

Writing from the Wreckage: Environmental Collapse and Female Voice in "Diary of an Interesting Year"

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Abstract

Post-apocalyptic fiction has emerged as a prominent genre in contemporary literary studies, frequently mirroring cultural concerns such as environmental degradation, societal collapse, the scarcity of essential resources and the complex ethical dilemmas that arise in extreme circumstances. At this point, ecofeminist theory provides a constructive lens by emphasizing the interconnections between environmental degradation and patriarchal oppression. Helen Simpson's short story "Diary of an Interesting Year" (2009) exemplifies this intersectional perspective by presenting the voice of an unnamed female narrator who struggles to survive in a world devastated by environmental collapse, disease and violence. Written in the form of a diary composed of brief, sequential entries, the narrative places the female body into the foreground as a central site where ecological devastation and patriarchal control converge. By doing so, she challenges conventional male-centered portrayals of apocalypse by emphasizing issues of sexual violence, reproductive injustice, and the silencing of women's voices. In this context, our study aims to explore how Simpson's short story lays bare the ecofeminist entanglement of environmental and patriarchal collapse by rendering the female body not only as a victim of environmental scarcity but also as a battleground of reproductive control and social violence in a post-apocalyptic setting.

Keywords: post-apocalyptic fiction, ecofeminism, sexual violence, environmental degradation, gender inequality

Yıkım Sonrası Yazını: "Diary of an Interesting Year" da Çevresel Çöküş ve Kadın Sesi

Öz

Post-apokaliptik kurgu, çağdaş edebiyat çalışmalarında belirgin bir tür olarak ortaya çıkmış; çevresel yıkım, toplumsal çöküş, temel kaynakların kıtlığı ve aşırı koşullar altında meydana gelen karmaşık etik ikilemler gibi kültürel kayguları sıklıkla yansıtmaktadır. Bu noktada ekofeminist kuram, çevresel yıkım ile ataerkil baskı arasındaki karşılıklı ilişkilere vurgu yaparak verimli bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır. Helen Simpson'ın "Diary of an Interesting Year" (2009) adlı kısa öyküsü, bu kesişimsel perspektifi örneklendirmekte; çevresel çöküş, hastalık ve şiddetle harap olmuş bir

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dünyada hayatta kalmaya çalışan isimsiz bir kadın anlatıcının sesini merkeze taşımaktadır. Kısa ve ardışık günlük kayıtları biçiminde kaleme alınan anlatı, kadın bedenini ekolojik yıkım ile ataerkil denetimin kesiştiği merkezi bir mekân olarak konumlandırmaktadır. Böylece, cinsel şiddet, üreme adaletsizliği ve kadın seslerinin susturulması gibi meseleleri öne çıkararak kıyamet anlatılarının geleneksel erkek-merkezli temsillerine meydan okumaktadır. Bu bağlamda, söz konusu çalışma, Simpson'ın öyküsünün kadın bedenini yalnızca çevresel kıtlığın mağduru olarak değil, aynı zamanda üreme denetimi ve toplumsal şiddetin yaşandığı bir mücadele alanı olarak tasvir ederek, çevresel ve ataerkil çöküşün ekofeminist düğümünü nasıl görünür kıldığını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: post-apokaliptik kurgu, ekofeminizm, cinsel şiddet, çevresel tahribat, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliği

INTRODUCTION

Post-apocalyptic narratives have achieved significant popularity in recent years, particularly alongside advancements in technology and science (Hicks, 2016). The genre typically depicts scenarios of societal collapse brought on by environmental catastrophe, pandemics, or technological failure, often serving as allegories for real-world socio-political instability. Common themes in such narratives include the sharing of scarce resources, building trust among strangers, and the struggle for collective survival. While such stories frequently emphasize character development in the face of existential threats, they also critically engage with broader ethical dilemmas, such as moral responsibility and the value of human life in worlds which have been degraded. Through these narratives, apocalyptic fiction provides authors with a platform to explore fundamental human fears and needs, ultimately reflecting on the essence of humanity. As Susan Sontag famously noted, “the imagination of disaster does not so much confront us with the reality of catastrophe as it serves to normalize what we already fear”, which highlights how such stories transform cultural anxieties into easily absorbed narrative forms (1965, p. 214). More broadly, as noted in Heather J. Hicks’s baseline definition of post-apocalyptic fiction, it refers to works that portray what might be described as “globalized ruin” (2016, p. 7). Thus, the genre functions as a critical lens through which society’s vulnerabilities and enduring human conditions are examined, offering insightful reflections on both the collapse and potential regeneration of civilization.

