



A Gift Upon the Shore

M.K. Wren

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In the Pacific Northwest of the near future, the golden age has ended in apocalypse. Nuclear war has unleashed firestorms and the killing cold of nuclear winter. Earthquakes and tidal waves have ravaged the West Coast of America. Desperate violent looters comb the devastated land. And a horrifying pandemic lays waste to the remaining human population. But one of the few survivors, Mary Hope, is determined to see that some spark of culture survives. Together with her beloved friend Rachel, she sets out to preserve the precious knowledge of the past by saving every book she can in what may very well be the last library - the only record of a world that has perished. But Mary and Rachel are not alone. They are forced to share their small subsistence farm, Amarna, with the Flock, a small band of survivors with fanatical beliefs. And one of those beliefs is that books are blasphemous and should be destroyed.

A Gift Upon the Shore Details

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From Reader Review A Gift Upon the Shore for online ebook

Samuel says

A book for lovers of books, A Gift Upon the Shore sets the scene after Nuclear war and plague have wiped out most of the human population and torn civilization apart. Against this backdrop, two women struggle with essential questions of what is valuable, and what parts of ourselves we can save.

Ionia says

This book has teeth! For being a post-nuclear-apocalyptic story, this was very original. I loved the idea of people collecting books for the education and regeneration of humanity. This was a concept that really appealed to my love of books throughout this entire story and made me keep turning pages in order to support the characters.

These are characters that are deeply written, with a lot of personality traits that make you want to get to know them better. One of the things that I found enjoyable about this book, is that it did not focus on the violence and turmoil that most novels with this theme do. Instead, it focused on the relationships between the characters and how they learned to adapt and move forward after the unthinkable happened. Their shared goal of collecting books and ensuring reading material for the next generations touched me.

I liked the way the author broke into the story and the way it continued to tell more about the past through the memories of the characters. This was a good approach in my opinion, allowing the reader to appreciate the current time in the novel as well as the events that brought the characters to the destination they were at. Rather than just dumping info on everyone at the beginning, this book fans out and unfolds rhythmically and carefully.

The reason that I decided on three stars for this book, was that I did feel the book was slow and a bit wordy in some places. Although the story was very enjoyable and the characters were smart and even funny at times, there were lags in this novel that could have been removed or lessened by some type of action.

Overall, this was a book that I mostly enjoyed and think others would find interesting as well. If you have not heard of this author yet, this may be someone you should add to your list.

This review is based on a digital ARC provided by the publisher in cooperation with Netgalley.

Shawna says

When I first read this book (nearly 20 years ago) I was in my twenties... I was young, I was idealistic, I was in love with books, and I thought I had come across something very special.

I have re-read it several times in the ensuing years, and have noticed my view on this work shift. Having read it again, now in my forties, I struggled to find that same connection. Now I see it as rather hypocritical. The author speaks time and again of having expanded views, of how being dogmatic can harm, how people need

to be seen as individuals... and then spends a large portion of the book hammering against Christianity. Yes, there are some extremists out there who would burn books, who would refuse to look beyond the Bible as their only form of education, but Ms Wren blatantly tars all Christians with the same damning brush.... that it is all blind indifference and stupidity and, essentially, that anyone remotely religious is therefore part of a cult and just deluding themselves. I find true offense that the author seems to think that her heroine is someone who is truly superior to those around her, and that she can only see other lifestyles as lacking empathy and true wisdom.

What the reader may fail to take into consideration, is that our heroine, Mary, is just as guilty as those around her.

Mary Hope is the one who chooses to turn her back on the legacy that Rachel has started with preserving all of the books around them when she decides to leave with Luke for the Ark, even though she tries to convince herself that Rachel will follow in the years to come. When Rachel comes to the Ark to seek medical help, she is shunned by the Prophet, yes, but Bernadette secretly gives her what medicine that she can, against the Prophet's wishes. Pregnant, Mary stupidly chooses to turn her back against the Ark and goes back to the home she had shared with Rachel. She loses her child, and still chooses to stay alone, but blames the Ark for the loss of Rachel and the baby.

