



**Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies**

**Apocalypse Now:  
Whither Utopianism  
in the Midst of Catastrophe?**

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*Unser historischer Ort ist dadurch bestimmt, dass wir nicht vor der Umweltkatastrophe stehen, sondern mitten drin.*<sup>1</sup>

(“Our historical location is defined by the fact that environmental catastrophe does not lie before us; rather, we are in the midst of it.”)

Over a decade has passed since Jonathan Bate announced the advent of a new approach within literary studies that he styled “Global Warming Criticism.”<sup>2</sup> By contrast with the critical preoccupations of the Cold War period, focussing exclusively on human language, agency and social relations, Global Warming Criticism would foreground the inextricability of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ as disclosed paradigmatically in the phenomenon of weather. In so doing, it would break with what Michel Serres terms the “Modern Constitution” (31-2), which severs the human from the nonhuman, while determining their relationship exclusively in terms of mastery and possession.<sup>3</sup> Over the past ten years, ecocritical literary and cultural studies have expanded and diversified, acquiring increasing theoretical sophistication in the process. However, few ecocritics have followed Bate’s inspired lead in locating their activity within the horizon of Global Warming. In the interim, this horizon has begun to look ever more ominous, lending a new urgency to the undertaking initiated by the pioneering British ecocritic. In this essay, I want to consider the implications for ecocritical utopianism that arise from the acknowledgement that with respect to climate change in particular environmental catastrophe no longer lies before us: rather, as Gernot Böhme insists, we are already in the midst of it. In this connection I will revisit one of the foundational catastrophe narratives of eurowestern culture, namely the biblical story of Noah’s ark, in order to discern what place remains for “the principle of hope”<sup>4</sup> when you have lost your faith that disaster can be averted.

At the risk of waxing apocalyptic, let me begin by sketching in something of our current climatic context. While politicians continue to quibble over how best to act without harming the blessed economy, the vast majority of scientists admit that it is already too late to avert some degree of climate chaos. If, in the absence of really radical reductions in carbon emissions – reductions, that is to say, of an order that seem incompatible with the current tendencies of capitalist globalisation – global average temperatures rise above 2° C, the consequent feedback loops could well send them soaring up to 6° or more within the next 100 years. The last time that kind of temperature rise occurred on earth, around 251 million years ago, something like 90% of all species appear to have been obliterated.<sup>5</sup> Even if the direst prognoses turn out to be wrong, there is growing agreement within leading edge climate science that current levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are already sufficient to significantly alter global weather patterns, causing a range of disastrous or even catastrophic events in many

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<sup>1</sup> G. Böhme, *Die Natur vor uns. Naturphilosophie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*. Kusterdingen, Die Graue Edition, 2002, p. 261.

<sup>2</sup> J. Bate, “Living with the Weather,” *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 55, no. 3, 1996, p. 433.

<sup>3</sup> M. Serres, *The Natural Contract*, trans. Elizabeth MacArthur and William Paulson. Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1995, 31-2.

<sup>4</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. N. Plaice, S. Plaice and F. Knight, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> G. Monbiot, *Heat*, London, Allen Lane, 2006, p. 13.

regions of the world in the coming decades.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the growing incidence and severity of weather disasters globally suggest that these climatic changes are already underway. There is strong evidence that the increase in heat waves and flooding in particular is related to climate change.<sup>7</sup> It appears that some extremes, such as heat waves, are also increasing in frequency and intensity more rapidly than the average climate.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the impact of such extremes on human societies around world is evidently escalating: according to research conducted by a Munich-based insurance group, from the 1960s to the 1990s an estimated threefold increase in the incidence of extreme weather events worldwide was accompanied by a ninefold increase in damages.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, the International Disaster Database of the Université catholique de Louvain in Brussels records that in 2005 alone nearly 12,000 human lives were estimated to have been lost and over 153 million people adversely affected by wind storms, wildfires, floods, temperature extremes, and droughts.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the growing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, longer-term processes of environmental change are underway and are set to accelerate. These include increasing weather variability; rising sea levels; reduced availability of fresh water; and an escalating extinction rate. According to the most recent IPCC estimate, up to 37% of all endemic species across the globe could be lost by 2050.<sup>11</sup> Given that the figures on carbon emissions and global mean temperatures undergirding the 2007 IPCC report are already outdated, this percentage, dire though it is, could well be considerably higher. The consequences of such changes will be all the more devastating where they are experienced in combination with other pre-existing social and environmental stressors, such as military conflict, economic hardship, land degradation and habitat destruction. There is a very real danger, moreover, that some responses to particular climate change impacts, such as turning up the air-conditioning to counter the heat, could actually exacerbate global warming, while others are likely to fuel potentially violent conflict over dwindling resources. Alternatively, the experience of disastrous ‘weather surprises’ could also provide the impetus for more radical mitigation measures: policy makers need to be