It is possible to analyze post-apocalyptic fiction via ecofeminism, a theoretical framework that emphasizes the connection between gendered oppression and environmental degradation. Emerging in the 1970s amidst the rise of both the women’s liberation and environmental movements, ecofeminism critiques patriarchal systems for their dual role in marginalizing women and exploiting nature, both of which are often rooted in ideologies of domination, control and hierarchy. Ecofeminist scholars such as Vandana Shiva (1988) and Carolyn Merchant (1980) argue that the same structures which devalue and subjugate women are also responsible for the ecological crises which are threatening the planet. Thus, post-apocalyptic fiction with an environmental focus has proven to be a fertile ground for exploring these connections and imagining alternative, more

sustainable futures. As Mary Mellor articulates, ecofeminism draws from both traditions: “It takes from the green movement a concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women” (1997, p. 1). This synthesis enables ecofeminism to offer simultaneously a critique of environmental destruction and gender inequality while proposing more just and ecologically balanced alternatives for both human and non-human life.

While often associated with environmental advocacy, ecofeminism extends beyond its ecological focus. It engages with a broad spectrum of global justice issues, including militarism, toxic waste, deforestation, desertification, soil degradation, reproductive rights, biotechnology and the treatment of non-human animals. As Greta Gaard emphasizes, “[e]cofeminism emerged from the intersections of feminist research and the various movements for social justice and environmental health, explorations that uncovered the linked oppressions of gender, ecology, race, species, and nation” (2011, p. 28). Building on this, d’Eaubonne (1974) highlights that resistance takes the form of both ideological critique and practical action, advocating interventions that simultaneously challenge patriarchal domination and environmental destruction. By drawing attention to these interrelated injustices, ecofeminist perspectives offer a comprehensive framework for analyzing the systemic forces that threaten both marginalized communities and the environment. Hence, as a feminist movement, ecofeminism operates not only as a form of critical theory but also as a resistance and manifesto, challenging the systemic marginalization of women within socio-political structures. Within this literary and theoretical context, Helen Simpson’s short story “Diary of an Interesting Year” (2009), later included as the twelfth story in her 2010 collection *In-Flight Entertainment*, exemplifies this ecofeminist approach through its portrayal of a dystopian future marked by environmental devastation and gender-based violence.

Set in 2040 and written in diary form, the narrative follows an unnamed 30-year-old woman as she documents her daily struggle to survive amid ecological collapse, resource exhaustion, and the breakdown of societal order. Through the female protagonist’s intimate reflections, the story critiques the intertwined exploitation of women and nature, highlighting the urgent need for an ethical reimagining of human relationships with both the environment and one another. As “a wry, humane and brilliant observer of our peculiar condition”, Simpson exposes the fragility of modern civilization by grounding her post-apocalyptic vision in deeply personal, gendered experiences of suffering and resistance (Palmer, 2010). This interest in the intersections of gender, domesticity, and social crisis aligns with Simpson’s broader body of work, including *Hey Yeah Right Get a Life* (2000) and *Constitutional* (2005). This paper aims to explore how Simpson’s “Diary of an Interesting Year” lays bare the ecofeminist entanglement of environmental and patriarchal collapse by rendering the female body not only as a victim of ecological scarcity but also as a battleground of reproductive control and social violence in a post-apocalyptic setting. By doing so, we contribute to ongoing discussions of how post-apocalyptic fiction envisions the female body as both a site of vulnerability and resistance.

1. ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON TESTIMONY AND SURVIVAL

Simpson's story not only addresses ecofeminist concerns in its content but also engages intertextually with literary traditions of documenting catastrophe. The story's title, "Diary of an Interesting Year," appears to be a conscious reference to Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), a landmark work of early English realist fiction that chronicles the devastation caused by the bubonic plague in London in 1665. The diary narrative technique is employed in both texts, allowing the narrator to document the social, environmental, and psychological effects of widespread disaster while subjectively conveying her observations. By referencing Defoe's work, Simpson places her narrator in a long literary tradition of bearing witness during times of social collapse and suffering. Yet Simpson's intertextual engagement reshapes this tradition through an ecofeminist lens, placing into the foreground how the female body becomes a central site of environmental and social violence. Accordingly, the unnamed female diarist offers a raw and intimate account of her life after the world witnesses a catastrophic collapse of environmental and social disintegration, whereas Defoe's narrator, frequently interpreted as a rational male observer, attempts to make sense of the plague through empirical observation and moral reflection (Wang, 2021). Hence, the title functions as a conversation between two crisis points: one, influenced by a fatal illness in early modern Europe, and the other, dominated by ecological devastation and gendered violence in an imaginary future.

