

**New American Civil Wars: Aspects of the Post-Apocalyptic Novel
in the U.S. from 2006-2019**

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Humanities

2019

Christina M. Brennan
School of Arts, Languages and Cultures

List of Contents

Abstract	4
Declaration	5
Copyright Statement	6
Acknowledgements	7
Chapter One: Introduction to New American Civil Wars: Aspects of the Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the U.S. from 2006-2019	9
1. American Civil War: A Future Conflict	9
2. The Apocalypse and the American Century	12
3. The New American Civil War Novel: Three Key Themes	18
4. Neoliberalism and the New Age of Surveillance Capitalism	20
5. The Post-Apocalypse in American Science Fiction	26
6. Conspiracy and Far-Right Nationalism in the New American Civil War Novel	32
7. Thesis Structure and Summaries of Chapters Two to Six	38
Chapter Two: ‘Can You Hear The Eagle Roar?’: Populism and American Zombies in Colson Whitehead’s <i>Zone One</i> (2011) and <i>Zombie Survival Guides</i>	43
1. Populism in American Politics	43
2. American Populism: From Reagan to <i>Fox News</i>	45
3. ‘Swimming with the Tide’: <i>Zombies Under American Phoenix</i>	54
4. Populism and Entertainment in <i>Zone One</i>	62
5. <i>Zombie Survival Guide</i> : Survival and Government during the War on Terror	72
6. Conclusion: Populism, Government and the Media	82
Chapter Three: ‘A New Cold War?’: Post-Apocalyptic Imperial Gothic and Cyber-Wars in Sandra Newman’s <i>The Country of Ice Cream Star</i> (2014) and Max Brooks’ <i>World War Z</i> (2006)	84
1. American Frontier and Cold War Borders	84
2. The Post-apocalypse and American Imperial Gothic	87
3. <i>The Country of Ice Cream Star</i> and the Post-Apocalyptic Imperial Gothic	92
4. <i>World War Z</i> : <i>Zombie Invasion</i> and Premonitions of Cyber-War	97
5. Conclusion: Imperial Gothic and American Civil War Novels	111

Chapter Four: ‘Search and Seizure’: Economic Crisis and Suburban Colonies in Lionel Shriver’s *The Mandibles* (2016) and Margaret Atwood’s *The Heart Goes Last* (2015) 113

1. Real Estate, Mortgage Debt, and the New American Civil War Novel 113
2. From Economic Crisis to Civil War: *The Mandibles* and *The Heart Goes Last* 115
3. Subprime Mortgage Crisis: Between Disaster and Dystopia 118
4. ‘Capitalist Realism’: State and Homeownership in Lionel Shriver’s *The Mandibles* 129
5. Conclusion: White, Middle-class Disillusionment 140

Chapter Five: Water Wars: Climate Change Denial in Paolo Bacigalupi’s *The Water Knife* (2015) and Chris Beckett’s *America City* (2017) 143

1. The American Civil War Novel and Climate Fiction 143
2. Generic Diversity in the Eco-Thriller Genre 145
3. American Southwest and Climate Change Denial in Paolo Bacigalupi’s *The Water Knife* (2015) 154
4. Climate Change and Presidential Elections in Chris Beckett’s *America City* (2017) 163
5. Conclusion: Insular Politics and Climate Change 169

Chapter Six: American Civil War and Revolution in Omar El Akkad’s *American War* (2017) and Christopher Brown’s *Tropic of Kansas* (2017) 171

1. New American Civil Wars 171
2. From the Historical Novel to the Revolution Novel 174
3. Civil War and Media Networks in *Tropic of Kansas* (2017) 179
4. Civil War and Revolution in Omar El Akkad’s *American War* (2017) 190
5. Conclusion: From Climate Change to Civil War 202

Conclusion: Future Civil Wars and Future Americas after 2019 205

Bibliography 212

Word count: 75,023

Abstract

Since the new millennium, major Anglophone authors, including Colson Whitehead, Max Brooks, Sandra Newman, Lionel Shriver, Margaret Atwood, Paolo Bacigalupi, Chris Beckett, Omar El Akkad and Christopher Brown have popularised post-apocalyptic genre fiction. This popularity appears to be a formal response to new challenges in the twenty-first century, triggered by global trends which range from anthropocentric global warming to globalisation.

This thesis addresses how a range of American literary and genre authors adapt a compelling set of post-apocalyptic motifs to imagine new challenges to U.S. politics in the twenty-first century. The most notable of these tropes, dating from the late 2000s to the early 2010s, is the motif of future civil war or secession in America. These texts are concerned with three additional themes or scenarios which are apparent across this canon: censorship (after states separate and information cannot be shared across closed borders); state nationalism (as states compete for resources); and partisan rhetoric (which translates into civil violence). With these three recurrent themes, this thesis proposes that the American post-apocalypse is concerned with first, a new era of partisanship in America and, second, the centrality of media to these profound trends.

Despite the global scale of these post-apocalyptic representations, their recurring landscapes are specific to America. These fictions repeatedly engage with key features of America's identity and government in the twenty-first century – from the globalised economy after the 2008 Global Financial Crisis to diplomatic tensions with nations including the Russian Federation. What does this genre revival say about the contemporary moment, especially as populism has come to define American democracy and the international order has become strained? This thesis reassesses this revival within the long history of American apocalypticism, exploring how core texts are responding to the rapidly changing dynamics of twenty-first-century politics and international relations.

As Frank Kermode observes in *The Sense of an Ending* (1966), history continually returns to the apocalypse as the symbolic motif for unfolding significant events. This thesis argues that a new phase in the post-apocalyptic imagination has emerged from American politics. This phase is marked by a long-term disillusionment with political and government institutions. This backlash is evident from the 2016 election of President Trump. However, this disillusionment had gradually emerged over the two previous decades. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis played a crucial part in changing American perceptions of its global power. This event was concurrent with the rise of the Internet as a platform for public debate. The Internet has also changed how misinformation has been deployed both within the U.S. (to stoke political disillusionment) and against U.S. international relations.

This thesis argues that the relationship between the U.S.'s uncertain global standing and the post-apocalyptic novel, shadowed by changes in mass and new media, tells an important story. It analyses a diverse range of post-apocalyptic fiction to contend that the genre is central to critiquing the relationship between media, news and American politics. Early twenty-first-century authors re-imagine the post-apocalypse in ways which anticipate and critique key features of American populism. In this canon, the post-apocalypse is driven by misinformation, the cult of personality and mainstream media engagement in partisan rhetoric. With America entering an unprecedented political era, genre fiction is potently articulating the emergence of new political trends, including 'post-truth' politics, which will become vital to rethinking the value basis of future American politics and international relations.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

Copyright Statement

- i. The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the “Copyright”) and she has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.
- ii. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made **only** in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.
- iii. The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trademarks and other intellectual property (the “Intellectual Property”) and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables (“Reproductions”), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.
- iv. Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy
(see <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=24420> in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, The University Library’s regulations.
<http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/about/regulations/>) and in The University’s policy on Presentation of Theses.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go first to my PhD supervisors, Ian Scott and J. Michelle Coghlan. They were enthusiastic about this project from the beginning and provided support through the writing and completion. I also thank Laura Doan and Monica Pearl for their feedback as panel members at various stages during the project. I am grateful to the AHRC for a doctoral award and to the University of Manchester for travel and conference awards essential to the project.

I am grateful to library staff at the University of Manchester, the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds, the Eccles Centre for American Studies at the British Library and the Boston Spa site of the British Library. Staff offered valuable help with questions relating to archives and hosted a range of useful networking events. My thanks to the Eccles Centre for a Postgraduate Research Award.

I presented various aspects of this work at conferences linked with the *British Association of American Studies* and the *British Association of Contemporary Literary Studies*. My thanks to audiences at ‘C21’ (Brighton, 2016), ‘What Happens Now’ (Lincoln, 2016), ‘Dystopia Now’ (Birkbeck, May 2017) and ‘English Shared Futures’ (Newcastle, 2017). I also depended on the encouragement of fellow PhD students in Leeds, Manchester and elsewhere. Special mention should be made to colleagues from the *U.S. Studies Online* editorial team. My thanks too to staff at the University of Manchester Graduate School for their support during submission.

The people who gave most generously of time and support were close to home. My parents were unwavering in their help. They’ve always been the first cheerleaders of my infuriating plans – even when they’re convinced that there are shorter routes to happiness. This work is for them with my deepest thanks. While writing this thesis, I perhaps never found a balance between work and life. Matt cheerfully put up with this struggle and was the most vital presence through all the daunting moments. Sometimes these moment weren’t fun; but without him nothing else would have been any fun at all.

[BLANK PAGE]

Chapter One

Introduction to New American Civil Wars: Aspects of the Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the U.S. from 2006-2019

1. American Civil War: A Future Conflict

Closed borders, warring states within the United States, a barricaded New York, and civil war between Nevada, California and Arizona. These are distinctive plot elements of a set of contemporary post-apocalyptic novels by prominent North American authors. Between 2006 and 2019, the literary prospect of future civil war in America emerged from apocalyptic representations of zombie quarantine (in Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*), currency war (Lionel Shriver's *The Mandibles*), environmental crisis (Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife*) and guerrilla warfare (Omar El Akkad's debut novel, *American War: A Novel*).¹ This thesis identifies these features as iconic plot elements of a contemporary genre of post-apocalyptic novel which it recognises and defines as the new American civil war novel. This new genre imagines an apocalypse which unfolds through the break-up or the secession of the United States. The novels examined in this thesis are especially prescient for the current decade which, according to scholarly commentary published after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, has redefined the national consensus on American politics and the international order since the end of the Cold War.²

However, these novels are not predominantly concerned with the national, political or cultural legacy of the original American Civil War (1861-65). Indeed,

¹ Colson Whitehead, *Zone One* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011). Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife* (New York: Orbit Books, 2015). Margaret Atwood, *The Heart Goes Last* (New York: Virago, 2015). Lionel Shriver, *The Mandibles* (London: The Borough Press, 2016). Christopher Brown, *Tropic of Kansas* (New York: Harper Voyager: 2017).