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<sup>6</sup> M. L., Parry, O. F. Canziani, J. P. Paulitkot, P. J. van der Linden, C. E. Hanson (eds), *Climate Change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group 11 to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> G. C. Hegerl, F. W. Zwiers, P. Braconnot, N.P. Gillett, Y. Luo, J.A. Marengo Orsini, N. Nicholls, J.E. Penner and P.A. Stott, ‘Understanding and Attributing Climate Change’, in S. Solomon, D. Qin, M. Manning, Z. Chen, M. Marquis, K. B. Averyt, M. Tignor and H. L. Miller (eds.), *Climate Change 2007: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Cambridge, Cambridge U P, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> L. V. Alexander, P. Hope, D. Collins, B. Trewin, A. Lynch and N. Nicholls, ‘Trends in Australia's climate means and extremes: a global context’, *Australian Meteorological Magazine*, no. 56, 2007, pp. 1-18.

<sup>9</sup> Munich Re Group, *Topics 2000: Natural Catastrophes – the Current Position* (Special Millenium Issue), Munich, Münchener Rückversicherungs-Gesellschaft Central Division: Corporate Communications, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> EM-DAT, *2005 Disasters in Numbers*, available from EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database ([www.em-dat.net](http://www.em-dat.net)) at the Universite catholique de Louvain in Brussels, Belgium, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Parry et al., *Climate Change 2007*, p. 241.

prepared to take advantage of this opening, as recent research indicates that there is a relatively small window of opportunity following a catastrophe to institute change.<sup>12</sup>

Hitherto, most research in environmental studies, including the ecological humanities, has focussed on examining the role of social and cultural factors in generating and, potentially, countering ecosocial ills. This has been a broadly utopian project, inspired by the hope that crisis could be prevented from sliding into catastrophe, and bent instead towards ecosocial transformation. Assuming that it might yet be possible to prevent catastrophe from sliding into cataclysm, this project remains a potentially valuable one. At this juncture, however, I believe that we are also confronted with an urgent new task: namely, the consideration of how best we might prepare for climatically-driven disasters that are presently beginning to erupt all around us. If Global Warming Criticism is to live up to its name, then, it must face up to the ineluctability of eco-catastrophe.

There are many dimensions to this work of preparation, of which the most obvious are technical and organisational, such as strengthening disaster warning and relief services, and ensuring that they come to the aid of the most vulnerable rather than the most privileged: a task that in turn has economic and political implications. Less obviously, but equally importantly, there is also a role for the humanities in this, to the extent that our very codification of certain events as disastrous or catastrophic, as well as the ways in which we make sense of them, and the kinds of behaviour that we adopt in the face of them, is strongly informed by cultural assumptions and societal norms. From this perspective, even those catastrophes that arise from non-anthropogenic factors, such as earthquakes or volcanoes, are never simply natural but always also to some degree socio-cultural. As Stephen Muecke has observed in relation to Hurricane Katrina, the “stories told about natural disasters are crucial to the organisation of people’s responses in the medium to long term. While the stories of individual events are told in the detail, they are nonetheless already broadly scripted by narrative forms of mythical strength.”<sup>13</sup>

Let me turn, then, to a consideration of one such mythical master plot. Evidence of the continued cultural valency of the Flood narrative is not hard to find. For one thing, a quick Google search reveals that the Ark sails again on the high seas of cyberspace, manifesting in a dizzying array of guises.<sup>14</sup> Among the more tenuously associated there are the New Jersey deli restaurant chain, where the descendents of some of Noah’s erstwhile refugees feature on the menu (<http://www.noahsark.net/noahsark.asp>), and the Spanish international day care centre, in which, like the animals on the Ark, today’s children are obliged to learn how to get along with those who are different from themselves (<http://www.noahsark.es/>). Noah’s Ark “Stuff-n-Fluff” Animal Workshop (<http://www.noahsarkworkshop.com/>) will come to your home or organization in order to give adults and children of all ages “the opportunity to make their very own stuffed animal and a lifetime of memories,” while Edward and Linda Benoit are renting out their Noah’s Ark, a Victorian mansion in the heart of historic West Tisbury Village, as a perfect holiday home for a large family, six couples or a corporate retreat