She never seems to try to connect to the survivors who come to her for help.... she continually points out to the reader of their (perceived) failings, as they try to pull together a new society as best as they know how.

Any society is going to consist of people with a difference of opinions. What our heroine fails to do is to take responsibility for her own poor choices, and to realize that unless she wants to start her own dictatorship, then all points of view must be taken into consideration. She did not have to allow the Arkites to stay with her, yet she rails constantly about how she is being pushed aside and being all but drowned in Christianity (which she sees as nothing more than turning a blind eye to the reality around you).

While it is a wonderful idea... two women trying to preserve what books they can against the odds in the hope that a future generation will find use of them, the heroine seems to miss the point... and lies a lot in order to force people to see her point of view. She is an unreliable character, and yet we are supposed to see her with sympathy? She falls into despair a lot, and it is Rachel that is forced to hold her together... she is a weak character, one who finds far too many flaws and who cannot find her own compass, so she takes on Rachel's ideals and makes them her own. She refuses to see her own failings, and that's a shame, because I think if she had, she might have been able to look at things from another viewpoint and perhaps have handled things differently.

I find a problem with the character of Miriam as well.... that she is blindly devoted to her beliefs is not the issue, but that she miraculously loses her memory in the end so that the issue is resolved???? That just slaps the reader in the face and seems to be a cheap ploy in order to bring the controversy to a close. It is not true to what we have been told of the character, which makes the author unreliable as well.

So while I enjoyed this book when I was younger, I will be discarding this title from my bookshelves and not bother with it again.

Rose says

this book looked like it had everything I like in a book, but I just didn't connect with it. The characters just seem subtly off - not behaving the way I think people would actually behave - and the conflict feels like it will be extremely predictable.

Michael says

I first read this book in the early 1990s, I think, and I was struck by the beautiful story that Wren tells of a post-apocalyptic time in the near future set in a small town on the northern Oregon coast.

The characters are magnificent. The reader comes to care deeply what happens to these people, particularly as the love the main characters have for each other is revealed.

And the central premise of the story is... books. Thousands of them, preserved for the future as best they can amidst the remains of the increasingly medieval civilization that was once America.

I re-read this story every few years, and it never fails to move me. In fact, I think it's about time to read this again!

Sherry says

4.5 stars really. What kept it from being a 5 star book for me was that there was a preachy quality to the book that, at times, bothered me. The women in the book were just as set in their thinking at times as the religious folk were and yet unable to see the hypocrisy of having disdain for another's viewpoint while thinking their's was the only viewpoint that was correct was bothersome. The very behaviour that they found disturbing in the people of the religious sect, they themselves exhibited time and again in their dealings with them. I thought that with all the wisdom Rachel was purported to have had she may have had the wisdom to apply some understanding and compassion to these people raised in such horrendous circumstances. After all it doesn't seem a huge leap to suppose that religious minded people of a cultish sect may interpret the end of the world as God's punishment, and children raised in these circumstances would have a difficult time thinking otherwise.

Aside from that criticism though, it was a very well crafted book and though there was a narrow mindedness to the character's way of thinking when it came to religion, there was some justice in their feeling that way. After all there can be a lot of damage done with dogmatic thinking and as much as I'd like to think I'd have some compassion for those raised up in it I have to admit they'd likely piss me off too. Where the characters shine though is in their decency and their love and appreciation for nature. Of course there was also the deep appreciation of books and in the 1st edition of the copy I have thanks to my good friend who sent it to me, on the underside of the cover there was a list of some of the books that were preserved in the vault. I have no doubt this book will stay with me for a long time and I'm so very grateful to my good friend for having sent it to me.

Jakk Makk says

Got me with the idea of preserving the books, lost me with the religious stuff.