² Examples of commentary, which are cited throughout this thesis, include G. John Ikenberry, 'The End of the Liberal International Order', *International Affairs*, 94 (2018), 7-23; Barbara Brodman and James E. Doan, 'Introduction', in *Utopia and Dystopia in the Age of Trump: Images from Literature and Visual Arts* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), 1-7 (p. 5); and Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 17-18.

alternative histories of the Civil War have been a prominent American mass-market genre since the 1960s and 1970s.³ Instead, a shared and consistent preoccupation with a future U.S.-facing civil war, often occurring within a hyper-mediatised and digitised era, unifies the selected novelists examined in this thesis. This new literary genre imagines a future civil war generated by specific political and cultural crises of the late 2000s and early 2010s. It is this thesis's argument that this literary prospect has a uniquely sensitive relationship with specific points of political and cultural tension during the first two formative decades of the twenty-first century. Its diverse and compelling texts, adapting a wide range of post-apocalyptic conventions, are concerned with a set of historical and contemporary trends in North America: from the immediate consequences of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 (in *The Mandibles: A Family, 2029-47*, 2016) to the ubiquity of 'fake news' (in *Zone One*, 2011) and the rise of rhetoric favouring protectionism (in *The Water Knife*, 2015, and *American War*, 2017).

One of the most notable trends in twenty-first-century literature in America, as elsewhere, has been the clear embrace of 'genre' fiction conventions (in speculative, horror, fantasy and science-fiction) by 'literary' fiction (formally associated with literary realism).⁴ Furthermore, the popularity of the post-apocalyptic novel, as a critical and commercial literary subject, is certainly not restricted to North America. This thesis explores the new American civil war novel as a contemporary sub-genre in this ongoing and national literary tradition which responds to the profound turmoil

³ As discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis, 'American Civil War and Revolution in Omar El Akkad's *American War* (2017) and Christopher Brown's *Tropic of Kansas* (2017)', Madhu Dubey provides a concise overview of this trend, and its relationship to the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, in 'Counterfactual Narratives of the Civil War and Slavery', *Journal of American Studies*, 52 (2018), 1-24.

The original American Civil War (1861-1865) was a vast political and national crisis which had a profound impact on American literary culture. Literary scholars, such as James Dawes, recognise how the civil war influenced cultural representations of key events over subsequent centuries, including the First and Second World Wars along with the Cold War. For critical discussions of the cultural and literary legacy of the American Civil War see James Dawes, *The Language of War: Literature and Culture in the U.S. from the Civil War to World War II* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002) and Randall Fuller, *From Battlefields Rising: How the Civil War Transformed American Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴ Pivotal work by literary critics, including Theodore Martin, has recognised the cultural and political significance of this Anglophone embrace of genre fiction and the questions which it poses for formal categories of literature. *Contemporary Drift: Genre, Historicism, and the Problem of the Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

of the political era in America after the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. Indeed, with this focus, this thesis identifies a new decisive phase in the long story of the American apocalyptic imagination. It also identifies a compelling, and still critically neglected, national trend within this body of post-apocalyptic fiction which focuses on the specific prospect of U.S. secession and civil war. Evoking dark visions of patriotism and protectionism, these novels envision a future nightmare which is specific to America – a fractured U.S. nation which, angered by internal hostilities, is on the verge of secession and a danger to its own democracy and future. The symbolic features of these novels interrogate the polarised character of American national politics as well as conflicts ensuing from volatile international relations after the Global War on Terror. The prospect of the end of the War on Terror is significant for these novels. They make direct references and allusions to events including the Arab Spring (2010-2011), as well as hostile diplomatic tensions with other major powers including China and the Russian Federation.

Ultimately, new American civil war novels expand their focus on the 2008 financial crisis to interrogate the political ramifications of the crisis as they intersect with cultural transformations in professional, mass and new media. From economic crisis to climate change denial and from ‘fake news’ to the prospect of a ‘New Cold War’ – these are the formidable subjects for this new post-apocalyptic canon. Presented with these interrelated literary and political futures, the new American civil war novel invites readers to question profound transformations in contemporary American politics and international relations. With this focus, this thesis seeks to offer the first extended exploration of the post-apocalyptic genre through the perspective of anxieties and conflicts in the decade before the Trump presidency. As this thesis argues and concludes, the new American civil war novel’s most innovative feature is its recognition of the critical role of traditional and new media in American democracy. With closed borders reflecting polarised relations between truth and democracy, and between politics and global communication, it argues that the new American civil war novel has become a compelling literary form for America’s democracy as, in the decade before President Trump’s inauguration, it has leant towards populism and protectionism.

2. The Apocalypse and the American Century

Addressing the new American civil war novel, as a designated and recognisable contemporary genre of the novel, it is necessary for this introduction to review the political and national symbolism of the apocalypse to the U.S. cultural imagination. This introduction will then discuss the relationship between this symbolism of the apocalypse and post-apocalypse and the key themes which this thesis recognises as pivotal to the new American civil war novel. It will then link the genre of the new American civil war novel with the political period in the U.S. between the years 2006 and 2019. Identifying a formative relationship between conspiracy culture and Internet culture, the introduction will also identify three key themes which are pivotal to the new American civil war novel: censorship across closed borders, state nationalism and partisan rhetoric. As observed by Douglas Robinson, the apocalypse is a potent biblical concept which has evolved to reflect America's cultural and generational perceptions of its own place and expansion within world history.⁵ For authors writing in the Early National (1776-1840) and Antebellum (1812-1861) periods, the annihilation of civilization was a fictional prospect which could be used to interrogate the ideologies of different historical moments. However, the most formative period for the new American civil war novel, aside from the immediate events of the early twenty-first century, is the twentieth century or, as it became known after the close of the Second World War, the 'American Century'. This American Century, characterised by America's economic, military and hegemonic dominance on the world stage, was heralded by Henry Luce, in his landmark essay for *Life Magazine* (1941), as the century with the most 'promise for human progress and happiness'.⁶ This optimism seemed valid, especially during the promise engendered by Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1930s 'New Deal'.⁷ However, as American economic and military

⁵ Douglas Robinson, *American Apocalypses: the Image of the End of the World in American Literature* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. xi.

⁶ Henry Luce, 'American Century', *Life Magazine*, February 1941; rpt. *Diplomatic History*, 23 (1999), 159-71 (p. 167)
< <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mlassite/discussions261/luce.pdf> > [accessed 15th June 2019].

⁷ For a detailed discussion of the significance of FDR's New Deal in the context of the American Century see Walter LaFeber, Richard Polenberg and Nancy Woloch, *The American*

proress became an international reality, U.S. national politics became susceptible to rhetoric which warned against the loss of this new dominance. This influential argument is most clearly articulated by Matthew Avery Sutton who, with reference to Luce's essay, concludes that U.S. status, especially during the Cold War, fuelled a revival in apocalyptic prediction:

[Luce] and evangelicals both blended faith with country and demanded that the United States take a new, bold, and preeminent place on the world stage. Atomic weapons, the birth of Israel, the rise of the UN, the developing Cold War all helped make the American Century the century of apocalyptic politics as well.⁸

By this logic, U.S. global dominance, contested by the Soviet Union, fuelled apocalyptic fearmongering that American prestige could be irrevocably lost.

Political and economic commentaries, represented by Giovanni Arrighi's ambitious study, have documented how post-war U.S. dominance relied upon institutions in global finance (i.e., the World Bank), America's oil industry (as a key factor in U.S. conflicts in Latin America and the Middle East) and U.S. military power.⁹ Whilst U.S. dominance continues to be debated after the millennium, international relations scholars, including G. John Ikenberry, agree that 'Pax

Century: A History of the United States Since 1941, Volume 2, Seventh Edition (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 173-75.

⁸ Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017), pp. 295-6. Similar studies, cited in later chapters of this thesis, include Lawrence Buell's *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) and Lisa Vox's *Existential Threats: American Apocalyptic Beliefs in the Technological Era* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

⁹ Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994), p. x. As Arrighi summarises, it was during the 'material expansion of the 1950s and 1960s' that 'the dominance of the "new" US regime translated in a world-wide expansion of trade and production'. As U.S. investment in oil resources was threatened over the late-twentieth century, the U.S increased its military commitments, including the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Vietnam War (1955-1975). Immanuel Wallerstein, 'The Eagle has Crashed Landed', *Foreign Policy Magazine*, 11th November 2011 < <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/11/the-eagle-has-crash-landed/> > [accessed 16th May 2019].