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<sup>12</sup> As economist Paul Romer has observed, “A crisis is a terrible thing to waste” (reported by Thomas L. Friedman in the New York Times on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Muecke, “Hurricane Katrina and the rhetoric of natural disasters.” In Emily Potter *et al.* (eds), *Fresh Water. New Perspectives on Water in Australia*, Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 2007, 260.

<sup>14</sup> I am indebted to my PhD student, Elyse Rider, for tracking down these sites.

(<http://www.noahsarkinfo.com/>). If you sign up at [www.noahsarkpcb.com/home/home](http://www.noahsarkpcb.com/home/home) you can help “to make God's presence known to the people who come to Panama City Beach”. Alternatively, you can just go along and have yourself a ball at “America’s Largest Water Park” in the heart of Wisconsin Dells (<http://www.noahsarkwaterpark.com/>), or maybe challenge yourself, physically and spiritually, with a spot of Christian white water rafting and back country adventuring in Colorado’s Rocky Mountains (<http://www.noahsark.com/>). While American biblical literalists promise to give you the low-down on the historical Ark in their high-tech “museums” (e.g. <http://www.creationmuseum.org/>; <http://www.wyattmuseum.com/noahs-ark.htm>), Ark Wildlife Ltd. in Hertfordshire will show you how to entice more of today’s surviving wildlife into your very own garden. There are of course any number of rescue missions sailing under Noah’s flag: mainly for children (e.g. <http://www.noahsarkhospice.org.uk/>; <http://www.noahsarkinc.org/>) or animals (e.g. <http://www.kissama.org/noahsark/index.html>; <http://www.noahs-ark-sanctuary.org/>), and sometimes for both (<http://www.noahs-ark.org/>), but also HIV positive individuals and families ([http://www.noahsark.org/stockholm/index\\_eng.htm](http://www.noahsark.org/stockholm/index_eng.htm)) and even for Europe’s built environment and cultural landscapes, which are under threat from global warming (<http://noahsark.isac.cnr.it/>). Inspired by a vision, Pastor Richard Greene is rebuilding the Ark in Frostburg, MD, in order to “reach lost souls for the Kingdom of God” (<http://www.godsark.org/index.html>). Meanwhile, in May 2007, Greenpeace activists were already completing their replica on Mt Ararat in Turkey with a view to focussing media attention on their call to world leaders to take action on climate change ([http://www.livescience.com/strangenews/070516\\_ap\\_green\\_ark.html](http://www.livescience.com/strangenews/070516_ap_green_ark.html)).

Spectral effigies of the Ark also can also be seen sailing on the silver screen: explicitly so, for example, in Tom Shadyac’s unabashedly born-again Christian “Evan Almighty” (Universal Studios, 2007), in which the animals, endearingly, get to help make their floating refuge, and somewhat more obliquely and in a secular key, in Roland Emmerich’s “The Day After Tomorrow” (Twentieth-Century Fox, 2004), about which, more anon. Within some recent literature, old Noah appears in a considerably less favourable light than in these filmic remakes of the Flood. Timothy Findley and Julian Barnes, for instance, both tell the story from the perspective of those who were “not wanted on the journey”: in Findley’s novel of that name (1984), it is Noah’s estranged wife’s aging and pregnant cat, and in Barnes’ *The History of the World in 101/2 Chapters* (1989), a sharp-eyed wood-worm, who manage to find their way on board uninvited. In both cases, the whole project comes across as seriously flawed, with Noah figuring as a petty tyrant, and a bungling one at that, who is evidently “on some kind of power trip” (to quote from Sting’s Noah song, “Rock Steady”).<sup>15</sup> Clearly, this is one catastrophe narrative that can be spun in all kinds of different directions!