Alison says

I really disliked this book. It was heavy-handed, flat yet terribly over-written (I had to start skimming descriptive passages, as it was just way overdone, yes, it's a beautiful field/ocean/flower but get on with it), and not engaging. Mary and Rachel's story is a poorly disguised allegory against the Bible-thumping Christians who basically ruin everything. I'm as atheist as they come, but howdy I wasn't expecting to be force-fed a dissection of all the ways Christianity Is Completely Super Stupid, You Idiots. It doesn't work.

I did enjoy that Wren worked her way through the dirty bits of a world in decline, a plague, and the aftermath of nuclear war. It was sometimes rather tedious, but that's what the world would be, and she didn't shy away from the very real horrors. Not that I like reading about horrible things, but it's really interesting to consider life post-apocalypse in this real world, and especially, woman-focused way. It's just a shame she apparently decided Christians were even worse than nuclear war, and that Rachel and Mary would always be the smartest, the rightest, the best, by virtue of their more "logical" thinking.

I'd like to restate that I am an atheist making these objections, and that it was obviously a work of its place and time in history that is no longer quite the same. But damn, this was a disappointing read.

Laura Drake says

One of my fave apocalyptic books of all time. She saves the books. How could you not love this?

Michael says

As I read this book, I thought about why it is that I've read so much "apocalyptic" fiction. In the past, I enjoyed watching the world shrivel and burn up; I didn't believe that such a thing would happen. I still don't. I think that the world continues on, maybe without me or you, maybe without all of us, but still here for someone or something else. I don't enjoy the death throes anymore. I find them vulgar and sad, and often eye-rolling. It's what comes AFTER that intrigues me the most. For instance, I wouldn't think much of the Fallout games if I had to go through the Great War.

In retrospect I would say that most books like this qualify as disaster porn. It takes a particularly fine writer (McCarthy, Auster) to make the journey worthwhile for me. There are moments in *A Gift Upon the Shore* that brought me back to those better examples, although there were also moments that made me roll my eyes. The beginning, with the unintelligible neon biker gang, was one of those moments. Ultimately I enjoyed this one because it champions the pursuit and the value of knowledge, which is something I feel strongly about.

Charity says

As you already know, I love a good post-apocalyptic novel involving religious zealots, especially when it also involves rational, free-thinking bibliophiles on a mission to save books (and knowledge) for future generations. *A Gift Upon the Shore* is fantastically crafted story filled with friendships, hardships, philosophical discussions, drama, hope, and despair. I loved the epigrams M.K. Wren selected and saved a few as favorites. So thought-provoking and epic, this story just sucks you in and makes you weep for humanity!

You MUST read it!

Checkman says

A Gift Upon The Shore is a post-apocalyptic novel that owes much to *Walden* by Henry David Thoreau, *Earth Abides* by George R. Stewart and *A Canticle for Lebowitz* by Walter M. Miller Jr. This is not a tale of gun-battles, epic struggles, mutants or invading hordes. Nor does it feature (predominately) male heroes who are brave, resolute, resourceful and armed to the teeth. It doesn't even have all that much in common with the classic post-apocalyptic/nuclear war novel *Alas, Babylon* by Pat Frank which features brave, resolute, resourceful male protagonists and brave, resolute, resourceful female protagonists who take care of hearth and home while the men are off doing manly things.

It's a simple story about two women who struggle to survive as well as try to preserve what little they can of civilization and the potential for Humanity's advancement. Their enemies are nature (as well as their ally) and ignorance. Not a mutant or Russian soldier in sight in *A Gift Upon The Shore*. It's a story heavy with melancholy and pessimism. In the end there is a triumph (of sorts), but there are many questions and doubts about the future. All in all it's an easy read and a fast read. When I finally got around to opening it up it took me probably four hours to get through it. But I never found myself growing bored or indifferent to the fate of the main character - Mary Hope.

Published in 1990 this is a story heavily influenced by the time during which it was written. The Eighties saw the conservative Christian Fundamentalist movement surge onto the political and social scene in the United States. The Cold War became a very real concern (again) and the Environmental/Green Movement started to become a louder voice by the end of the decade.