Americana’ – as ‘the period in which the United States wielded the most power on the world stage’ – is being forced to adapt to new economic, diplomatic and environmental crises, including ‘the global financial crisis of 2008, which [has] widened economic inequality and fuelled grievances across the advanced industrial democracies’.¹⁰

This thesis will not seek to rehearse interdisciplinary arguments about the scale and timeframe of this American Century. As Walter LaFeber observes, the “‘American Century’” has been a term used by many, in various contexts, and with varying definitions’ to address social, economic and geopolitical questions.¹¹ Instead, in light of the key events highlighted above, this thesis follows American literary and cultural criticism which analyses how apocalyptic visions have been re-framed to suit the terms of this American Century.¹² This relationship preoccupied scholars writing before the new millennium. As Mary Manjikian argues, U.S. dominance was the ironic impetus behind a substantial canon of late-twentieth-century American popular novels, films and texts which voiced anticipatory fears about the end of U.S. dominance. This comprehensive canon includes Cold War fiction depicting a post- nuclear-war U.S., Western themed titles from the 1980s and ‘present-day apocalypics’, including such novels as *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy, *The Pesthouse* (2007) by Jim Crace and *The Passage* (2010) by Justin Cronin. Manjikian’s study points to the ways in which ‘imagining the demise of one’s [the U.S.’s] empire serves both psychological and political ends and is a useful way for moving beyond the situatedness of one’s own experience and coming to a broader understanding of the hegemon’s significance [...] in the international system’.¹³

This apocalyptic tradition in America is not specific to the latter decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, Manjikian is indebted to substantial work in Gothic studies which, drawing comparisons between the early 1900s and early 2000s, explores the ways in which an array of *fin-de-siècle* Victorian and Edwardian literature imagined

¹⁰ G. John Ikenberry, ‘The Plot Against American Foreign Policy Can the Liberal Order Survive?’, *Foreign Policy Magazine*, May/June 2017, 1-7 (pp. 1-2).

¹¹ Walter LaFeber, ‘Illusions of an American Century’, in *The Short American Century: A Post-Mortem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 158-86 (p. 161).

¹² Mary Manjikian, *Apocalypse and Post-Politics: The Romance of the End* (New York: Lexington Books, 2012).

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 7-9.

the prospect of British imperial decline.¹⁴ Scholars in American Studies, including Manjikian, have built upon this crucial work by identifying the apocalypse and post-apocalypse as the dark *doppelgänger* of the American Century. As this thesis addresses literary works from the perspective of the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, it is especially important to recognise literary precedents which are preoccupied with the material and political legacy of U.S. dominance. This focus is especially true of the Cold War fictions which depict post-nuclear-war America vulnerable to invasion by other nations. David Seed argues as post-nuclear-war U.S. fictions are part of a ‘long tradition in American writing’ which explores the ‘underside of manifest destiny’ as the belief that U.S. expansion across the North American continent was part of the nation’s divine fate.¹⁵ This tradition of ‘American invasion narratives’, as Seed calls them, dating from the early nineteenth century, anticipates a larger body of work which has endured until after the new millennium.

Dating the first ‘American invasion narrative’ to Pierton W. Dooner’s *Last Days of the Republic* (1880), which imagines U.S. invasion by a Chinese Empire, Seed argues that such narratives arise ‘during periods of anxiety about immigrant labour or nuclear supremacy’ and ‘give imaginative form to a testing out of national ideology, speculating about possible weaknesses not just in civil defence but also in presumptions about social cohesion’.¹⁶ This focus on Asian powers has a timeframe which Isiah Lavender traces across twentieth-century U.S. culture. As Lavender expands, ‘M.P. Shiel’s *The Yellow Danger* (1898) and Edward Pendray’s *The Earth-Tube* (1929) are the best examples of earlier stories while [Ridley] Scott’s *Blade Runner* and William Gibson’s ground-breaking *Neuromancer* (1984) reinvent the supremacy of the Orient’.¹⁷ However, alongside fears of ‘Yellow Peril’ invasion, post-

¹⁴ Most notably and leading this field, Stephen D. Arata describes how British Gothic literature, including Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), enacts a ‘pervasive narrative of reverse colonization’ where the ‘colonizer finds himself in the position of the colonized’. Stephen D. Arata, ‘The Occidental Tourist: “Dracula” and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization’, *Victorian Studies*, 33 (1990), 621-45 (p. 623).

¹⁵ David Seed, ‘Constructing America’s Enemies: The Invasions of the USA’, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 37 (2007), 64-84 (p. 64).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁷ Isiah Lavender, *Race in American Science Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), p. 13.

apocalyptic worlds have offered a desirable entry-point into fantasises of American adventures and settlement. With reference to commercial titles, including Leigh Brackett's *The Long Tomorrow* (1955), Pat Frank's *Alas Babylon* (1959) and Walter J. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), M. Keith Booker notably argues that the post-apocalypse became 'a new version of [the] American frontier' with 'renewed possibilities for adventure [...] no longer available in the routinized world of contemporary America'.¹⁸

This late-twentieth cultural and political context is significant for the contemporary period in which the novels examined in this thesis have been published. This thesis recognises the new American civil war novel as a profound development in this national literary tradition. Whilst inheriting iconic tropes from earlier literary periods, its canon is concerned with three key themes which, as this thesis argues, reflect a set of transformations in contemporary American politics and foreign policy in the decade after the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. More particularly, these novels are often concerned with the cultural and political, rather than the financial, legacy of the crisis. Indeed, the following thesis chapters, engage with pivotal work by Anglophone literary scholars, including Heather J. Hicks, Andrew Tate, Diletta De Cristofaro, among others, who interrogate the relationship between the contemporary post-apocalypse and the transnational history of apocalyptic discourse.¹⁹

However, whereas Anglophone post-apocalyptic narratives, in De Cristofaro's description, 'target the nexus between apocalypticism, (neo-)colonialism, global capital and neoliberalism, and the Anthropocene', this sub-genre of American post-apocalyptic fiction depicts extreme conditions of U.S secession and civil war – conditions which reverse U.S. prestige and force characters to confront the future after the end of the 'American Century'.²⁰ One central premise of this thesis is that the

¹⁸ M. Keith Booker, *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War: American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism, 1946-1964* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2001), p. 65.

¹⁹ Heather J. Hicks, *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Andrew Tate, *Apocalyptic Fiction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017). Diletta De Cristofaro, "'Time, no arrow, no boomerang, but a concertina": *Cloud Atlas* and the anti-apocalyptic critical temporalities of the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 59 (2018), 243-57.

²⁰ De Cristofaro, "'Time, no arrow, no boomerang, but a concertina'", p. 245.

apocalypse, as a story of biblical redemption which was essential to the founding of colonial and Early National America, has experienced major secular transformations over subsequent American generations. Consequently, the literary and cultural symbolism of the apocalypse, as reflected in a national tradition inherited from early nineteenth-century authors including Charles Brockden Brown, Washington Irving and James Fennimore Cooper, has evolved over time to reflect American perceptions of its own national unity and international prestige. As Heather J. Hicks further recognises in her study of the post-apocalyptic novel in the twenty-first-century, this development became especially pertinent after the millennium, as the genre evolved to ‘reflect a set of historical and epistemological transformations – the globalized economy intensified by the end of the Cold War; the international recognition of the menace of anthropogenic global warming; [and] the attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror’.²¹

Writing in the year 2019, with the prevalence of neologisms including ‘post-truth’, ‘alternative facts’ and ‘fake news’, it is clear that public and academic commentators agree that America is witnessing the early phase of a new political epoch which is undermining and questioning categories of professional and new media.²² Alongside the ascendancy of Donald Trump, there has been a reactionary shift in political iconography and spectacle which, as Matthew d’Ancona describes, follows the depletion of public trust after the 2008 financial crisis.²³ With rising economic nationalism, captured by the banner of ‘America First’, the resurgence of far-right movements and increased competition from Russia and China have contributed to a new political era in the U.S. which Alex Ross describes as fostering an ominous epoch of ‘American authoritarianism’.²⁴ This thesis argues that the new American civil war novel developed its three key and identifiable themes in the

²¹ Hicks, *Post-Apocalyptic Novel*, p. 2.

²² In addition to studies cited in the first footnote of this introduction, see Michiko Kakutani, *The Death of Truth: Notes on Falsehood in the Age of Trump* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2018); and Matthew d’Ancona, *Post-Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back* (New York: Ebury Press, 2017), p. 23.

²³ d’Ancona, *Post-Truth*, p. 23.

²⁴ Alex Ross, ‘The Frankfurt School Knew Trump was Coming’, *New Yorker*, 5th December 2016 < <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-frankfurt-school-knew-trump-was-coming> > [accessed 17th May 2019].

formative decade before these events. As the decade progressed, the more violent imagery of the genre, including civil war, became more acute with titles published in the late 2010s, including El Akkad's *American War* and Brown's *Tropic of Kansas*.

3. The New American Civil War Novel: Three Key Themes

This section will address how these three key themes historicize this profound moment in American political history. Centring on U.S. secession into separate states, this thesis identifies three key themes in the future American civil war novel: censorship (after states separate and information cannot be shared across closed borders); state nationalism (which encourages states to compete for limited resources); and inflammatory or partisan rhetoric (which often translates into civil violence). Censorship is the first key theme for these future American civil war texts. Within these texts, as captured by El Akkad's *American War*, censorship leads to the suppression of oral testimonies and official documents which reveal the scale of internal hostilities. Set in the early-twenty-second century, the novel's protagonist, journalist Benjamin Chestnut, reconstructs an authoritative narrative of the Second American Civil War:

I've spent my professional career studying this country's bloody war with itself. I've written academic papers and magazine articles, headlined myriad symposiums and workshops. I've studied all the surviving source documents: congressional reports, oral histories, harrowing testimony of the plague's survivors. I've reconstructed the infamous events of Reunification Day.²⁵

²⁵ El Akkad, *American War*, p. 4. El Akkad (b. 1982) has extensive experience as a journalist, covering the U.S. War in Afghanistan, Guantanamo Bay military trials and the Arab Spring. His *American War* has been compared to Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004) in which an alternative U.S. is imagined when Charles Lindbergh defeats Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1940 Presidential elections. Michiko Katutani, 'A Haunting Debut Looks Ahead to a Second American Civil War', *The New York Times*, 27th March 2017 < <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/27/books/review-american-war-omar-el-akkad.html> > [accessed 25th July 2017].

