrative strategies used by DeLillo in response to 9/11, noting that: 'At once 'beyond words' but the subject of endless words and around 40 million hits on the internet, 9/11 has proved paradoxically unrepresentable and endlessly represented' (p. 10). Similarly, Pankaj Mishra writes that novels that directly address 9/11 fail in their explicitly political focus to account for 'social and emotional reality', Pankaj Mishra, 'The End of Innocence', *The Guardian*, 19 May 2007, available online, accessed 2 February 2008:

<<http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,2082858,00.html>>.

²⁷ Jim Crace, *Continent* (London: William Heinemann, 1986), *The Gift of Stones* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1988), *Arcadia* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), *Signals of Distress* (London: Viking, 1994), *Quarantine* (London: Viking, 1997), *Being Dead* (London: Viking, 1999).

²⁸ Crace quoted in Tew, *Jim Crace*, p. 60, 95, 116.

²⁹ Crace quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 195, 195.

³⁰ Crace quoted in *Ibid.*, 31.

³¹ Jim Crace quoted in Caroline Moore, 'Regressed to its Pioneering Past' review of *The Pesthouse* in *The Daily Telegraph Website*, accessed 5 January 2008:

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml;jsessionid=OKIHWBKU3ZKYVQFIQMFSFF4AVCBQoIVo?xml=/arts/2007/03/11/bocra210.xml>>.

³² As Caroline Moore writes: 'Crace's novels struggle to find a place for optimism in a bleak world: he seeks for the humanist equivalents of faith, hope and charity in a world dominated by Darwinian determinism, mortality and lust.' (*Ibid.*)

³³ Crace quoted in Tew, *Jim Crace*, pp. 193-4.

³⁴ Darko Suvin, *Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), p. 36.

³⁵ Crace quoted in Tew, *Jim Crace*, p. 171.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³⁷ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (London: Picador, 2006), pp. 124, 279.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 71, 189, 234.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 138, 292.

⁴⁰ Doris Lessing, *Mara and Dann: An Adventure* (London: Flamingo, 1999).

⁴¹ Doris Lessing, *The Story of General Dann and Mara's Daughter, Griot and the Snow Dog* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006) (first published by Fourth Estate in 2005).

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁴³ Catriona Miller, 'British Apocalypses Now – or Then?: *The Uninvited Invasion: Earth and The Last Train*' in John R. Cook and Peter Wright, eds, *British Science Fiction Television: A Hitchhiker's Guide* (London: I. B. Tauris and Company, 2006), pp. 263-282, (p. 264).

⁴⁴ Critics who have commented on the vogue for contemporary 'literary' novelists to utilise SF generic elements include Matt Thorne, Kai Maristed, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Michael Chabon: Matt Thorne, 'Satire and SF meet – on another planet', review of Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, *The Independent*, 12 October 2007, accessed 27 August 2008:

<<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-stone-gods-by-jeanette-winterson-396609.html>>.;

Kai Maristed, 'Imagining a plundered, media-plagued Earth', review of Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, *The Los Angeles Times*, 31 March 2008, accessed 27 August 2008: <<http://www.latimes.com/features/books/la-et-book31mar31.1.4075967.story>>.;

Michael Chabon, 'After the Apocalypse', review of *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 54, No. 2, 15 February 2007, accessed 27 August 2008: <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/19856>>.;

and Ursula K Le Guin who writes that '[f]ormerly deep-dyed realists are producing novels so full of the tropes and fixtures and plotlines of science fiction that only the snarling tricephalic dogs who guard the Canon of Literature can tell the difference', Ursula K Le Guin, 'Head Cases', review of Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*.

⁴⁵ Michael Chabon, 'After the Apocalypse', review of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Andrew Lawless, 'The Poet of Prose – Jim Crace in Interview', *Three Monkeys Online: The Free Current Affairs and Arts Magazine*, February 2005, accessed 28 August 2008:

<<http://www.threemonkeysonline.com/article3.php?id=196>>/

⁴⁸ John Updike, *Toward the End of Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); Michel Houellebecq, *La Possibilité d'une île* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), translated in English as *The Possibility of an Island*, trans. Gavin Bowd (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

⁴⁹ Chabon, 'After the Apocalypse', review of *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy; M. John Harrison, 'Clone alone', review of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, *The Guardian*, 26 February 2005, accessed 28 August 2008:

<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/feb/26/bookerprize2005.bookerprize>>.

⁵⁰ Tew, *Jim Crace*, pp. 6-7.

⁵¹ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Vol. 3, pp. 1310-11.

⁵² Siddhartha Deb, 'Manifest Destiny in Reverse', review of *The Pesthouse* in *The Daily Telegraph Website*, accessed 5 January 2008:

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml;jsessionid=oZFJPGCKCMYC3QFIQMFSFF4AVCBQoIVo?xml=/arts/2007/03/11/bocra10.xml>>.

⁵³ At other points in the novel, however, Nature engulfs man-made technologies, as, for example, with the secret bridge at Ferrytown which is almost instantly consumed by the river (93); similarly, the tarmac 'Dreaming Highway' is degraded by water (138).

⁵⁴ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Vol. 3, p. 1336.