Grounded in Enlightenment values such as reason and order, Defoe's narrative reflects a worldview in which the male subject positions himself as a detached observer of suffering and chaos (Crosara et. al., 2022). In contrast, Simpson's narrator lacks the privilege of distance since her body is subjected to starvation, sexual violence, and unwanted reproduction, and her story unfolds through these daily struggles for survival. The female diarist of Simpson presents real-life experiences of women that reveal the psychological and physical costs of surviving environmental collapse, thereby subverting the authoritative, empirical tone of Defoe's narrator. To illustrate, deprived of medical care and basic hygiene, she worries about an unwanted pregnancy and describes the burden of washing menstrual rags: "April 8th. Boring morning washing out rags. No wood for hot water, so had to use ashes and lye again. Hands very sore, even though I put plastic bags over them. Did the face masks first, then the rags from my period. Took forever. At least I haven't got to do nappies, like Lexi or Esmé—that would send me right over the edge" (Simpson, 2009). From an ecofeminist perspective, Simpson's female voice highlights the intertwined oppressions of nature and women, making the diary a means not merely of historical record, but of endurance and testimony. In doing so, Simpson reclaims the genre as a space to place marginalized voices into the foreground, making visible the gendered dimensions of environmental collapse and inviting readers to consider whose experiences shall be preserved—and whose shall be forgotten—in the archives of catastrophe.

The act of writing also turns out to be a vehicle for the female subject to assert her existence, both individually and collectively, beyond its formal and historical context. From the outset, the reader learns that the narrator is thirty years old and that her husband, identified only by the initial G., gives her a spiral-bound notebook and a biro, which she uses to write in daily. She deliberately keeps her handwriting small to make the notebook last longer—a seemingly minor detail that

poignantly reflects the dire state of her post-apocalyptic world. In this post-apocalyptic reality, even basic tools for writing have become precious commodities, and every page feels like something to be saved, not wasted. The diary, which spans nearly a year, documents her ongoing struggle to survive in a devastated England where climate disaster, disease, violence and scarcity dominate daily life. Forced to ration not only food and safety but also self-expression, the narrator's decision to write in smaller script becomes a subtle act of survival. This moment exemplifies how post-apocalyptic fiction transforms ordinary actions—like writing—into vital strategies for preserving both selfhood and sanity. From an ecofeminist perspective, this act of constrained expression parallels the broader silencing of women's voices in systems of patriarchal and ecological domination. Just as nature is exhausted and commodified, so too is a woman's capacity for speech and creativity reduced to fragments of survival. In a world where death is ongoing and unpredictable, the diary becomes not only a record but a lifeline, asserting the enduring human—and specifically female—need to testify, to remember, and to resist obliteration.

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Simpson's post-apocalyptic fictional world, much like Defoe's plague-stricken London, is devastated by disease, but in this instance as a direct consequence of environmental neglect and infrastructural collapse. To illustrate, the breakdown of the drainage system leads to contaminated water and the unchecked spread of cholera, while closed hospitals and state absence exacerbate the suffering. Families are displaced, forced to flee on foot, and resort to wearing face masks even during sleep as a desperate form of protection. This imagery, eerily reminiscent of recent global crises such

as COVID-19, underscores the material consequences of ecological degradation, irrespective of the cause of the outbreak. As the narrator writes,

February 23rd. Went round this afternoon and the cousins were saying the thing that finally drove them out was the sewage system—when the drains backed up, it overflowed everywhere. They said the smell was unbelievable. The pavements were swimming in it, and of course the hospitals are down, so there’s nothing to be done about the cholera. Didn’t get too close to them in case they were carrying it. They lost their two sons like that last year. (Simpson, 2009)

As is evident from this entry, the survivors struggle to secure even the most basic necessities of life; for instance, they cannot access food and shelter, which in turn strips them of care, personal space, and ultimately their sense of dignity. Even in such conditions, the act of writing emerges as an essential act of survival and resistance—a testimony to her existence and a way to maintain a sense of self in a world unraveling around her. Through the fragile confessions in her diary, Simpson’s narrator reflects the relentless struggle to endure, transforming the journal into a breakable yet urgent record of life and dignity on the brink of collapse.