Inaccurate information about fossil fuels is the key obstacle to U.S. reunification; and ‘lying’ or ‘fancy Northern journalists’, as they are perceived in the South, are designated as traitors to America’s national confidence.²⁶ Distrust of formal media or journalistic platforms is a recurrent feature of the new American civil war novel. The novels in this thesis make tangible a nascent distrust of news sources which, between the late 2000s and early 2010s, has arisen through the national and global beneficiaries of what Shoshana Zuboff, as the most prominent critic of this trend, has called ‘surveillance capitalism’.²⁷ The presence of closed borders, as barriers which disrupt the transmission of accurate news, adapts motifs from earlier invasion and post-apocalyptic genres.

The presence of closed borders means that news and intelligence are not shared between separate U.S. states. Closed borders also lead to censorship and new forms of legal sabotage and blackmail across state borders. These borders highlight the two final generic themes: state nationalism (in which state populations are encouraged to identify with their state rather than the U.S. Union) and inflammatory rhetoric under the guise of patriotism. In text after text, the iconic feature of a civil-war torn U.S. anticipates political twenty-first-century sympathy in the U.S. for isolationist rhetoric and tendencies. These fictions crucially address a key political trend which promises to define a new generation of culture wars: namely, the collapse of the democratic promise of the ‘digital revolution’ (first promised by the dot-com bubble of the 1990s) into insular brands of populism which, according to Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, are sowing the seeds of ‘authoritarian values’ in twenty-first-century America.²⁸ The new American civil war novel foreshadows current issues which are bringing about a radical shift within the U.S.-led world order. These texts depict events which lead to the irreversible dissolution of the Union: corporations attempt to

²⁶ El Akkad, *American War*, p. 75.

²⁷ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2018).

²⁸ Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, pp. 17-18. For work on how digital networking became the basis for ‘renewed utopianism’ (or ‘cyber-utopianism’) in the 1990s, see studies including Mark Featherstone’s *Planet Utopia: Utopia, Dystopia, and Globalisation* (London: Routledge, 2017) p. 147; and Lincoln Dahlberg, ‘Libertarian Cyber-Utopianism and Global Digital Networks’, in *Globalization and Utopia: Critical Essays*, ed. Patrick Hayden and Chamsy el-Ojeili (London: Routledge, 2009), 176-90.

privatise state authorities; politicians use inflammatory rhetoric against rival states and the U.S. loses its status as the world's leading power.

With this focus on new American civil wars, this thesis argues that these texts provide a rigorous vantage point from which to study the revival of the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel and that they will also serve as a fruitful springboard for addressing generational questions, including the future of American democracy in the globalised and digital age.

4. Neoliberalism and the New Age of Surveillance Capitalism

The new American civil war is a genre concerned with the legacy of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. This section will outline the immediate political and economic context which is formative for the development of the new American civil war novel. This crisis, beginning with the emergency liquidation of Lehman Brothers financial services on 15th September 2008, was an event which engendered long reaching and destructive consequences both in the U.S. and on the global stage. In the ensuing decade, the crisis has become central to influential scholarly accounts of U.S. literature and culture. Criticism in this field of study includes Arne's de Boever's analysis of 'finance fiction' (with titles including Adam Haslett's *Union Atlantic* [2010] and Cristina Alger's *The Darlings* [2012]) as well as Annie McClanahan's study of how U.S. culture – across American fiction, photojournalism and horror cinema – interrogates the precarious character of financial transactions.²⁹ Echoing McClanahan's observation that U.S. culture is shadowed by a 'potentially terminal crisis in capitalism', the category of the new American civil war novel imagines grave and austere national conditions which have been compromised by national debt.³⁰

Yet the new American civil war novel is not primarily concerned with American debt culture or the intensification of finance capitalism. Instead, it reflects a decisive, reactionary shift in America's political culture which, as detailed in the

²⁹ Arne de Boever, 'Creatures of Panic', *European Journal of English Studies*, 19 (2015), 24-38. Annie McClanahan, *Dead Pledges: Debt, Crisis, and Twenty-First-Century Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), p. 4.

³⁰ McClanahan, *Dead Pledges*, p. 103.

section of this introduction titled ‘Conspiracy and Far-Right Nationalism in the New American Civil War Novel’, originally developed from the depletion of public trust in U.S. government after the 2008 crisis. The U.S. government bailout of Wall Street, or the ‘Emergency Economic Stabilization Act (2008)’ which paid \$700 billion in taxpayers’ money, was a focal point for this loss of public trust. The 2008 financial crisis could, in theory, have led to and proved the need for a higher level of accountability in global finance capitalism. However, inversely, the crisis only made visible capital’s ability to generate profit out of crisis. According to Andrew Hoberk, ‘what has collapsed (or rather failed to collapse) [...] is capitalism: not only in the sense suggested by the 2008 banking crisis and the recession it engendered, but also in the sense that the[y] [...] embody the breakdown of capitalism’s fundamental premise of eternal growth’.³¹ It is this decreased accountability of capital, and its ease of movement under a phase of what commentators are calling ‘digital capitalism’, which receives the most profound attention in the new American civil war novel.

Consequently, an examination of this ‘digital capitalism’, as a condition encompassing the expansion of anonymised capital under neoliberal economics, provides a useful starting point for examining the genre of the new American civil war novel. This condition anticipates the anti-establishment sensibility which has become prominent in politics under Trump. This sensibility cannot solely be attributed to economic dissatisfaction. Definitions of neoliberalism vary but David Harvey’s offers an influential perspective about the legacy of neoliberal economics on the state:

Neoliberalism is [...] a theory of political-economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property

³¹ Andrew Hoberk, ‘The Post-Apocalyptic Present’, *Public Books*, 15th June 2015 < <https://www.publicbooks.org/the-post-apocalyptic-present/> > [accessed 19th May 2019].

rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets.³²

In America, as the founding country for the neoliberal Chicago School of Economics, explanations of why the U.S. made the neoliberal turn have focused on the crisis of capital which weakened the Keynesian model of welfare states, the 1973 oil embargo and the ‘stagflation’ of the economy (with high unemployment and high inflation) in the 1970s.³³ And yet, as critical theorist Wendy Brown shows, neoliberal rationality has not just killed off aspirations like social mobility but has also undermined the sovereignty of the nation-state itself.³⁴ As she explains, as the ‘transnational flows of capital, people, ideas, goods’ have undermined the nation-state, ‘neoliberal rationality’ recognises no authority or jurisdiction apart from ‘entrepreneurial decision-makers (large and small)’ which, disregarding liberal commitments, only recognise ‘market criteria’ and demote ‘the political sovereign to managerial status’.³⁵

It is this legacy of neoliberalism which is the key focal theme for the new American civil war novel. The genre, as this thesis argues, is concerned with the relationship between this neoliberal economics and the Internet as facilitated by the digital expansion of Information and Communication Technologies.³⁶ As Daniel

³² Harvey, *History of Neoliberalism*, p. 2. David Deacon, in his article on “‘Some Unholy Alloy’”: Neoliberalism, Digital Modernity, and the Mechanics of Globalized Capital in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Counselor*’, offers a useful explication of Harvey’s definition which highlights ‘how capital could organize us, dictate space, and how human beings orientate themselves (socially, culturally, economically, and physically)’. *European Journal of American Studies*, 12 (2017) < <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/12364> > [accessed 15th July 2019].

³³ See *The Elgar Companion to the Chicago School of Economics*, ed. Ross B. Emmett (Northampton, MA and Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2010); and Lanny Ebenstein, *Chicagonomics. The Evolution of Chicago Free Market Economics* (New York: St Martin’s Press). For the 1973 oil crisis, see *Oil Shock. The 1973 Crisis and its Economic Legacy*, ed. Elisabetta Bini, Giuliano Garavini and Federico Romero (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016).

³⁴ Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2009).

³⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 34-5.

³⁶ Schiller, *Digital Capitalism*, p. xiii.

Schiller argues, the invisible coercion of neoliberal economics is nowhere more apparent than within the ‘political and social underpinnings of the Internet’. Schiller’s claim that ‘the Internet comprises nothing less than the central production [...] of an increasingly supranational market system’ is now more pertinent since it has become a platform beyond democratic accountability.³⁷ Reflecting on technologized capital, Judy Wajcman further asserts that this mode of digital capitalism requires ‘us to leave behind the old dichotomies about technologies being either inherently liberating or enslaving. By now we should have learnt to be sceptical about both extreme positions: the messianic promise of a technologically-wrought new epoch on the one hand and a blanket rejection of dominance by machines on the other’.³⁸ These observations represent the modern phase of digital capitalism as antithetical to formal or external accountability and democracy.

It is now useful to address the concept of digital capitalism. Briefly, under this form of capitalism, data and information become products and services. As Shoshana Zuboff argues, a new economic logic, driven by the ‘competitive dynamics’ of new social media markets, aims to extract commercial value from users’ data and computer usage. Zuboff traces surveillance capitalism’s inception to a ‘moment of emergency’ in Silicon Valley after the burst of the dot-com bubble in 2000. In response to this emergency, Google decided to ‘suspend its principles’.³⁹ It combined the company’s user-search data with their data-extraction capabilities to predict human behaviour online. Silicon Valley generated a vast ‘asymmetry of knowledge’. As Zuboff claims:

This unprecedented concentration of knowledge produces an equally unprecedented concentration of power: asymmetries that must be understood as the *unauthorized privatization of the division of learning in society*. This means that powerful private interests are in control of the definitive principle of social ordering [...]. We have an institutional disfiguring of these huge asymmetries of knowledge and power which are antithetical to democracy.⁴⁰

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Judy Wajcman, *Pressed for Time: The Acceleration of Life in Digital Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2015), p. 3.