I recall in the Eighties there were public book-burnings (though admittedly these were few and far between and often staged for the publicity by opportunistic individuals) and various groups began to push for removing certain books from public library shelves and out of the public schools. There was a lot of talk about the spread of illiteracy in the United States while others pushed for censorship of not just books, but anything that might be deemed inappropriate. The fear of Nuclear War and Nuclear Winter was strong and many believed we were heading for a war with the Soviet Union. It was simply a matter of time.

I could go on, but you get the picture. In retrospect it was no different than any other decade. There are always fears and concerns about the future. People are always convinced that we are on the brink of oblivion and nothing can be done to prevent it. But the fears and concerns take on a different context depending on

the decade and the areas where one lives. Oh and one's own personal background.

M.K. Wren moved to the Oregon coast in the mid-sixties. She is originally from Texas. One might call it the "buckle of the bible-belt". The Oregon coast ,however, is most assuredly *not* in the Bible-belt. An artist, book-lover, and freethinker I have no doubt that she had become concerned about the social and political trends moving through the United States in the mid-eighties. Concerned enough that she decided to write a novel of a possible future if those trends continued unabated. I can't say that for certain without speaking to M.K. Wren of course, but I still suspect I'm not that far off the mark.

I make this observation because I think it's important to have a sense of where an author might have been "coming from" when he or she wrote their book. If you understand that it can help make their plot and characters more understandable.

I bring this up because there are more than a few who are disturbed by her depiction of Christians. I'm not defending her characterizations, but I am arguing that there might be an explanation for why Ms. Wren did what she did. Look back at the Evangelical movement of the 1980's and the so-called Moral Majority and then ask yourself if she didn't have a reason to be concerned.

However I also admit that her surroundings might have given a greater sense of danger and threat than the conservative Christian movement might have really represented. My wife is from Portland, Oregon and over the past twenty-five years I've spent many days and weeks in Western Oregon. It's a very Liberal area and like any area that is dominated by one group or philosophy things can be a bit skewed.

In the end this isn't a bad post-apocalyptic novel. It works hard to rise above some of the conventions of the genre. It's intelligently written and mostly believable. I have a few qualms with how the world is conveniently depopulated. The two women are very lucky - especially when considering what befalls everyone around them in the first few years after the war. But those things occur in stories like this. If the protagonists didn't make it then the stories would last for sixty pages and end with their deaths.

Out of print now, but worth looking for if you are into PA novels and stories. Whatever it's failings at least it has some intelligence and is trying to give us more than just Zombies and machine-guns wielded by muscular heroes.

Now if we're talking muscular machine-guns wielding Zombies.....well that's another thing entirely.

Sarah says

ah, yet another of the postapocalyptic fiction books i do so love. this one was horrible and depressing, too.

it takes place in the 'near future'. it's about 30 years after the End, when we managed to nuke most of the planet. that event was followed by a nuclear winter and a 'blind summer' when the radiation was so bad that most everything died/burned. a few pockets of people survived, and the story is told from the viewpoint of one of the women, who was in her 20s during the End, and who in the present of the story, is in her 50s or 60s.

we learn about how life was before the End: how earth was overpopulated, there was a great economic decline, there were roving gangs of looters and such and the environment was shot to shit. then, we nuked

ourselves. a lot of people died. the radiation made most of the survivors infertile. the main character and her friend survived on a small farm. they lived off the land, and preserved all the books (thousands) that they could, because they didn't want the knowledge of their time lost forever. their reason for living was the hope that future generations would find their stash of books and be able to learn from them.

eventually, a survivor from an extreme christian group found them. he took the main character back to their compound (with her okay, because they both were fertile, and she wanted a community for her child to live in). well, they were crazy religious people. knowledge was bad because it went against god. the bible was the truth and word of god and everything in it was true. to question its truth was to blaspheme and to earn yourself a beating. the main character eventually left the compound because they wouldn't help her friend (who they thought was a witch and an unbeliever).