The daily deprivation she records in her diary reaches far beyond the lack of tangible resources; it also becomes an experience that strains the body’s limits, testing the boundaries of endurance. Another diary entry deepens the atmosphere of bodily and environmental deterioration in Simpson’s post-apocalyptic world, where the narrator suffers from insomnia amid the suffocating humidity and the omnipresent threat of disease-carrying mosquitoes. The text follows as:

March 2nd Can’t sleep. I’m writing this instead of staring at the ceiling. There’s a mosquito in the room, I can hear it whining close to my ear. Very humid, air like filthy soup, plus we’re supposed to wear our face masks in bed, too but I was running with sweat, so I ripped mine off just now. Got up and looked at myself in the mirror on the landing—ribs like a fence, hair in greasy rats’ tails. Yesterday the rats in the kitchen were busy gnawing away at the bread bin, they didn’t even look up when I came in. (Simpson, 2009)

This passage reflects the extent to which even rest and recuperation, one of the most basic elements of survival, become impossible to accomplish. The physical description, such as “ribs like a fence, hair in greasy rats’ tails,” evokes both starvation and dehumanization, mirroring the breakdown of the social order outside. The presence of rats chewing through the last vestiges of stored food underscores the inversion of domestic space, where safety, nourishment, and control have all vanished. As the narrator rips off her mask in frustration, we glimpse the tension between survival and sanity, between biological necessity and psychological endurance.

Pregnancy becomes not only a biological possibility but also a gendered threat as psychological and physical pressures accelerate, one from which women in post-apocalyptic settings are unable to protect themselves fully (Lowenstein, 2013). The narrator’s attempt to chronicle her everyday survival highlights how women—who are often positioned as nurturers and caregivers—are disproportionately burdened by ecological disasters and must navigate a world where both nature and femininity are devalued and exhausted. The entry from *May 14th* intensifies the depiction of gendered vulnerability in a world in collapse. Once more, the narrator’s insomnia is connected to the unrelenting psychological consequences of unprotected sex in a setting lacking in reproductive

healthcare and bodily autonomy, in addition to the physical discomfort—“bites itching, trying not to scratch”—in this instance (Simpson, 2009). Her statement, “[s]ick of being on knife edge re pregnancy,” evokes a physical and existential sense of exhaustion (Simpson, 2009). Alongside necessities such as soap and clean air, the sarcastic desire for condoms highlights the narrator’s awareness of how severely women’s needs are overlooked in survival discourses. According to ecofeminist scholars such as Greta Gaard (2011) and Stacy Alaimo (2010), feminist responses must take into consideration how ecological degradation negatively impacts women’s reproductive and physical lives. Simpson’s narrator personifies this intersectional suffering, making even sleep a source of vulnerability and fear. Through these instances, the narrative challenges both the environmental breakdown and the gendered systems that make it harder for women to survive.

In one of the most harrowing diary entries, dated *June 12th*, the narrator recounts her visit to Maia, a heavily pregnant woman trapped in an abusive relationship. The narrator reflects with stark clarity on the bleak prospects of new life in a world where disease, malnutrition and violence have become the norm: “She’s very frightened. I don’t blame her. She tried to make me promise I’d take care of the baby if anything happens to her.... I suppose there’s no harm in promising if it makes her feel better” (Simpson, 2009). Although the narrator gives her word to assume responsibility for the baby if the mother does not survive childbirth, she is grimly aware of the infant’s almost inevitable fate. Therefore, she voices this awareness with a matter-of-fact brutality that strips away any lingering sentimentality: “I give a new baby three months max in these conditions. Diarrhea, basically” (Simpson, 2009). From an ecofeminist perspective, this scene vividly illustrates the intersection of reproductive injustice and ecological devastation. In *Ecofeminism as Politics* (1997), Ariel Salleh argues that women, as a direct agent of biological reproduction, become the embodiment of nature in a socio-economic system which both depends on and devalues them. Thus, the pregnant woman’s body in the story is not a symbol of regeneration but a victim of overlapping systems of exploitation, which is a certainty of her death rather than her survival.