³⁹ Zuboff, *Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, p. 27.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 67.

This power struggle, based on competition for data and information, signals that democracy itself is in crisis. For Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris and Hal Roberts, writing in their study *Networked Propaganda* (2018), ‘technological processes [move] beyond the control of any person or country – the convergence of social media, algorithm news curation, bots, artificial intelligence – were creating echo chambers’ to reinforce biases and overwhelm capacities, especially in the U.S. and Europe, to ‘govern [...] as reasonable democracies’.⁴¹ *Networked Propaganda* is one study in a growing field which recognises that Trump’s victory was only a single event which contributed to the long-term anti-democratic tendency in the interconnected world to reduce human behaviour to data and neoliberal profit.⁴² When Zuboff declares that ‘data is the new oil’, she is provocatively arguing that a new period has begun after the American ‘petro-culture’ of the late-twentieth-century – the period in which the politics of oil, and of its extraction, were essential to understanding late capitalism in America. It is data and information which will direct twenty-first-century capitalism; and it is this phenomenon which demands narrative response as a decisive phase of this ‘third modernity capitalism’ reshaping U.S. and Western society.⁴³

This thesis argues that this phase of capitalism is significant to the development of the new American civil war novel. Conceptions of the apocalypse and post-apocalypse have consistently addressed the relationship between capital and technology. Cultural critics have identified an inventory of terms which reflect the abstraction and destructive potential of global capital. These include, most notably, the ‘technological apocalypse’, the ‘ironic apocalypse’ and the ‘capitalist apocalypse’.⁴⁴ Of these terms, Lee Quinby’s understanding of the ‘technological

⁴¹ Yochai Benkler, Robert Faris and Hal Roberts, *Network Propaganda. Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 4.

⁴² Other notable commentaries include Brian L. Ott, ‘The age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the politics of debasement’, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 34 (2016), 59-68; Michael Barkun, ‘President Trump and the “Fringe”’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 29 (2017), 437-43.

⁴³ Zuboff, *Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, p. 14.

⁴⁴ Lee Quinby identifies the ‘ironic apocalypse’ as ‘the dystopian view that history has exhausted itself’, and ‘[t]he irony is that we live on beyond morality or meaning’. *Anti-*

apocalypse’ is the most useful for this thesis. By Quinby’s account, ‘both divine and technological expressions of apocalypse have been used in this century to revitalize a sense of “America” as a moral exemplar: a savior nation and a beacon of global democracy’.⁴⁵

By contrast, whilst similarly tied to U.S. nationhood, the new American civil war novel depicts technology and global communication as an antithesis to this democracy. The new American civil war novel is a distinctly twenty-first-century contribution which interrogates this anti-democratic expansion of surveillance and data extraction, as empowered by digital capitalism. The challenge of addressing new features of twenty-first-century modernity is the key impetus behind the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel which, as Heather J. Hicks suggests, has become the ‘sine qua non of modern fiction’.⁴⁶ Boundaries are comparably fragile in these post-apocalyptic texts which imagine secession, with violent and policed borders breached repeatedly by rumour and conspiracy. Equally, the efforts of survivors – most notably journalists, including Benjamin Chestnut in *American War* – seek meticulously, and perilously, to retrace the causes of secession and conflict. Together, this narrative enables a distinct critique which asks how (and whether) it is possible to oppose online networks of anti-democratic persuasion.

The central paradox which the new American civil war novel addresses is that as global communication becomes more integrated, and access to global news and intelligence increases, the U.S. becomes more susceptible to insular conflict. This new American civil war novel, therefore, traces and critiques key themes which promise to define twenty-first century political life: how technology is exceeding accountability and how communication is becoming a weapon of subversion and sabotage. The following section positions the new American civil war novel within an established

Apocalypse: Exercises in Genealogical Criticism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. xvi. Evan Calder Williams characterises the ‘capitalist apocalypse’ as ‘the possibility of grasping how the global economic order and its social relations depend upon the production and exploitation of the undifferentiated’. *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse: Luciferian Marxism* (Winchester and Washington DC: Zer0 Books, 2010), p. 8.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. xix.

⁴⁶ Hicks, *Post-Apocalyptic Novel*, p. 4.

literary tradition of American science-fiction which negotiates the overlapping, but still not synonymous genres of post-apocalyptic and dystopian literature.

5. The Post-Apocalypse in American Science Fiction

In the *Cambridge Companion to American Science Fiction* (2015), Gerry Canavan and Eric Carl Link argue that ‘the science fictional imagination’ has been ‘fundamental to the arc of history across the so-called American Century’. This was a century ‘born in Edison’s laboratories and Ford’s factories’ and it was their expanding visions of possibility which fuelled American science fiction.⁴⁷ This is not to forget, however, the more enduring place of the apocalypse – and the prospect of apocalyptic redemption – in the American national imagination. David Ketterer argues that the Christian tradition of apocalypse gave birth to key aspects of the American Frontier.⁴⁸ According to Ketterer, the spiritual vision of New Jerusalem laid out in the Book of Revelation inspired the idea of the Manifest Destiny (or the ‘Redeemer Nation’) which is destined to spread freedom across the North American continent in the name of Puritan Christianity.

American apocalypticism is one form of the perceived change and crisis which generates Western narratives of apocalyptic end-times. As Frank Kermode writes in *A Sense of An Ending* (1964):

What is interesting, though, is the way in which this knowledge is related to apocalypse [... and] establishes the language of an elect; and the way in which writers [...] are willing to go along, arguing that the rate of change implies revolution or schism, and that this is a perpetual requirement; that the stage of transition, like the whole of time in an earlier revolution, has become *endless*.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Gerry Canavan and Eric Carl Link, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to American Science Fiction*, ed. Eric Carl Link and Gerry Canavan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 1-17 (p. 4).

⁴⁸ David Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1974), pp. 15-16.

⁴⁹ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1966; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 101.

For Kermode's field-defining study, the apocalypse is one of the primary concepts for understanding the crises and trajectory of Western civilization. The contradiction which Kermode identifies in the apocalypse – the rebirth which follows destruction – has provided a central vantage point for formative narratives of American nationhood.

However, with the beginning of the twentieth century, American ruralism became secondary to urbanisation as the predominant theme of American apocalyptic fiction. Indeed, whilst British science-fiction anticipated its own 'Golden Age' of science fiction with novels including H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895), the U.S. produced correspondent texts which included Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column* (1890) and, eventually, Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* (1912).⁵⁰ As Brent Ryan Bellamy observes, Donnelly's novel depicts an oligarchic dictatorship of the United States. Its suppression of a working-class revolt led by a resistance movement called the 'Brotherhood of Destruction', sheds light upon social, political and historical anxieties regarding urbanisation and migration – the potentially threatening movements perceived to be undermining America's rural innocence and destiny.⁵¹ Yet

it was the Cold War, and the threat of the nuclear bomb, which introduced a new set of apocalyptic visions. These fictions, as they are listed below, return to speculative themes from the formative period of Nuclear Age apocalyptic fiction during the 1950s and 1960s. Such novels of the early nuclear age include Wilson Tucker's *The Long Loud Silence* (1952), Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) Brackett's *The Long Tomorrow* (1955), Frank's *Alas Babylon* (1959) and Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), as well as iterations of the post-apocalyptic novel which tailed literary modernism in the late 1950s, most notably Harry Harrison's *Make Room! Make Room!* (1955). As David Seed observes, these Cold War speculative fictions were not 'futuristic fantasies' but were texts especially sensitive to germane themes of nuclear technology and Cold War American militarism. These texts performed, as Seed concludes, a 'role of negative prophecy where the dreaded

⁵⁰ Ignatius Donnelly, *Caesar's Column: A Story of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: F.J. Shulte and Company, 1890).

⁵¹ Brent Ryan Bellamy, 'Residues of Now: The Cultures and Politics of Contemporary U.S. Post-Apocalyptic Novels', Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Alberta, 2014, p. 10.

outcomes are envisaged [...] in such a way that the reader is induced to ponder the present signs of disaster'.⁵²

During the latter Cold War, it became a commonplace observation that the 'postmodern condition' encouraged a post-apocalyptic sensibility, heralding 'the end of the grand narratives of modernity', assumptions of scientific progress and the death knell for religious and secular humanism.⁵³ During this period of cultural postmodernism, critical and generic distinctions between the apocalypse and post-apocalypse became most prominent. As Bellamy notes, the term 'post-apocalypse', unlike the tradition of biblical apocalyptic rapture, has profound secular symbolism: 'on the one hand, the apocalypse denotes the destruction of current forms and a revelation, even a transcending of limits; on the other, the post- indicates that something remains after the term it modifies'.⁵⁴

It is necessary, in this introduction, to clarify that this thesis examines a set of post-apocalyptic texts which are distinct from the Christian tradition of apocalyptic revelation. As the theologian Catherine Keller recognises, the biblical Book of Revelation has offered a multi-generational and 'multi-dimensional, culture-pervading spectrum of ideological assumptions' which have permeated secular Western culture.⁵⁵ However, this thesis focuses on a set of novels with primarily secular concerns.⁵⁶ Indeed, it contributes to a still-expanding body of commentary on the post-apocalypse after postmodernism. Cultural criticism of the post-apocalypse steadily developed over the two decades before the new millennium. Most notably, James Berger's *After the End* (1999) and Teresa Heffernan's *Post-Apocalyptic*

⁵² David Seed, *American Science Fiction and the Cold War: Literature and Film* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 9.