A degree of ambivalence also inheres in the tangled fabric of the biblical text itself, which equivocates as to the whys and wherefores of the catastrophe that it frames. To some extent this is a function of its multiple and shifting authorship, with at least two distinct voices belonging to vastly different timeframes jostling one another for command

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<sup>15</sup> Timothy Findley, *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, Toronto, Penguin Canada, 2006; Julian Barnes, *The History of the World in 101/2 Chapters*, London, Picador, 1989.

of the detail.<sup>16</sup> Although the text insists that the deluge is divinely ordained, the instigator is referred to alternately, in the English translation, as Lord and God, names that conjure distinct images of deity: one, *Adonai*, an early epithet for Yahweh, more ancient, anthropomorphic, and local; the other, *Elohim*, more recent, remote and universal. Each of these divine agents explains their intervention slightly differently. Yahweh claims to have been provoked by human wickedness alone to seek to “blot out” not only humankind, but also all other terrestrial creatures in the process (6.7).<sup>17</sup> This is rough justice indeed, reminiscent of the brutal *lex talionis* of Attic tragedy, in which the chorus of innocents is regularly made to suffer the catastrophic consequences of wrongs perpetrated solely by their social superiors; as such, it is reminiscent also of James Lovelock’s Gaia, ‘who’, according to his most recent, and deeply alarming, prognosis, is set to make life extremely difficult for a vast array of species, some of whom are already beginning to go down as collateral damage as ‘she’ endeavours to rid ‘herself’ of their pesky self-appointed lords and masters.<sup>18</sup> According to the later author who takes over the narrative around Gen. 6.11, however, other creatures too had fallen into sin, filling the whole earth or land (*erets*) with “violence” (6.11): now it is said to be not just humans, but “all flesh” (*col basar*) which had “corrupted their way upon the earth” (6.12). As Anne Gardner observes in her “ecojustice” reading of Gen. 6.11-13, this phrase, *col basar*, is used repeatedly throughout the Flood narrative (notably 6.17 and 19, 7.21, 9.11 and 15-17) in contexts where it evidently refers to all land animals and birds, along with humans: that is to say, all creatures who breathe air, with the possible exception of sundry water mammals and reptiles (sea creatures, who are not mentioned, apparently having continued to behave themselves). The blanket condemnation of “all flesh” thus turns out to be something of an exaggeration: this is a key instance of the authorial shiftiness alluded to earlier! Reading the Flood narrative in the light of Genesis 3, one might nonetheless assume that this alleged corruption of the other creatures was a consequence of humanity’s initial fall from grace, and connected with the Creator’s subsequent cursing of the land/ground ‘for their sake’ (3.17), thus making us ultimately responsible for the whole mess after all.

Whoever is taken to be the primary culprit here, it is significant that, according to this second voice, the earth/land itself had been corrupted or degraded (*shachath*) as a result of this proliferating violence among, and perhaps also between, humans and animals (6.11). The disaster, in other words, had already occurred, long before the rains begin to fall and the seas to rise. In this light, it is unclear whether the flood is really a catastrophe at all, or whether it is not a blessing in disguise. As it turns out, of course, this is precisely how the divinely-ordained deluge is to be understood. For, contrary to the intentions initially attributed to both *Adonai* and *Elohim*, the life of the land, human and otherwise, is not obliterated but rather renewed by the ultimately beneficent waters that for forty days and forty nights cover the earth. Significantly, the restoration of fertility, Earth’s healing from the depredations of a violent history of possibly more-than-human

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<sup>16</sup> In my discussion of Genesis 6-9, I draw on the biblical scholarship of John Olley in “Mixed Blessings for Animals: The Contrasts of Genesis 9” and Anne Gardner, “Ecojustice: A Study of Genesis 6.1-11” in Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (eds), *The Earth Story in Genesis*, Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, pp. 130-39 and 117-29, respectively.

<sup>17</sup> All quotes from Genesis are taken from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

<sup>18</sup> J. Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*, London, Allen Lane, 2006.

abuse, is effected only with the enlistment of what ecofeminist theologian Catherine Keller interprets as the creative/destructive chaosmosis of “the deep” (*tehom*).<sup>19</sup> Recalling, and temporarily reversing, the emergence of a differentiated world of beings in Genesis 1, the loosing of the waters from above and below, as “all the fountains of the great deep [were] broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened” (7.11), might be seen to effect a partial retraction of the patriarchal violence figured in the Sumerian myth of Marduk’s murder of the mother goddess Tiamat, whose name is echoed in the biblical *tehom*. If, as Catherine Keller has argued, God’s foundational hospitality, affording a place within godself for the dynamic unfolding of a stupendous diversity of life on Earth, as narrated in Genesis 1, involves the participation of the mater/matter/matrix of the primordial deep, then such a collaboration is even more evident here with regard to the renewal of Earth life in the wake of the deluge.