friend dies, her baby is stillborn. she goes back to the farm and lives alone for almost 20 years, continuing the work of preserving the books. while she was there, the community at the compound was falling apart. eventually, a few survivors from the compound find her farm, and ask to stay. she says yes, under the condition that she will be able to teach the children. they grudgingly agree.

except they're still crazy fucking religious. one of them tries to blow up the vault of books because they are full of evil and sin. luckily she doesn't succeed. there's a lot of strife in their small farm community because of religion vs. knowledge. at the end of the book, thankfully, the religious folks make an effort to embrace the knowledge and to understand that their views may not be everyone's. it's a 'happy' ending as they go.

i was just so pissed at the religious freaks who refused to understand how important knowledge was and how important it was to preserve it so that someday they could once again make paper and have running water, etc. their religious literalism was scary. it refused any idea that didn't strictly agree with the way things the bible said they were. it pains me that people are like that. it frightens me that if a world wide catastrophic event did happen, these are the types of people we'd most likely find in the remnants of this country. religion isn't going to help us survive a new stone age. knowledge and the ability to think and problem solve is what will get us through.

Zach says

Another novel of the nuclear apocalypse, focusing on the attempt of two women to stockpile as many books as possible in order to bequeath some semblance of culture and civilization to the descendants that they hope will some day rebuild humanity (note: based on everything else in the novel, this is a 100% foolhardy hope). The narrative is presented as a frame story where Mary Hope, aged 65ish, is telling a child the story of Mary Hope, aged 25ish, and her misadventures around the time of the collapse of civilization-and misadventures they are. The younger Mary is one of those characters whose every choice makes you clutch your head and groan, but fortunately she has the much older and wiser Rachel to guide her (until she voluntarily leaves Rachel's guidance in the most exasperating of all the awful choices she makes). The narrative tension in both stories revolves around surviving after war (and focuses, more than many books of this ilk, on a return to the land and small farm-steadying over scavenging, but more on that below), with the added struggle in the later sections of sharing the farm with a group of literalist patriarchal Christians.

The odd part, though, is that even with this book's unrelenting critique of patriarchy and reactionary religion, it isn't really a feminist novel. Not quite anti-feminist, but not quite in the place I'd like it to be, either... it

could maybe be described as a conservatively essentialist pro-woman-but-only-a-certain-kind-of-woman work? (That isn't really a thing, I just made it up... although that Lefanu book that I'm currently reading makes a distinction between "feminist" sf and "feminised" sf, which I think is as good a way as any to look at it, and this certainly falls into the latter category). Even while the two protagonists are very strong and capable women (and not just at "women's work," which continually astonishes the Christians), the younger Mary is constantly fixated on the importance of childbearing, most of her awful choices revolve around the first man she meets post-apocalypse, and the book is aggressively heteronormative throughout, which is especially surprising given its focus on "relativism" and the impossibility of external truths. Further, the main villain isn't even one of the sexist Christian men. No? No. It's the leader of the Christian women, a totally flat and unsympathetic cardboard cutout of a character.* [spoiler below]

Anyway most post-apocalyptic books are, in one way or another, a meditation on modernity, and the other weird tension here is that Wren and her characters can't really make up their minds about whether they're happy to see it go or not (not that this isn't a valid point of confusion). This is a book steeped in romanticism, and lush descriptions of the beauty of nature makes up a large part of the text. The ruins of civilization, on the other hand, rarely merit much more of a mention than "There were some burned-out buildings," these buildings (and nature), of course, having become victims of the more impressively destructive impulses of modern technology. At the same time, however, this novel is one long ode to the cultural creations of modernity, and a more explicit examination of this dichotomy would have served this novel well.

* whose ultimate punishment, no less, is the death of her child at her own hand!

Daniel says

I received an electronic copy of this from the publisher via NetGalley.

