



Foretelling the Posthuman Apocalypse: A Transhumanist Study of *the Scarlet Plague*

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17696392>

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 28-10-2025

Published: 10-11-2025

Keywords:

Destruction, transhumanism, prediction, pandemic, literature, id, ego, superego

ABSTRACT

The article highlights the calamitous nature of COVID-19, the pandemic that could partake the world as mentioned in the dystopian novel *The Scarlet Plague*. The crux of the research is to focus on the prophecy of Jack London and how the very human instinct could construct a societal upheaval in the future. The incidents narrated by London have undoubtedly erupted in its actual shape in the form of Covid-19 for which the world was unprepared. The psychological impact and the intuition of the human mind as told by Sigmund Freud (id, Ego and Superego) has been used as a theory to validate the title "Foretelling the Posthuman Apocalypse: A Transhumanist Study of *The Scarlet Plague*". It's the humans who have the power to create, control and consequently disrupt the cosmic energy in all modes. The article attempts to ignite the primitive and instinctual human drives that lead to goodness and evil in transhumanist point of view.

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD OF PANDEMIC

The world has seen the harsh conditions and gruesome realities of Covid-19, Cholera, Black Plague, The Great Plague of London etc., any epidemic outbreak entirely disrupts the normal routine of humans. Yet there are instincts and predictions of epidemics in literature and in movies. One such literary prediction is Jack London's dystopian novel *The Scarlet Plague*. The novel was originally published in the year 1912, in the London Magazine. The novel became a precursor that has predicted the outbreak of



Covid -19 in the early part of the nineteenth century. The novel is one of the finest examples of post-apocalyptic fiction in modern literature. It is appraised as a critique of modern social structure and lifestyle. The devastating effects of pandemic leads to intense poverty, disrupts the societal life and causes significant loss.

THE SCARLET PLAGUE

The Novel, *The Scarlet Plague* is set in a desecrate America in the year 2073. The story centers around the major character called James Smith. The novel is the reminiscence of Smith's journey of pandemic. The narration shifts after sixty years from the period of 'Red Death' - the pandemic that has cost the whole population of the country. London mentions in his novel that this uncontrollable epidemic has eradicated the existence of human life and destroyed the livelihood of human in the year 2013. The country had few survivors including James Smith. In the beginning of the story Smith tries to unfold the mystery of the pandemic to his grandsons - Edwin, Hoo-Hoo, and Hare-Lip who find it unreliable and absurd.

The Scarlet Plague can be seen as a premonition of the contagious epidemic, Covid -19.

that the world has recently faced. Though the case is slightly different from the Red Death, Covid- 19 has almost killed forty percent of the world's population. Red Death as mentioned by London is a pandemic that kills the victim within thirty minutes of the spread. There was no cure or remedy to it. The Scarlet rash immediately turned the people numb and they died. The body of the dead decomposed very fast as it had bacterial infection. The pandemic has finally reached San Francisco where Smith was working as a professor, he noticed that millions of people are dying and there was no vaccine to prevent the death. Smith managed to escape from the pandemic and was the lone survivor in San Francisco. He sheltered himself in the Grand Canyon for three years and restricted his mobility. Slowly he found other survivors - a working man and a slave woman along with them there was three boys to whom he narrates the tragic experience of Red Death.