In most post-apocalyptic fiction, the pregnant woman plays a crucial role, symbolizing not only the survival and continuity of the human race but also the gendered stakes of ecological and social collapse, making her body a site where environmental and patriarchal pressures intersect (Lowenstein, 2013). In Simpson’s narrative, contaminated water and poor sanitation, byproducts of ecological collapse, transform childbirth from an act of hope into a probable sentence of death. This grim reality reaches its peak in the entry of *July 17th*, where the narrator records: “Maia died yesterday. It was horrible. The baby got stuck two weeks ago, it died inside her. Violet Huggins was useless; she didn’t have a clue. Martin started waving his Swiss Army knife around on the second day and yelling about a Cesarean—he had to be dragged off her” (Simpson, 2009). This horrifying account not only exposes the absence of even the most basic medical support but also displays the extent to which women’s suffering is normalized in a world devoid of basic care and competence. As stated by Noël Sturgeon, “where women are degraded, nature will be degraded, and where women are thought to be eternally giving and nurturing will be thought of as endlessly fertile and exploitable” (1997, p. 28). This connection between reproductive exploitation and environmental collapse reinforces the story’s ecofeminist critique of systems that exploit both women’s bodies and

the natural world. In a world where neither women nor nature can safely sustain life, the lack of hope predicates not only the demise of individual futures but also the gradual and unavoidable extinction of humanity as a whole.

2. FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY AND RESISTANCE IN POST-APOCALYPTIC SETTINGS

In the post-apocalyptic world of Simpson's fiction, patriarchal logic not only disregards women's bodily suffering but is also manifest in language, where men monopolize authority. A striking example is mansplaining, a communicative practice in which men explain concepts to women in a patronizing or condescending manner, thereby reinforcing underlying gender hierarchies. The *Oxford English Dictionary* conceptualizes mansplaining as an explanation "[o]f a man: to explain (something) needlessly, overbearingly, or condescendingly, esp. (typically when addressing a woman) in a manner thought to reveal a patronizing or chauvinistic attitude." As Şentürk (2022) argues, language functions as a powerful political tool in the service of a male-dominated ideology that prevents women from expressing themselves and constructing their individual identities, while maintaining control over women's bodies and identities, or influencing power dynamics (pp. 150–151). Within this framework, the narrator's relationship with her partner, G., illustrates the subtle yet pervasive manifestations of verbal dominance inherent in patriarchal structures. G.'s constant pontification, frequently expressed in technical or moralizing terms—such as his lecture on environmental collapse or his reductionist reminder that "[e]ach breath removes oxygen from the atmosphere and replaces it with carbon dioxide" illustrates a persistent imbalance of authority in their relationship (Simpson, 2009). Instead of engaging in a mutual dialogue, G. displays his epistemic superiority by presenting himself as the only source of valid knowledge and limiting or dismissing the narrator's viewpoint. This interaction intensifies the narrator's feelings of frustration and isolation while simultaneously highlighting the gendered power structures that shape domestic relationships within patriarchal systems. Thus, such patronizing remarks by men reflect a broader problem in which men often assume the role of authoritative interpreters of women's bodies and knowledge, a pattern that persists even amid environmental and societal collapse.

In response, within this post-apocalyptic world, the narrator asserts her agency by documenting her experiences in a diary, thereby claiming a space to articulate her perspective and challenge the verbal supremacy of men. As Rebecca Solnit contends, "having the right to show up and speak are basic to survival, to dignity, and to liberty", a principle that is vividly embodied in the narrator's act of narrating her own story and preserving her voice despite the constraints imposed by patriarchy (2012, p. 20). From this perspective, the act of writing itself becomes both a personal and political strategy—a means of survival and a challenge to the systems that would render her invisible. This notion aligns with Hélène Cixous's call in "The Laugh of Medusa" ("Le rire de la Meduse") for women to write of themselves (*écriture féminine*) as a way of reclaiming power and disrupting phallogocentric discourse. As Cixous states at the very beginning of her seminal article, "[w]oman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the

same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement” (1976, p. 875). Writing functions not only as a means of self-expression but also as a radical act of reclaiming space in history and discourse, as Cixous’ argument makes evident. In this sense, the narrator’s diary functions as a tangible manifestation of this principle. By documenting her personal experiences in the diary, Simpson’s narrator embodies the self-authorship Cixous promotes, thereby resisting erasure by affirming her physical and mental presence in the text. Moreover, the narrator’s employment of an unfiltered, often fragmented style aligns with the tenets of *écriture féminine*, emphasizing fluidity, subjectivity, and embodiment rather than strict narrative structures. This narrative choice both challenges the dominance of phallogocentric discourse and affirms the capacity of women’s writing to generate alternative modes of meaning, in the context of post-apocalyptic societal collapse.