⁵⁵ John Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 14. Urry develops his theory of non-human agency, arguing that: 'This is not to suggest [...] that humans do not exert agency. But they only do so in circumstances which are not of their own making; and it is those circumstances – the enduring and increasingly intimate relations of subjects and objects – that are of paramount significance.' (p. 14). Along these lines, Doris Lessing has recently argued that we need 'some kind of education' capable of posing a different set of relations between human agency and the natural or non/pre-technologised world. Doris Lessing, 'On not winning the Nobel Prize,' The Nobel Prize for Literature 2007 Acceptance Speech, *nobelprize.org* website, accessed 5 January 2008:

<http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2007/lessing-lecture_en.html>.

⁵⁶ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Civil Government*, Chapter 5, 'Of Property,' Section 49, accessed 27 August 2008: <<http://www.constitution.org/jl/2ndtro5.htm>>; Stuart Hall quoted in Peter Brooker (ed), *Modernism/Postmodernism* (London: Longman, 1992), p. 24.

⁵⁷ We can trace this 'disgrace' in Don DeLillo's reflections on the attacks on the twin towers in 2001: 'We like to think that America invented the future. We are comfortable with the future, intimate with it. But there are disturbances now, in large and small ways, a chain of reconsiderations', quoted in Pankaj Mishra, 'The End of Innocence', *The Guardian*, 19 May 2007, available online, accessed 2 February 2008:

<<http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,2082858,00.html>>.

⁵⁸ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Vol. 3, pp. 972-3.

⁵⁹ Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, p. 46.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁶¹ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 209.

⁶² James Q. Wilson qtd in Jonathan Sacks, *The Politics of Hope* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), p. 185.

⁶³ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 206.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* This critical gesture – reconciling some mode of communication between the level of the individual or particular, and that of the universal, or social totality – has been made by David Harvey in *Spaces of Hope*, where he argues that 'there is a large untitled terrain within which these discursive regimes have been conveniently separated from each other', David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 15.

⁶⁵ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, p. 206-7

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Maria Varsam, 'Do the right Thing? Knowledge and Agency in Ursula Le Guin's "The Ones who Walk Away from Omelas"' in José Eduardo Reis and Jorge Bastos da Silva (eds), *Nowhere Somewhere: Writing, Space and the Construction of Utopia* (Porto: Editora da Universidade do Porto, 2006), pp. 131-136 (p. 132).

⁶⁸ The sea has always occupied a central place in literary utopias as José Eduardo Reis and Jorge Bastos da Silva point out: 'Every historian and essayist researching the phenomenology of utopia acknowledges, therefore, the catalytic role played by the sea and seafaring discoveries in the birth of utopia, both as a genre and a general term by which to refer to an indeterminate hope in the future well-being of humankind', Reis and da Silva (eds) *Nowhere Somewhere: Writing, Space and the Construction of Utopia*, p. 10.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁷⁰ Jim Crace quoted in Lawless, 'The Poet of Prose – Jim Crace in Interview.' The idea that a completely 'otherworldly' distancing from the world of Crace's readership is necessary to the utopian imaginary of *The Pesthouse* might also be supported by Fredric Jameson's theoretical position in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981). Jameson argues (drawing on Louis Althusser's concept of 'expressive causality') that 'some deeper, underlying, and more "fundamental" narrative' that offers the 'master narrative' or 'political unconscious' of all literary and theoretical texts can only be apprehended allegorically' (p. 28). Similarly, in 'Walter Benjamin, or Nostalgia,' *Salmagundi* 10-11 (1969/70), pp. 52-68, he calls allegory 'the

privileged mode of our own life in time, a clumsy deciphering of meaning from moment to moment, the painful attempt to restore a continuity to heterogeneous, disconnected instants' (pp. 60-61).

⁷¹ It is interesting to note that debates over climate change and human intervention have recently been identified as signalling a change in discourse from 'alarmism' (apocalyptic) to 'small actions' ('minor' utopian), "Climate porn' turning off public from action,' *Institute for Public Policy Research* website, 3 August 2006, accessed 25 January 2008: <<http://www.ippr.org.uk/pressreleases/?id=2240>>.

⁷² DeKoven, *Utopia Limited*, pp. 270-1. The relationship between America and Utopia – specifically, as understood from a European point of view – has also been explored by Jean Baudrillard in *America: 'For the European, even today, America represents something akin to exile, a phantasy of emigration and, therefore, a form of interiorization of his or her own culture. At the same time, it corresponds to a violent extraversion and therefore to the zero degree of that same culture'*, Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1988), p. 75.

⁷³ Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 42.

⁷⁴ Theodor Adorno, 'Commitment' in Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics* (trans. ed. Ronald Taylor) (London: Verso, 2002), p. 193.

⁷⁵ Jonathan Bate, 'Where a cabbie's rantings are a holy text', review of Will Self's *The Book of Dave*, *The Daily Telegraph Online*, accessed 26 August 2008: <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2006/05/28/bosel28.xml>>.

⁷⁶ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 198.

⁷⁷ Ruth Levitas, qtd in David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, p. 190.

⁷⁸ DeKoven, *Utopia Limited*, p. 287.

⁷⁹ Moylan, *Demand the Impossible*, pp. 1-2, 26-7.