SMITH'S PANDEMIC ENCOUNTER

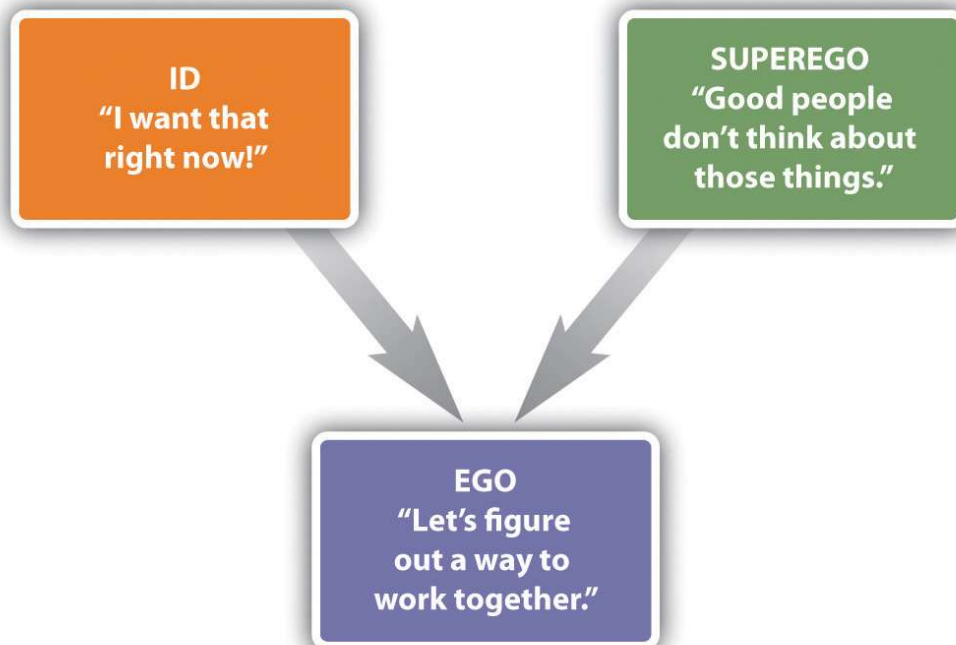
Smith notices a young woman turning scarlet when he was teaching, she quickly dies leaving a panic and commotion amongst the campus. On returning home, Smith was not allowed to enter the home as the family is overtaken by the fear of pandemic. Smith decides to stay alone from his family and soon witnesses the epidemic taking over the whole city. He cuts of his social interaction and stays in his college's chemistry building. He becomes the lonely survivor in the entire city. After three years he



migrates to San Francisco, hoping for a better life. he discovers a new society and has the company of a pony and two dogs. He finds few people who have broken themselves to be tribes and keeps their company. He worries about the social advancements that has caused this epidemic. He remembers the everyday issues, task of survival, quality of food, his job and security. He realizes that he has to nurture moral values, knowledge and wisdom in his grandsons but they do not believe his recollections of pandemic.

EGO AND SUPER-EGO

According to Freud, human nature is divided into three categories – Id, Ego and Super-Ego. Id is driven by the earthly desires and pleasures of human race which makes an individual to explore his / her bodily needs. The Ego evolves to develop the personality of an individual by adhering the qualities of moral conscience whereas Super-Ego alters the attitude by inculcating the need to work together in order to resolve an issue. This is more related to the mental stability. The sense of Id vanishes when the survival turns out to be the hardest part of life. when Smith endures all alone in Grand Canyon, he does not gets carried away by the emotional raptures of Id. He undergoes the mental condition to safeguard himself from the plaque that is killing millions of people. Taking the ego into consideration, *The Scarlet Plaque* has essentially evolved to put forth all three human interactions meticulously to figure out the transhumanist view of characters in the novel. By applying the concept of Ego and Super- Ego, Smith’s character can be analyzed in the framework of transhumanism.





TRANSHUMANIST REVELATION

The transhumanist revelation highlights the understanding of physical and mental limitations of human race under the influence of science and technology. Smith is retreated with social obligations and civilization during his hiding. Nothing seems important to him other than the cause of survival. He stands as a symbol to portray the evolving technological and scientific experiment that keeps the life of human race at stake. The essential nature of human race is altered in the course of survival. None of Smith's grandchildren believe him when he reminisces the harsh memories of The Scarlet Plaque. The young boys driven more by transhumanist nature question and demean the story narrated by him.

You are true savages. Already has begun the custom of wearing human teeth. In another generation you will be perforating your noses and ears and wearing ornaments of bone and shell. I know. The human race is doomed to sink back farther and farther into the primitive night ere again it begins its bloody climb upward to civilization. When we increase and feel the lack of room, we will proceed to kill one another. And then I suppose you will wear human scalp-locks at your waist, as well – as you, Edwin, who are the gentlest of my grandsons, have already begun with that vile pigtail (30).

Though the boys fail to comprehend the horror of Scarlet Plaque, London has tunned the character of Smith with an incredible intuition of Covid-19. In the transhumanist juncture, both the imaginary Scarlet Plaque and the real encounter of Covid-19 are similar in destructive nature.

CONCLUSION

London has keenly predicted the anxieties of human race with the advancement of science and technology. Smith's journey from living as a man of his dreams is contrasted with the dream of survival in Grand Canyon for three years with disillusioned hopes to adhere the reality. Transhumanism throws insight to this physical and mental condition of need for survival in emergences of science and technology. The advancements are for the betterment of human race is itself a self-contradictory statement when the very point of living demonstrates pain of survival. The most cultured civilization undergoes a drastic change with these advancements in society, which has evolved as a catastrophe to the world.



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