Within the narrative logic of this biblical master plot, then, catastrophe is set to work in the service of the good, effecting a purification that clears the way for a new start, a second genesis. This model of redemptive violence has since been adopted and adapted in the service of any number of secular utopian projects, in which the creation of a better world, albeit through human rather than divine agency, is assumed to require the destruction of the old: a tragic necessity that is also invoked at the other end of the Christian Bible in the apocalyptic narrative of St John’s Revelation. Implicitly, it is also along these lines that climate change is framed in “The Day After Tomorrow,” with nature, humanly altered, yet monstrously Other, being called upon to perform the mythical work of purification. The biblical story of Noah’s ark is alluded to explicitly in one of Emmerich’s earlier films, a science fiction thriller entitled “The Noah’s Ark Principle” (1984). The references are more subtle here, but nonetheless noteworthy. Apart from the shots that show water bubbling up from below ground as well as coming down in torrents from the heavens, there is the figuration of the New York city library as an ark-like locus of refuge, albeit one in which patriarchal authority has been devolved upon the son, who takes the lead in endeavouring, as best he can, to safeguard the survivors of this humanly engendered, if entirely unintended, inundation. Moreover, this flood too, which, not entirely fancifully, ushers in a new Ice Age, is ultimately redemptive: the boy gets the girl; father and son are reconciled; and the Cheney look-alike Vice Presidential climate change sceptic has been converted into a Presidential environmental justice advocate. This all seems very liberal and ‘pc’, but the text also flirts with a more conventionally biblical agenda in its opening and closing frames, which show how an overcrowded, polluted and morally depraved world – a world filled with filth, corruption and vice – has been swept clean by the catastrophe: “Come and look at this,” says one astronaut to another in the final words of the film, with reference to the crystalline atmosphere over the pure white expanse of the northern hemisphere, “I’ve never seen it so clear.” In contradiction to its explicit agenda of warning – this being one way that apocalyptic can function, namely to the end of galvanising human endeavours to avert the worst – the subtext of “The Day After Tomorrow,” in keeping with the telos of its biblical intertext, implies that a cataclysmic climate shift might be welcomed as affording a clean slate on which the contrite survivors might make a new start. Quite apart from its potential to engender a callous indifference to the suffering deemed necessary to the realisation of the greater good, the problem with this model of

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<sup>19</sup> Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*, London/New York, Routledge, 2003.

redemptive violence (the most vicious variant of which is currently to be found in Christian fundamentalist anticipations of the rapturous Second Coming) is that it militates against remedial action to avert the worst in a situation, in which the worst, were it to eventuate, might not afford any possibility of recovery at all: beyond a certain level of global warming, climate change confronts us with the potential scenario of an ending that disallows any new beginning, at least for most, if not all, humans, along with the vast majority of other species, many of which are already bearing the brunt of the humanly engendered degradation of the earth.

Against the troublingly utopian impulse manifest in the happy ending of this crypto-apocalyptic catastrophe narrative, however, it is possible to discern in the biblical narrative itself a countervailing tendency: one that brings better news for the more-than-human world. Firstly, it should be noted that by contrast with Revelations (and the earlier Zoroastrian apocalyptic that it echoes), but in line with the apocalyptic discourse of some of the Hebrew prophets, humans are not construed as the passive victims, or, in the case of the holy remnant, beneficiaries of this act of divine vengeance.<sup>20</sup> Rather, in the figure of Noah, an apparently righteous, if emphatically unsaintly man, humans are called upon to play a part in ensuring the continuation of life, human and otherwise, in the face of catastrophe. What is asked of Noah in preparing a place of refuge, not only for his own kin, but also for representatives of each and every kind of terrestrial creature, is, of course, strictly impossible. I am not referring so much to the patent improbability of getting and keeping all those animals on board a vessel that is so oddly proportioned that its likelihood of floating seems negligible: although I'm sure the literalists have 'proved' that it can be done, I take this text to be mythically based, and thereby free of the requirement of verisimilitude. What interests me more is the conceptual contradiction that emerges if Noah's task is recognised as an act of hospitality: for the precondition of hospitality is surely the possession of a home of one's own. Noah, however, is required to provide a welcome to this vast array of nameless strangers at a time when his own home too has been lost.