⁵³ For a key discussion and literary review of the relationship between postmodernism and apocalypticism see Monica Germanà and Aris Mousoutzani, 'Introduction', in *Apocalyptic Discourse in Contemporary Culture: Post-Millennial Perspectives on the End of the World* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1-23 (p. 9).

⁵⁴ Bellamy, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Boston: Beacon Publishing, 1996), p. xi.

⁵⁶ Richard G. Kyle, *Apocalyptic Fever: End-Time Prophecies in Modern America* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2012), p. xiii. Kyle adopts the term 'secular eschatological fictions' from Warren Wagar, *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

Culture (2008) and Heather J. Hicks' *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First-Century: Modernity Beyond Salvage* (2014) highlight important questions about the future of the genre after the new millennium. Berger argues that apocalyptic representations tend to echo the legacy of historical events, and particularly historical crises, in the late-twentieth century. Berger writes that the Holocaust and Hiroshima terminated confident assumptions about the future of Western civilisation. He concludes that 'in the late twentieth-century the unimaginable, the unspeakable, has already happened and continues to happen', thereby rendering many cultural forms, in some sense, post-apocalyptic.⁵⁷

Broadening Berger's argument, Heffernan identifies the post-apocalypse – as a motif and concept – with events beyond the immediate horrors of the mid- and late-twentieth century and, instead, interprets it within a history of Western modernity which dates to the Enlightenment.⁵⁸ Heffernan observes a clear shift over the twentieth-century from the apocalyptic promise to post-apocalyptic exhaustion. As she recognises, 'faith that the end will offer up revelation has been challenged in many twentieth-century narratives'.⁵⁹ She departs from Berger's conclusion that 'loss cannot always be translated into language' and, instead, turns to a modernist tradition, featuring T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence and Jean Baudrillard, to argue an 'unveiled' world after the hope of biblical revelation is characterised by an 'openness of [...] narrative' which 'keeps alive infinite directions and possibilities'.⁶⁰ She concludes that the post-apocalypse has a radical and subversive impulse: 'what can possibly come after the modern or "after" its after?'⁶¹

This thesis's perspective is closer to Heffernan's rather than Berger's stance. Whilst its novels address the catalytic destruction of the post-apocalypse within a variety of contexts, which include zombie apocalypse, financial crisis and eco-

⁵⁷ James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 123. Bellamy, pp. 17-18. Teresa Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Twentieth-Century Novel* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 56.

⁵⁸ Heffernan, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 14.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

catastrophe, they are not framed as ‘unrepresentable’ incidents. Instead, they explore these futures with Heffernan’s pivotal question in mind. This thesis, therefore, follows the more recent work of Heather J. Hicks which distinguishes post-apocalyptic fiction published after the new millennium from the narratives written from the nineteen-fifties to the nineteen-eighties which Heffernan and Berger recognise in their studies. As Hicks suggests, these works ‘portray catastrophe of at least a national level and, by nature of our globalized political economy, assume dramatic effects elsewhere as well’.⁶² Here, Hicks joins recent commentary, including Tim Lanzendörfer’s collection on *The Poetics of Genre in the Contemporary Novel* (2016), which observes that this “‘turn” to genre in the contemporary novel has remained under-theorized, both with regard to understanding how and what genre is and does, and to the extent of the turn to genre’.⁶³ One of the most prominent trends in this genre at the turn of the twenty-first century has been its increasingly focused interest in global disaster: from the escalating likelihood of global eco-catastrophe to the return of ‘last man’ narratives of viral pandemic, as well as the collapse of the globalised economy amidst zombie outbreak.⁶⁴ With the ‘contemporary rise of post-apocalypse as an early twenty-first century master genre’, this genre turn may be viewed as a formal response to socio-economic trends including ‘austerity, in which everyone is on their own and public institutions designed to mitigate inequality no longer work to do so’.⁶⁵

Post-apocalyptic literature is marked by a generic seriousness which poses urgent questions about the future of the planet at the end of the American Century, whilst being close in formal terms to accessible popular genres. Hicks observes that ‘salvage is a crucial practical and conceptual element’ of the apocalypse, with characters ‘confronted with the remnants of the modern world – from the immaterial domain of words and ideas to the physical detritus of objects and machines – and they must “shore” “[t]hese fragments”, as T.S. Eliot puts it in his post-apocalyptic

⁶² Hicks, p. 4.

⁶³ Tim Lanzendörfer, ‘Introduction’, *The Poetics of Genre in the Contemporary Novel*. ed. Tim Lanzendörfer (London: Lexington Books, 2016) 1-14 (p. 3).

⁶⁴ Andrew Hoberek, ‘Epilogue: 2001, 2008 and Beyond’, in *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, ed. Brian McHale and Len Platt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 497-513 (p. 499).

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 509.

masterpiece, *The Waste Land* (430)'.⁶⁶ With the scope of post-apocalyptic salvage in mind, it is useful to pursue the distinction between post-apocalyptic and dystopian conventions further and highlight the conventions which the new American civil war novel adopts from both traditions. The new American civil war novel marks a foundational moment for the American science-fiction imagination which uniquely adapts this tradition of post-apocalyptic salvage identified by Hicks. However, by reimagining U.S. civil war and secession within the contemporary post-apocalyptic context, these texts bring into focus two aspects of the seceded U.S. state, and its borders, which will be central to the following readings of twenty-first-century science fiction. Firstly, the unique geography of the seceded U.S. state or colony furnishes it with a 'critical' quality of dystopian possibility. The 'critical dystopia', as expanded upon in the section below, is defined by the science fiction scholar Tom Moylan as more hopeful than the classic dystopia. Despite their 'sober apprehension' of the 'intensified deprivation' under late capitalism, Moylan conceived of a critical dystopian model which endeavoured 'to find traces, scraps, and sometimes horizons of utopian possibility'.⁶⁷ And secondly, it is distinctive that the characters' journeys in these novels to retrace the cause of disaster become a generic process which echoes and critiques the new era of surveillance capitalism, as an era in which problems of climate change and emerging new authoritarian tendencies are amplified by unequal concentrations of information and knowledge.

Blending the utopian with the catastrophic is the aim of the 'critical dystopia' which, first coined by Lyman Tower Sargent, is further explained by Moylan with political commentary and science fiction analysis. He interprets neoliberal capitalism as an anti-utopian project that tries to de-legitimise utopia.⁶⁸ But utopia is subversive and so, consequently, it uses one of the literary devices of anti-utopia, namely dystopia, to re-enter public discourse and engender hope for a world beyond neoliberal and capitalist enclosure. The 'critical dystopia' negotiates the necessary pessimism of the classic dystopia with an overtly utopian stance which 'refuses the anti-utopian

⁶⁶ Hicks, *Post-Apocalyptic Novel*, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky. Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder, Colorado: Perseus, 2000), p. 276.

⁶⁸ Lyman Tower Sargent, 'The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited', *Utopian Studies*, 5 (1994), 1–37.

temptation that lingers like a dormant virus in every dystopian account'.⁶⁹ It is easy to see the link between post-apocalyptic writing and predecessors in the Western dystopian tradition, including works inspired by Soviet totalitarianism, such as Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). If, as Gregory Claeys recognizes, dystopia is 'supposed to be an inverted, mirror negative vision of utopia', then the critical dystopia shows that there is a new kind of totalitarianism after Soviet Communism.⁷⁰ The critical dystopia is a productive concept for rethinking ideas about capitalist enclosure, in the light of globalized digital communication, and the profound consequences of asymmetry of knowledge which translates into asymmetries of power. The new American civil war novel develops this perspective by focusing on its characters' resistance to the intrusion of surveillance capitalism and, with its scepticism towards official news and propaganda, to the frenetic pace of globalized communication.

6. Conspiracy and Far-Right Nationalism in the New American Civil War Novel

With this perspective, new American civil war novels reiterate Fredric Jameson's view that the 'future frame' of science fiction allows us to glimpse the 'unmediated, unfiltered experience of the daily life of capitalism'.⁷¹ However, these new American civil war novels also depict the closed state as a fictional device to foreground trends in Internet and cyber-led conspiracy and to reveal how, under the drive of surveillance capitalism, these trends are becoming increasingly – and ominously – central to the

⁶⁹ Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, p. 195. This phrase is repeated, almost verbatim, in the 'Introduction. Dystopia and Histories', in *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 7.

⁷⁰ Gregory Claeys, 'Three Variants of the Concept of Dystopia', in *Dystopia(n) Matters: On the Page, on Screen, on Stage*, ed. Fátima Vieira (Newcastle on Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 14-19 (p. 14).

⁷¹ Fredric Jameson's, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005), p. 287. Quoted in Rebekah Sheldon, *The Child to Come: Life After Human Catastrophe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), p. 104.