While the narrator’s diary enacts *écriture féminine* as a form of self-expression and resistance, this approach gains further significance when considering her anonymity and the erasure of personal identity within the text. The narrator, an unnamed young woman with no background or distinguishing traits beyond her gender, age, and fertility, becomes both universal and symbolic, amplifying the text’s resistance motif. She becomes a stand-in for all women in a world that reduces them to their reproductive function. The narrator’s loss of identity reflects the environment’s loss of its unique ecosystems, which are turned into land used only for practical purposes. The narrator’s erasure of identity sets the tone for how other women in the story are portrayed: stripped of agency and subjected to systemic violence that becomes disturbingly normalized. This relationship is evident in the *June 12th* diary entry, where the narrator details Maia’s pregnancy and the abuse she experiences with her partner, Martin. Maia’s fear and visible bruises on her face reveal a reality in which domestic abuse has become normalized amid societal collapse. The narrator’s restrained reaction, choosing not to ask about Maia’s “new black eye,” highlights how normalized and pervasive this violence has become (Simpson, 2009). Instead of being interpreted as a sign of passivity or ignorance, this silence is a manifestation of a common, internalized understanding among women—an implicit knowledge of systemic violence that is so widespread that it no longer needs to be articulated. Even when this issue is recognized, it is often thought to be pointless to seek answers because it is considered irreparable; therefore, bringing it up only serves to emphasize how difficult it is to resolve.

The image of the exploited woman, paralleling the destruction of nature, emerges repeatedly throughout the story in various forms, such as in the case of compulsory billeting, where the female body is placed under threat. The narrator and her husband, G., are assigned a group of eight Spanish billeted individuals who arrived by Army truck. The group included an elderly woman, her daughter, twin toddler grandsons, described as “pretty feral”, and four unsmiling men of military age, all designated to reside with the couple (Simpson, 2009). This compulsory hosting arrangement not only threatens the privacy of the narrator and her husband but also discomforts her under the gaze of one of the Spaniards, highlighting a recurring pattern in situations of social and political breakdown, in which women tend to experience a heightened sense of pressure and threat compared to men. The uneasiness of the narrator can be inferred from the diary entry dated *July 3rd*: “G.

depressed. The four Spaniards are bigger than him, and he's worried that the biggest one, Miguel, has his eye on me (with reason, I have to say)" (Simpson, 2009). This entry subtly reflects both her awareness of being objectified and the normalization of male entitlement to the female body. Her casual acknowledgment — "with reason, I have to say" — shows how the threat of sexualization has become an ordinary part of life, revealing an internalized expectation of being watched and desired. In these situations, the story emphasizes how gendered vulnerability is exacerbated in times of crisis and chaos, when patriarchal dynamics reappear with new intensity and traditional social safeguards have been undermined. However, these suppressive conditions force the narrator toward both physical and psychological forms of resistance, marking the initial stages of her emerging consciousness and evolving sense of autonomy.

The tension arising from the Spaniard's gaze necessitates an exploration of the male gaze and its role in structuring gendered power relations. In patriarchal systems, women's value is often tied to their bodies and external appearance. Within such hierarchies, the belief that a woman's worth depends on her physical allure pressures women to conform to beauty standards. Yet these standards are shaped less by genuine appreciation than by shifting ideological and economic forces under patriarchy (Bozkurt, 2023, p. 175). Building on these dynamics, in this post-apocalyptic context, the male gaze intensifies, as societal collapse removes conventional safeguards and women's vulnerability becomes amplified. The moment discussed above exemplifies how the narrator is positioned within a gendered structure of visual dominance, reflecting Laura Mulvey's (1975) concept of the male gaze, according to which women are constructed as passive objects of male observation and desire. The term *male gaze* was introduced by Mulvey through her application of psychoanalytic theory and feminist film criticism to analyze how classical Hollywood cinema structures its visual language around male spectatorship. However, its relevance extends beyond cinema, offering a powerful lens for interpreting literary representations of gendered power dynamics. In Simpson's narrative, the gaze functions not merely as a way of seeing but as an enactment of control, which reinforces broader patriarchal ideologies under conditions of societal collapse. In a similar vein, E. Ann Kaplan emphasizes the asymmetrical nature of the gaze, asserting that "men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and of possession which is lacking in the female gaze" (1983, p. 31). Kaplan's formulation underscores the active and possessive nature of the male gaze, a concept vividly embodied in Simpson's post-apocalyptic narrative through the narrator's discomfort and objectification under male surveillance, reflecting deeply rooted patriarchal power relations.