Just who is to have a place on the ark, though, is a further question on which the text equivocates. Both narrators agree that the only humans to be saved are Noah's own family: no hospitality at all is to be afforded to fellow members of his own species. With regard to Noah's other-than-human guests, the Lord distinguishes between clean and unclean creatures, and calls for the former to be privileged, with seven breeding pairs of these to only one of the others being allowed on board (7.2-3). Elohim, by contrast, insists that one male and one female of every kind of creature that comes to him must be saved, regardless of their classification, which is to say also their usefulness to humans (7.8-9). Although there is still a numerical limit, along with specifications of gender and species, this comes closer to instantiating that unconditional hospitality of which Derrida writes that it:

requires that I open my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner etc.) but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them

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<sup>20</sup> On the varieties of biblical, pre-biblical and post-biblical apocalyptic see Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1996.

come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering a pact) or even their name.<sup>21</sup>

For the philosopher who had long been concerned with the status, ethical as well as ontological, of the animal, the “categorical imperative of hospitality” extends beyond the human, for it commands that we say “yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification [...] whether or not the new arrival is the citizen of another country, a human, animal, or divine creature, a living or dead thing, male or female.”<sup>22</sup> It is here, in the impossible call that Noah should extend a welcome to more-than-human others, at a time when his own home is imperilled, that an alternative utopian horizon might be glimpsed in this narrative: one that, in pertaining primarily to means rather than ends – how we are act in the face of catastrophe, rather than the new world that we would like to create in its wake – might best be termed counter-utopian. The ark itself figures this counter-utopia of hospitality quite literally: cast adrift on the endless waters, unmoored from any terrestrial abode, it is truly ‘no place’ in particular. As such, it models a form of ‘ecstatic dwelling’, dwelling, that is, in exile in the company of more-than-human strangers, which is fast becoming the only kind of dwelling available on an increasingly uninhabitable earth, where ever more beings, human and otherwise, are destined to be rendered homeless.<sup>23</sup>

If Noah’s family and his assorted other-than-human guests are to survive the flood, however, the ark must finally come to ground. It is one of the creatures of the air that brings the sign of their immanent salvation: the dove who returns with the olive branch, presaging the promise of God’s peace. Most of us know the story, even if we’ve never read the text. As I see it, though, it is precisely at this happy turning point in the narrative that the radical hospitality of the ark is forfeited. For in response to Yahweh’s assurance that “all flesh” was to have a new chance of life, Noah proceeds to sacrifice a whole host of his erstwhile guests – one each “of every clean animal and every clean bird” (8.20). Moreover, although Elohim’s new covenant is extended not only to Noah and his descendents, but to “every living creature of all flesh” (9.15) and to the land itself (9.13), it is accompanied by the pledge – one that reads to me more like a curse than a blessing – that “every beast of the earth and [...] every bird of the air [...] everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea” will flee from humans in “fear” and “dread” (9.2): “Into your hand are they delivered” (9.2). While this clearly echoes the privileging of humans in the creation narrative of Genesis 1, the directive to “subdue the earth” (1.28) is not reiterated. The consumption of animals as food, however, is now condoned, on the proviso that they are suitably dead and thoroughly bled (9.4). Nor is there to be any reciprocity in this: any animal who presumes to prey on humans, together with any human murderer of his own kind, is to be slain, for “God made man in his own image” (9.6).

The counter-utopian ethos of radical hospitality that is opened by the interruptive event of the flood is abrogated as the crisis is resolved: in place of the community of

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<sup>21</sup> Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*, trans. Rachel Bowlby, Stanford, Stanford UP, 2000, 25.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 75, 77.

<sup>23</sup> The concept of “ecstatic dwelling” is drawn from Michel Haar, *The Song of the Earth. Heidegger and the Grounds of Being*, trans. R. Lilly, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1993.

more-than-human strangers dwelling together equitably in exile on the ark, humans and animals are once more located on either side of a rigid divide separating the rulers from the ruled.<sup>24</sup> The bitter legacy of human-animal hierarchical dualism is powerfully evident in “The Day After Tomorrow,” in the utter absence, moreover, of the countervailing moment of radical hospitality. The only animal that finds refuge in the library, the tramp’s dog, is accorded ethical considerability solely (in a thoroughly Kantian manner) on account of the suffering that his exclusion would cause his human companion. Apart from the birds that signal the coming inundation, the only other animals that figure significantly are the bacteria, which threaten the heroine with a fatal blood poisoning, and the wolves, escapees from the city zoo, which are cast, fairy-tale fashion, as primal adversaries in their evil aspiration to prey on human flesh: in both cases, human survival is shown to depend upon vanquishing an other-than-human foe.