U.S.'s future. This entanglement, ultimately, shapes the narrative arc of the new American civil war novel. To understand the contemporary symbolism of the seceded U.S. state, this thesis recognizes the importance of the critically rich area of conspiracy studies, as it has developed in the wider field of American Studies. Scholars of contemporary American culture argue that, with the rise of the Internet in the 1990s, the U.S. witnessed a significant transformation in how extremist fringes infiltrate the media mainstream, and how far-right movements access institutional platforms to promote their ideologies. It is useful to consider this transformation within the context of profound techno-economic developments in 1990s American popular culture. As the previous decade increased public access to the Internet, the 1990s is formative for considering how conspiracy and paranoia acted and circulated in popular culture before the millennium. The 1990s, as Peter Knight argues, saw conspiracy themes evolved through 'fears and fantasies that everything is becoming connected': alongside fears of viral contagion through open borders of globalisation, '[p]anic about the unstoppable viral connectedness of the Net [became] the specter stalking the inflationary promotion of the digital and new media world'.⁷² At their broadest, conspiracy beliefs are, like apocalyptic revelation, a form of religious belief which 'views history as controlled by massive, demonic forces'. Michael Barkun concludes that '[c]onspiracist preoccupations' in the twentieth-century, including the 'Kennedy assassination', attracted 'obsessive concern with the magnitude of hidden evil powers' and apocalyptic anxiety.⁷³ Unravelling the genealogies of conspiracist world views, work in this area has shown how urban legends and conspiracies have spread among sub-cultures on the Internet and through mass media. However, they also recognise how this phenomenon relates to larger changes in American culture, with Barkun explaining that after the new millennium, apocalyptic fever characterised many areas of contemporary American life, and became especially visible after 9/11.

Readings of Internet conspiracy culture, and their importance to the structures and values of contemporary America, offer an incisive way of analysing narratives

⁷² Peter Knight, *Conspiracy Culture: From Kennedy to the X Files* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 4, 210.

⁷³ Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 2-3. Pivotal studies of American conspiracy culture include Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Post-war America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

within the genre of the new American civil war novel. As literary scholars have noted, a prominent selection of post-apocalyptic texts, including novels examined in this thesis, reflect an increasing desire to solve racial tension in the U.S. by imagining the end of race in a ‘post-racial’ society. This follows Lauren Berlant’s argument in that, after the 2008 election of Barack Obama who declared the ‘audacity of hope’, the contemporary U.S. became deeply invested in the idea of a progressive post-racial nation which could affirm the American values of ‘upward mobility, job security, political and social equality and lively, durable intimacy’ as well as ‘meritocracy’.⁷⁴

The new American civil war novel marks a new phase in this tradition which explores new transgressive libertarian and conservative movements. In the late 2010s, a growing corpus of public and academic commentary began to attend to emergent kinds of ‘new populism’, as proposed by Marco Revelli, which by the unresolved legacy of the 2008 crisis, expressed ‘protest and grievance [...] in an era where atomised masses lack voice or organisation’.⁷⁵ For a significant number of commentators, the focal moment for this populism can be dated to the year after Obama’s presidential election and the 12th September 2009 march led by the *TEA Party Movement* (Taxed Enough Already) on Washington, D.C.. Placards evoked the inflammatory buzzwords which, according to commentators including Nils C. Kumkar, would define reactionary American politics over the coming decade. These included allusions to the ‘horrors’ of socialism, with pictures of Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, slogans deriding ‘big government’ and a reactionary sympathy for ‘birther’ conspiracies denying Obama’s citizenship.⁷⁶

Within this anonymous Internet culture, the first African American president generated more reactionary conspiracies than his predecessors. In the early 2010s, the rise of communication networks initially offered great promise of a ‘new public

⁷⁴ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 3.

⁷⁵ Marco Revelli, *The New Populism: Democracy Stares into the Abyss*, trans. David Broder (London: Verso, 2019), publisher’s summary and pp. 4, 7. See also George Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

⁷⁶ Nils C. Kumkar, *The Tea Party, Occupy Wall Street and the Great Recession* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 45. Another study which affirms the importance of the Tea Party to ‘the direction of American democracy’ is Anthony DiMaggio’s *The Rise of the Tea Party: Political Discontent and Corporate Media in the Age of Obama* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

sphere' of citizen journalists, especially after the events of the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movement.⁷⁷ However, these movements, rather than initiating progressive or grass-roots change, heralded a new phase of reactionary politics which would overthrow the formal gatekeeping and accountability of mainstream journalism, and inaugurate an Internet sub-culture dominated by viral content producers. Media commentators including George Hawley have identified the 'Alt-Right' as unifying several extremist ideologies, including white nationalism and yet, it is 'unlike any racist movement we have ever seen. It is atomized, amorphous, predominantly online, and mostly anonymous'.⁷⁸ The 'Alt-Right' is the neologism for the far-right (alternative right) movements which have led to this dramatic reshaping of U.S. governance which, in turn, has alarmingly drawn white supremacy and U.S. white nationalism into the ever-increasing sharing of viral and sensationalist content, as encouraged by the profit drive of surveillance capitalism.⁷⁹

The Alt-Right, therefore, and its online profile and identity, poses a significant and distinctly modern challenge for political observers who are used to understanding politics in formal terms. Beyond the mainstream of Republican conservatism, white nationalist groups are perceptibly rising in influence and achieving political support at higher levels of government, with former subcultures and their mindsets threatening to infiltrate mainstream organisations.⁸⁰ However, with Trump's unexpected election, questions of white nationalism have been raised across social networks because of his slogans. The ascendance of 'Alt-Right' fringe nationalism and the expansion of American conspiracy culture provide a compelling context for re-reading post-

⁷⁷ Examples of this 'pro-democratic' optimism include Heather Brooks' *The Revolutions Will be Digitized: Dispatches from the Information War* (London: Windmill Books, 2012) and Paul Mason's *Why It's Still Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions* (London: Verso, 2013).

⁷⁸ Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right*, p. 3. Other relevant studies include Thomas J. Main, *The Rise of the Alt-Right* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2018). John E. Finn, *Fracturing the Founding: How the Alt-Right Corrupts the Constitution* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019).

⁷⁹ J.M. Berger, 'Trump is the Glue that Binds the Far Right', *The Atlantic*, 29 October 2018 < <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/10/trump-alt-right-twitter/574219/> > [accessed 27 June 2019].

⁸⁰ Vian Bakir and Andrew McStay, 'Fake News and the Economy of Emotions: Problems, Causes, Solutions', *Digital Journalism*, 6 (2018), 154-75.

apocalyptic novels which may be viewed as predecessors to the new American civil war novel, including Whitehead's *Zone One* (as the most acclaimed novel studied in Chapter Two of this thesis) and Shriver's *The Mandibles* (in Chapter Three). Each of these texts present a forceful critique of social and new media. This critique turns to the commodification of new media and yet, most presciently, also illuminates the immediate potential for rapidly changing media environments to encourage partisan loyalties. The late 2000s and early 2010s have been a formative period which has given birth to what the critical media theorist Ico Maly calls 'algorithmic populism'.⁸¹ Under this phenomenon, the protocols and algorithms of social media have become an essential political force. 'Populism in the age of digitalization has fundamentally changed'. Users are 'engaged in an endless algorithmically shaped battle to co-construct the "voice of the people"'.⁸² Consequently, if 'populism can be performed by policy or rhetoric', then the 'widespread use of digital media by politicians invites us to look at a third category: the technological'.⁸³

This thesis reads its set of American post-apocalyptic novels as critiquing new intersections in technology and populist rhetoric. These texts register the ways in which new media is changing how reactionary ideologies are rhetorically communicated in America. Taking *Zone One* as a key example, an area of downtown Manhattan has been cleared of zombies and has become the flagship area for a new state under 'American Phoenix', representing America: 'Up, out of the ash, reborn' and a 'new era of reconstruction'.⁸⁴ However, Whitehead's African-American protagonist has ominous premonitions about America's future: 'Would the old bigotries be reborn [...] when they cleared out this Zone, and the next, and so on, and they were packed together again, tight and suffocating on top of each other?'⁸⁵

⁸¹ Ico Maly, 'Algorithmic Populism and Algorithmic Activism', *Diggit Magazine*, 10th October 2018
< <https://www.diggitmagazine.com/articles/algorithmic-populism-activism> > [accessed 14th May 2019].

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Jessica Baldwin-Phillipi, 'The Technological Performance of Populism', *New Media & Society*, 21 (2019), 376-97 (p. 378).

⁸⁴ Whitehead, *Zone One*, pp. 61, 120.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 231.

Readers might – to follow Leif Sorensen’s example – identify this apprehension with the immediate ‘political context, in which *Zone One* appeared, in 2011’. This was when ‘commentators were finding portents of doom [...] in circumstances such as the collapse of the financial markets’ and ‘the global war on terrorism’.⁸⁶ But, if this is the case, Whitehead’s novel also helps us uncover the long-term repercussions of these events for U.S. politics. The barricaded Zone One, as a zone in which news and intelligence are shared through government filters, offers a suggestive approach to reading twenty-first century post-apocalyptic fictions: one that is attuned to the changing relationship between government and journalism, and how both can become complicit with reactionary politics.

Therefore, the ‘genre turn’, as identified by scholars including Hicks, amongst American literary writers of post-apocalyptic fiction, is more than a formal development. To return to where this introduction began, with Manjikian’s *Apocalypse and Post-Politics: Romance of the End* (2012), she argues that the post-apocalyptic novel reveals itself as a cultural form which is attuned to historical change. The genre, she observes, provides a useful path for moving beyond ‘the situatedness of one’s own experience and coming to a broader understanding of the hegemon’s experience (or lack thereof) in the international system’. Citing the work of Susan Bowers, who saw the Civil War as an apocalyptic moment in U.S. history, Manjikian affirms that the contemporary cultural imagination in the U.S.:

[u]ses fears to create an apocalyptic moment in which the old America – the superpower and the hegemon in the international system – has been erased entirely, leaving the physical geography of America untouched whilst its inhabitants float through the landscape, leaderless and lost. [...]. In this new world, America's infrastructure has crumbled, globalization has failed, and there is no reliable communications system linking the fractured country together.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Leif Sorensen, ‘Against the Post-Apocalyptic: Narrative Closure in Colson Whitehead’s *Zone One*’, *Contemporary Literature*, 55 (2014), 559-92 (p. 560).