The entry for M.K. Wren in the "Encyclopedia of Science Fiction" aptly describes this novel as ambitious and eloquent. I was unfamiliar with her work before coming across this ebook reissue, but now I will eagerly pick up the "Phoenix" fantasy trilogy for which she is apparently best-known.

"A Gift Upon the Shore" uses the post-apocalyptic scenario to delve into two unique responses to wide-scale tragedy where civilization has collapsed and individuals are forced to give up or survive. The first response is one of fear and the erection of a rigidly controlling, false worldview based around the worst of Biblical literalism. The second response is one of careful rationality, deciding to preserve what is beautiful about humanity: art, knowledge, and compassion.

The conflicts between these two world-views drives the plot of the novel, related through the first person present point-of-view of protagonist Mary Hope, an elderly teacher living amongst (though philosophically apart from) a small Christian community. The origins of her present conflicts within the community are related through her first person past recollections of the advent of nuclear holocaust, her survival along with friend Rachel in solitude as they turn to preserving Rachel's library, and their joyous, though ultimately disastrous, encounter with another survivor sent forth from "The Ark" to find potential mates to repopulate the devastated Earth.

The dichotomy between the rationally agnostic (or atheist) Rachel or Mary and the fervently ignorant religion of other characters has led some to criticize the novel as anti-religious or anti-Christian. This is only true, perhaps, if you accept reason and faith as diametrically opposed. Instead, the novel is more aptly described as being a reaction against the anti-intellectual Conservatism that we sadly see all too frequently coming from political and social news. Wren's target is not Christianity itself, but rather a form of religion that grabs hold of simple, comforting answers or interpretations and holds onto them vehemently in the face of reality, because if they were to acknowledge reality their rigid and weak system would crumble, leaving them exposed to fear and despair. Rather than investing energy to support a dogmatic system of suppression, Wren argues that something more divine (and, I would argue, more religious) is possible, namely focusing on what is beautiful about humanity and about creation.

Wren masterfully uses female characters, something sadly not that common in science fiction. Rachel and Mary are each memorable, finely-rendered and realistic characters. However, the other characters are less developed. The major antagonist is dogmatic repression made manifest and many of the rest are simply literal weak-willed followers. This arises from Wren's separation of the two philosophies: one very liberal humanistic and the other totalitarian and thus unsympathetic and less 'humane'.

These religious or philosophical points of the book are thus perhaps too overt and not presented as complexly as one would hope. But, the heart of the novel doesn't lie in simply presenting the conflict between these two opposing ideas, it lies in Wren's appreciation for life and the world, which the beliefs and behaviors of Rachel and Mary merely echo.

Here is the true gift presented by Wren to the readers of the novel: her descriptions of nature are profoundly beautiful. Numerous passages describing the Oregon coast and its surrounding ecosystems are rendered in hauntingly poetic language. Reading this and thinking of another literary 'post-apocalyptic' novel, "The Road", I can only think how much more evocative and meaningful is "A Gift Upon the Shore", though admittedly, they are very different kinds of books. This is truly eloquent and ambitious, and though it may not attain the profound heights that it strives for, I would easily recommend it.

John Wiltshire says

I read this many years ago but it stuck in my mind. So much did it stick that I've just been recommending it to someone who's interested in post-apocalyptic novels. I'd forgotten its title and author, so just Google'd "post-apocalyptic, two women, Portland, pandemic" and found it. Don't you just love the internet? This really is an excellent, literary take on a post-apocalyptic world. It's frustrating as all get-go, however, so be warned going in. Sometimes the pandemic isn't the worst thing you can face.

Metaphorosis says

With her Phoenix Legacy, M. K. Wren did for science fiction romance what Mary Stewart did for fantasy - except that fewer people noticed. That's a shame, because the Phoenix trilogy is terrific.

Despite that, I didn't pick up *A Gift Upon the Shore* for many years, mostly because I'm not much of a post-apocalypticist. But with its recent reissue, and Wren's confounding failure to write any other books (This is her only other SF novel, though she also wrote a series of mystery stories.), I decided to buy it.