In its narrative framing of global warming, “The Day After Tomorrow” certainly succeeds, with the assistance of some pretty spectacular special effects, in foregrounding human vulnerability in the face of a cataclysmic climate shift, and its affirmative representation of mutual assistance and even self-sacrifice in the face of catastrophe is edifying. However, as a work of highly anthropocentric crypto-apocalyptic ghosted by the biblical mythos of redemptive violence, it is at once ultimately reassuring with regard to human survival and, to my eyes, offensively unconcerned about the fate of other-than-human beings. What the makers of this film failed to countenance, though, namely, that in the midst of catastrophe, at a time when our own homes, perhaps even our lives, are in peril, we might answer the call to give refuge to non-human others, whether wild or domestic, is far from unknown in reality. Let me close, then, with a real-life instance of radical hospitality, which took place in Australia’s federal capital in the summer of 2003.

After years of searing drought, the forested mountains to the south and west of Canberra had been ablaze for weeks when, on January 23, three separate fires converged and descended upon the city with extraordinary speed and violence. Compared with Katrina, for example, the toll was tiny: still, four people and untold numbers of animals were killed, over 500 homes were obliterated, and thousands were left with no more than the clothes that they were wearing when they fled. Among the numerous tales of bravery and generosity to have come out of this catastrophe, several involve animals. Not only did many people risk their lives endeavouring to protect their own animal companions, but one elderly couple also braved the flames in order to rescue the remaining animals in the RSPCA shelter whom the officers and volunteers there had been unable to take with them when they were forced to evacuate. According to Deborah Rose:

In the days and weeks to come the donations poured in: a golf course offered its greens as a horse paddock, local children delivered bags of apples, shopkeepers sent vegetables, and people from other states sent truckloads of fodder for the horses whose stables and food had burnt.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The best analysis of the conceptual structure, social history and ethical implications of this divide remains Val Plumwood’s critique of the “logic of colonization” *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, London, Routledge, 1993.

<sup>25</sup> Deborah Bird Rose, ‘Moral Friends’ in the Zone of Disaster’, *Tamkang Review* vol. 37, no. 1, Autumn 2006, p. 82.

In addition, the many dazed and in some cases injured kangaroos who had managed to escape the firestorm, but could find no grass to graze in the burnt out bushland and paddocks beyond the city, were afforded a ready welcome in urban parks and gardens. Sadly, none of the forty-seven patients in the animal hospital could be saved. But a few days later a memorial service, conducted by an Anglican priest, was held at the site. Attended by around 250 people, this enabled the community to grieve for the suffering and deaths of animals, wild and domestic, companions and strangers.

As Rose notes, in Canberra (as in the case of the biblical Flood), the unforeseen possibilities of transpecies justice and compassion that emerged in the zone of disaster were closed down again as the event was translated back into the normative discourse of human-animal, reason-nature, mind-matter dualism. Nonetheless, in the coming decades, “there will be no shortage of catastrophes” and such “catastrophes offer unprecedented opportunities for the formation of new transnational and transpecies communities.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, as extreme weather events of various kinds escalate in scale and number around the world and existing habitats come under even more pressure than industrialisation has already imposed upon them, the question of whether those humans who are in a position to do so can respond to the call to make a space, not only for human refugees, but also for displaced animals, might well be critical to the survival of a great many species: truly, into our hands have they been delivered. It will certainly be impossible to provide refuge, for example in the guise of migration corridors, for them all, and some will doubtless save themselves despite us. Nonetheless, the counter-utopian ethos of radical hospitality instantiated, however imperfectly, in the tale of Noah’s ark, affords an opening for hope, if not of a better world, then at least that we might yet comport ourselves with some measure, however inadequate, of justice and compassion towards more-than-human others as we embark on the rough waters of a perilously warming world. And if that possibility were to be realised, might not the world become a better place, after all, albeit one in which the fate of “all flesh” is once again in question?

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 94.