⁸⁷ Manjikian, *Apocalypse and Post-Politics*, pp. 65-7. Susan Bowers, ‘*Beloved* and New Apocalypse’, in *Toni Morrison’s: Fiction: Contemporary Criticism*, ed. David Middleton (London: Routledge, 1996), 209-30.

Such intriguing arguments resonate with the literary emergence of contemporary U.S. texts which more overtly embrace the material prospect of secession, or U.S. civil war, than those by their most immediate predecessors. A literal reading of the closed states and civil wars in these texts might indicate that the aggressive patriotism of the 2000s and 2010s, which has culminated in Trump's insistence on preserving domestic industries and climate denial, is threatening to lead the U.S. to its own stasis of potential in an ever-changing, multinational world. In some sense, this is the fear articulated by Barbara Brodman and James E. Doan, in their collection on *Utopia and Dystopia in the Age of Trump* (2019), when they argue that the 'Trumpian era' foreshadows 'a regressive dystopia where fascism desiccates the seeds of female empowerment, technological advancement, and international civility'.⁸⁸

However, this thesis identifies an adherence to apocalyptic traditions here as an illuminating indicator of the generational realities of a particular era. It illustrates an evolving world which is not associated with a particular presidency but rather with epochal questions about the ways in which the U.S. will occupy a pivotal role in influencing global relationships, between technology, democracy and twenty-first-century ideas of nationhood. These texts exert an anticipatory power to draw readers into tackling the difficult topics of democracy and populism, thereby helping to develop a profound affinity with these pressing issues in a way that nonfiction cannot. As the title of El Akkad's novel reminds us, American civil war is a literary prospect which compels readers to critique and interrogate their relations to U.S. democracy and government in the digital age. Ultimately, the new American civil war novel offers a unique and incisive literary form to explore defining generational, as well as national, questions for twenty-first-century America.

7. Thesis Structure and Summaries of Chapters Two to Six

This thesis identifies the new American civil war novel as a compelling literary form which inherits this national tradition to interrogate new and evolving relations between truth and democracy, and between politics and media communication, in America's

⁸⁸ Barbara Brodman and James E. Doan, 'Introduction', in *Utopia and Dystopia in the Age of Trump: Images from Literature and Visual Arts* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), 1-7 (p. 5).

twenty-first century. With this diversity in mind, the order of the chapters is based upon the thematic focus of the novels: Chapter Two focuses on secession after zombie contagion; Chapter Three focuses on the prospect of a new Cold War between the U.S. and Russia after viral pandemic; Chapter Four focuses on the debt crisis; Chapter Five depicts U.S. secession after water wars in America's Southwest; and Chapter Six addresses the literary phenomenon of contemporary 'Second American Civil war' novels. There is an additional element to the organisation of this thesis. Chapters Two and Three adapt the conventions of generic apocalyptic scenarios which are familiar within American literary and cultural traditions. Both the zombie apocalypse and the viral pandemic have an established cultural and literary heritage in the U.S. in the late-twentieth century. By contrast, Chapters Four, Five and Six focus on three sub-genres which have been less prominent in American culture. The texts in Chapter Four use the conventions of 'dystopian finance fiction' to address the national legacy of the 2008 financial crisis. The novels in Chapter Five use post-apocalyptic conventions of the American 'eco-thriller' to attend to the legacy of anthropogenic climate change. The novels in Chapter Six, with their focus on future civil war, depict national violence ensuing from political rhetoric and denial of environmental and political expertise.

Chapter Two offers a reading of Colson Whitehead's acclaimed novel *Zone One* which sets out several key issues of crucial importance to the new American civil war novel. In *Zone One*, as a key novel of the 'zombie renaissance' which Mark McGurl identifies in Anglo-American popular culture, news is implicated in worsening conditions of the zombie apocalypse.⁸⁹ The thesis opens with Whitehead's novel since it focalises the three key themes which evolve and become more prominent in later texts which this thesis categorises as new American civil war novels. The novel depicts not only a post-zombie America under a patriotic government called 'American Phoenix', but also the secession of New York City from the rest of the U.S. nation – a motif which is recurrent across the set of novels examined in this thesis. As analyses from critical race theory have demonstrated, *Zone One* critiques key tenants of Obama's vision for a post-racial America, as articulated in his memoir *The Audacity of Hope* (2006). Yet the novel's African American protagonist, Mark Spitz, is also

⁸⁹ Mark McGurl, 'The Zombie Renaissance', *n+1*, 9, 2010
< <https://nplusonemag.com/issue-9/reviews/the-zombie-renaissance/> > [accessed 13th August 2019].

implicated in a relationship with the new government's use of media and propaganda after the zombie apocalypse of the 'Last Night'. As a former social media manager for a U.S. coffee multinational, Spitz recognises parallels between the use of click-bait marketing before the Last Night and the new era of propaganda after the Last Night. Framing Whitehead's novel against the backdrop of the early right-wing backlash to Obama's presidency, especially by the TEA Party, this chapter argues that *Zone One* is an influential post-apocalyptic novel which critiques the reactionary values emerging from post-2008 socio-economic immobility.

Chapter Three argues that Sandra Newman's sleeper novel *The Country of Ice-Cream Star* self-consciously uses the post-apocalyptic premise of a viral pandemic to produce an ambivalent treatment of predictions of a 'New Cold War' which posits the U.S. against Russia or China. This thesis argues that the novel offers a compelling thematic focus for the new American civil war novel which contrasts with the imagery and concerns of Whitehead's *Zone One*. Newman's novel has been critically prominent for its narration in the dialect of a tribal society in the U.S. which has been forged over an eighty-year period. This society has re-emerged after the arrival of a fatal flu virus called 'the Posies' in America – a virus which shortens life-expectancy to the age of eighteen. Newman's novel is indebted to the conventions of Nuclear Age fiction. However, the novel also plays with conventions to envision the prospect of a stand-off between the U.S. and Russia – one in which Russia has a monopoly over an antidote which will be essential to the survival of the U.S.'s future. It critiques the emergence of a new world order, exacerbated by hostilities between the U.S., China and Russia, in which espionage and sabotage through technology will become more untraceable – and even more subversive.

Chapter Four elaborates on this influence of knowledge and information in the American post-apocalyptic canon. Specifically, it focuses on works published after the 2008 Financial Crisis and demonstrates how Lionel Shriver's *The Mandibles* and Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* adapt the motif of the seceded state to comment on the legacy of the 2008 financial crisis, and the momentum it gave to populist antagonism. In both novels, the subprime mortgage crisis is recast as a tragedy for white, middle-class America which distracts from its especially deleterious legacy for African American and minority subprime homeowners. These texts investigate the close alliance between free-market endorsement and anti-multiculturalism in contemporary America. These fictions offer an innovative post-apocalyptic

predecessor to the new American civil war novel in which to explore the relationship between culture war and economic backlash after the 2008 financial crisis.

Chapter Five considers the ways in which Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Water Knife* envisages the prospect of American civil war within the socio-political context of water shortages in the American Southwest. Placing the novel in dialogue with modern climate change fiction (or 'cli-fi'), this chapter argues that *The Water Knife* illuminates the relationship between changing technological contexts and public disinformation about climate change in America. Comparing *The Water Knife* to Chris Beckett's *America City* (2017), the chapter argues that the 'eco-thriller' depicts and addresses how climate sceptics gain media exposure and undermine technical expertise and science. Adopting key themes identified in this thesis, *The Water Knife* and *America City* interrogate how climate change is as much an issue of public opinion and education as environmental decline.

Chapter Six, the final thesis chapter, analyses the overlap between the new and emergent sub-genre of the 'Second American Civil War' novel and post-apocalyptic conventions in texts written by Omar El Akkad and Christopher Brown. This chapter identifies these texts as examples of the 'alternative history' genre which, according to Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, grew from a marginal genre to a mainstream category during the early 1990s, after the end of the Cold War.⁹⁰ However, as Schneider-Mayerson observes, the Cold War is notably absent as subject matter from American alternative histories.⁹¹ This chapter extends Schneider-Mayerson's claims, exploring the ways in which twenty-first-century American civil war is depicted in these novels which deploy post-apocalyptic conventions. As this chapter demonstrates, this sub-genre of post-apocalyptic American Civil War novels has become a key genre for modern U.S. fiction which illuminates the evolving dynamics of twenty-first-century nationalism and right-wing movements.

This chapter takes the thesis back to where it begins, in Chapter Two with *Zone One* imagining the ascent of triumphant U.S. nationalism. Across epistolary testimonies of civil war, with their allusions to corruption and censorship by industry lobbies, we may see in shorthand all the legacies of decisive shifts in U.S. national and

⁹⁰ Matthew Schneider-Mayerson, 'What Almost Was: The Politics of the Contemporary Alternate History Novel', *American Studies*, 50 (2009), 63-83.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 77.

international politics which promise to become more acute. The conclusion of this thesis reviews the range of answers which these texts offer. Given the marked patterns which the analysis in this thesis reveals, it concludes with a provisional set of the literary archetypes which promise to define the new American civil war novel during the first two decades of the twenty-first century.