The story deals with a writer who comes to live with an artist on the Oregon coast, just before nuclear war. (Coincidentally, Wren lived with an artist, on the Oregon coast...) The story explores the women's struggle to survive, and the different ways they approach their legacies. Key issues include knowledge (a trove of books), reproduction (as an imperative in a depopulated world), and religion (for good or evil).

Some people have disliked the way religion is treated, and I agree that it's not placed in a very flattering light. If you're an easily-offended Christian, this may not be the book for you. For others, the book poses some interesting questions about how we *would* prioritize our values if push came to shove.

Wren makes what I assume was a deliberate choice to put Mary, the writer, between two more extreme views. So far, so good. Unfortunately, many of the choices Mary makes are simply not credible - at least, not in the person Wren has shown to us. While we understand her to be balancing difficult choices, she in fact is extremely malleable, and is apparently driven by desires that manifest only vaguely in her own mind and emotions.

The book alternates flashbacks as a young woman and a present as an old woman. The present scenes are more consistent, but even foolish youth doesn't adequately explain the past Mary's choices.

All in all, an interesting story, but substantially weakened by a protagonist that simply doesn't ring true. Worth picking up for a story about how to balance imperatives, but without the impact of the far better *Phoenix Legacy*.

Johnathon Neist says

Originally published in 1990, it seems like the publisher is re-releasing this title in the midst of Hunger Games hysteria. It will play well with readers that can handle more character development and a slower pace than the aforementioned series. It may not play well with those sensitive to criticism of the Christian religion.

The story is set after a large nuclear explosion occurs in the United States, and the narrative focuses upon how the character not only survives the loss of nearly everything dear to her, but also how she adapts to fundamentalists that seem to be the only other survivors. One friend from before the blast survives with the narrator, and together they decide that beyond pro-creation with the crazies, preserving books is the best gift they can leave for any other survivors. Anyone who loves books will appreciate this plot device and it leads to a lot of suspense and a fantastic ending. The author selects some great quotes for the purpose of

foreshadowing before every chapter.

If you are fascinated with a gloomy dystopian future and how humans would react, give this book a read. The character types are a bit different from all the other titles in this genre.

Brenda Pike says

I give this four stars and not five only because I was a little disturbed at how preachy it could get in its anti-religion. However, it's refreshing to have a book in which that's the main theme. And it hits notes that are close to my heart: love of books and post-apocalyptic futures.

I loved the frame of an old woman telling her story to a child—it was a very convincing perspective, and it surprised me that it drew me in so much. I also loved the character of Rachel, idealized though she is. I actually cried at the end (which is very hard to make me do) and didn't feel manipulated by it (even harder). All in all, a great book. Thanks, Sharon, for recommending it.

Nikki says

I received this book on Netgalley in exchange for an honest review. I really wanted and expected to like it; it's a reissue of a book published in 1990, and offers a more female viewpoint on the story of nuclear apocalypse and survival, even regrowth. Unfortunately, I just couldn't get into it: the pace is slow, the writing feels stodgy, and it feels more than a bit judgemental about Christianity -- or Christians, at least. I don't see any reason why the more Christian a character professes to be, the more dogmatic and intolerant they behave. I'm very close to some very serious, devout Christians: whatever they believe about me (the fact that I'm a Unitarian Universalist, the fact that I have a same-sex partner), they treat me with compassion and understanding.

As for the writing, it's little repetitive tics that give it the sense of stodginess and clumsiness. Every other chapter for at least the first quarter of the book starts by telling us what 'Mary Hope' is doing -- bludgeoning the reader over the head with that pointed surname. To me, the structure of alternating present first person and past third person chapters felt clumsy too: quite often the one introduces the other, and yet little happens in either to justify taking up a whole chapter, let alone two.

I like the idea, but I think it would have been better served by simplicity of language, structure and style.
