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Apocalypse in Indigenous Literature

Although in the Western imagination, the apocalypse is a looming speculative threat of the future, for Indigenous peoples of America, the settler-induced destruction of their world is an event of the past. Historically, North American literature framed colonization as a divine Christian mission to establish global dominion ahead of the biblical Apocalypse, justifying the genocide of Indigenous populations. Later, secular (post)apocalyptic fiction ignored Indigenous people and failed to hold colonial-settler structures responsible for the collapse. However, Indigenous activists, scholars, and creatives have been resisting these dominant narratives through a movement Anishinaabe scholar Grace Dillon calls Indigenous Futurisms. Indigenous Futurisms blend traditional knowledge with science fiction to imagine alternative, Indigenous futures for Indigenous people. My research asks how Indigenous writers explore the tension between the settler-colonial understanding of apocalypse, which assumes no future, and future-oriented Indigenous Futurisms as a form of resistance. I argue that Indigenous Futurisms act as a counter-narrative to Western apocalyptic tropes and present apocalypse as an opportunity for Indigenous decolonization and rebirth. Applying the lens of indigenous literary criticism, I analyze four contemporary Indigenous novels from Canada and the US: Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017), Rebecca Roanhorse's *Trail of Lightning* (2018), and Waubgeshig Rice's *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018). My presentation outlines key concepts in Indigenous Studies, including the Indigenous concept of cyclical time, Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), and Gerald Vizenor's theory of Native survivance. I show how these novels interpret the apocalypse as the Earth's inevitable need for renewal after colonial-settler destruction. As fictional states reinstate colonial policies to manage the crisis, Indigenous characters refuse to be perpetual victims of colonial violence. Instead, they turn to their ancestral knowledge to restore their lands and heal their communities. This project raises questions for future research beyond literary studies: it argues that addressing the climate crisis requires more than the settler-colonial state extracting indigenous knowledge, lands, and ceremonies; rather, it requires other disciplines to embrace an epistemological shift that centers TEK and adopt a decolonial mindset.

The research topic originated from a course on Indigenous Futurisms taught by Professor Kimberly Wieser-Weryackwe, which I took during my exchange year at the University of Oklahoma. This course then inspired my bachelor's thesis, which was supervised by PD Dr. Monika Müller at the Ruhr University Bochum and was submitted on April 1, 2026.