As the post-apocalyptic world around them deteriorates, the couple is ultimately forced to abandon their home in London as a result of escalating looting and civil unrest. From an ecofeminist perspective, the story's shift into displacement after societal and ecological collapse highlights how post-apocalyptic settings frequently reinforce patriarchal dominance, primarily through abuse and control of women's bodies. In search of a more secure place to live, the narrator and her husband embark on a journey toward Russia, described by G. as "the new land of milk and honey since the Big Melt" (Simpson, 2009). They set out on foot, heading north in search of safety, but their journey exposes them to far-reaching scarcity, disease, and the constant threat of sexual violence—directed

toward women, as is all too predictably the case. Along their journey, they encounter a man referred to only as M., another displaced survivor whose presence becomes a turning point in the narrative. After murdering G., M. assumes control over the narrator, subjecting her to repeated sexual assault. As revealed through the narrator's diary entries, M. consistently subjects her to physical violence and engages in non-consensual sexual exploitation. The extent of this abuse is illustrated in the following statements:

September 15th. ...He's [M.] turned everything else inside out (including me)...

September 19th. ... What he does to me is horrible. I don't want to think about it. I won't think about it...

October 8th. M. beat me up yesterday. I'd tried to escape. I shan't do that again, he's too fast.

October 14th. If we run out of beans I think he might kill me for food... I'm just meat on legs to him. He bit me all over last night, hard. I'm covered in bite marks. (Simpson, 2009)

Indeed, the position assigned to women in the aftermath of social and political collapse offers the reader critical insight into the nature of gender relations that existed prior to the catastrophe. As asserted by Bethany Benkert, "[a]fter the destruction of an apocalypse, traditional patriarchal systems that were present before the disaster routinely dominate the rebuilding process" (2018, p. 39). This course of events not only highlights the persistence of patriarchal violence after the collapse of society but also shows how post-apocalyptic worlds tend to preserve and even intensify existing gender inequalities.

As a result of the ongoing sexual assaults perpetrated by M., the narrator eventually becomes pregnant. The narrator's forced pregnancy, resulting from repeated sexual assault by M., is emblematic of the loss of bodily autonomy that women endure in post-apocalyptic conditions. As stated by Majid Yar, "[a] notable and recurrent feature of post-apocalyptic fictions is the portrayal of crime in terms of sexual violence" (2015, p. 60). This observation is clearly reflected in the narrator's experience, where pregnancy is portrayed not as a source of hope or continuity, but as a terrifying and dehumanizing prospect within a collapsed social order. As already discussed earlier in relation to Maia's pregnancy and later on her death, far from being a celebration of life, the pregnancy becomes a burden that intensifies her physical vulnerability and existential despair. This feeling of dread is heightened by the memory of Maia, whose death during childbirth serves as a chilling reminder of the deadly risks that women face when reproductive labor takes place in a world devoid of infrastructure, care, and dignity. As is clear from her diary entry on *August 29th*, the narrator's trauma shows up in both her subconscious and her logical fear: "Dreamed of Maia and the Swiss Army knife and woke up crying" (Simpson, 2009). Her fear is not only of pain or death, but of bringing a child into a world where violence, scarcity, and domination have replaced any semblance of humanity. Thus, Simpson's story powerfully critiques the romanticization of maternity in survivalist narratives by showing that in a world ruled by patriarchal violence, pregnancy offers no promise of the future—only the deepening of oppression. The narrator transforms personal trauma into testimony by recording these violations in her diary, enacting a form of resistance that affirms women's right to tell their own stories despite being silenced in public life.

The narrator finally declares her agency against this background of systemic violence and forced reproduction. By the end of the story, in stark contrast to traditional portrayals in post-

apocalyptic fiction, the unnamed narrator chooses to end her pregnancy and continue her survival struggle alone: she emerges not simply as a survivor but as a complex embodiment of endurance shaped by trauma. Her ability to outwit M., her abductor, rapist, and the murderer of her partner, reveals that survival in a post-apocalyptic landscape depends not on brute strength, but on psychological resilience, strategic thinking, and a persisting will to live. In a world where societal structures have collapsed and violence has become normalized, the narrator's continued existence serves as a quiet but powerful bulwark against the patriarchal domination imposed upon her. Her defiance challenges the structures of control and gendered violence that seek to reduce her to a passive victim. However, as James Berger observes, "what survivor has survived is some trauma endowed with cultural significance—some apocalypse" (1999, p. 47). The narrator's survival, therefore, is not a triumphant resolution, but a burdened continuity—one that carries the weight of profound psychological scars and an uncertain future. Her endurance marks a refusal to submit, yet it also raises unsettling questions about what kind of life is possible after such extreme violation. The story concludes without redemption or renewal, emphasizing that survival itself may be the onset of yet another, more ambiguous struggle.

CONCLUSION

Post-apocalyptic narratives have long functioned as cultural laboratories for imagining the consequences of societal collapse, but their dominant traditions have too often centered on male experiences of catastrophe, survival, and renewal, as in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), where a father and son walk alone through a burned America. In contrast, works such as Helen Simpson's "Diary of an Interesting Year" place the female perspective within these envisioned futures into the foreground, illustrating that the consequences of collapse are not distributed equally. By sharing her personal and physical experiences, the female narrator exposes the deep imbrication of environmental destruction with violence against women: just as ecosystems are stripped and exploited, women's bodies are reduced to sites of reproduction and abuse. This dual exploitation underscores how post-apocalyptic imaginaries often reproduce the very patriarchal structures that precipitated collapse in the first place. At the same time, the narrator's testimony resists the historical silencing of women by inscribing their perspective into the record of catastrophe, compelling readers to reconsider whose stories are preserved in cultural memory. In doing so, Simpson's narrative challenges the traditional conventions of post-apocalyptic fiction, shifting its focus from heroic survival to embodied vulnerability, from masculine endurance to the fraught realities of gendered oppression. Through this lens, the apocalypse emerges not as a universal, gender-neutral event but as one in which patriarchal systems persist—and even intensify—amid environmental destruction.

In a broader sense, post-apocalyptic fiction's emphasis on the female voice offers a critical reorientation of the genre itself. These tales reveal survival as a continuous struggle with trauma, physical vulnerability, and structural injustice rather than elevating it as a triumphant return to stability. By grounding the apocalypse in the specifics of women's experiences, they challenge the abstraction of catastrophe and emphasize the ethical significance of narrative agency. In this manner, the female voice emerges not only as a testament to persistence but also as a critical form of cultural

resistance, ensuring that the memory of collapse includes the perspectives most at risk of being deleted. Simpson's narrative, in documenting gendered violence and asserting female agency, resonates with contemporary feminist movements such as #MeToo, highlighting the ongoing struggle to have women's experiences recognized and valued. These narratives invite readers to reconsider the assumptions underlying dominant accounts of disaster, questioning whose suffering is recognized and whose resilience is celebrated. They highlight the intersections of gender, power, and environment, demonstrating that the consequences of societal collapse are deeply uneven and socially mediated. Ultimately, by making women's experiences the centrepiece, post-apocalyptic fiction encourages a more inclusive and reflective approach to imagining both catastrophe and the possibilities for survival and renewal, asserting that survival itself is not merely an endpoint but a continuous process of resistance as well as an assertion of agency.

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Oktaf Yivli

Eksik Poetika

Türk Şiri Üzerine
Eleştirel Okumalar

2
BASIM



Günce Yayınları

Öykü Nasıl Okunur

Oktaf Yivli



Günce Yayınları

2
BASIM

Kirkyama

Aşk, Edebiyat ve Öteki Şeyler

Oktaf Yivli



Günce Yayınları

2
BASIM

Fabula Narratur

Öykü Üzerine
Anlatıbilimsel Okumalar

Oktaf Yivli



Günce Yayınları

