

Spring 2012

**Review of Then by Julie Myerson London: Jonathan Cape, 2011.
£12.99; \$30.25 ISBN: 978-0224093750**

Mimosa Stephenson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/jostes>

Recommended Citation

Stephenson, M. (2012). Review of Then by Julie Myerson London: Jonathan Cape, 2011. £12.99; \$30.25 ISBN: 978-0224093750. Jostes: The Journal of South Texas English Studies, 3(2), 111-112.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of South Texas English Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact justin.white@utrgv.edu, william.flores01@utrgv.edu.

Review of *Then* by Julie Myerson

London: Jonathan Cape, 2011. £12.99; \$30.25

ISBN: 978-0224093750

Dr. Mimosa Stephenson, University of Texas at Brownsville

Julie Myerson's apocalyptic picture of her protagonist's survival in a ruined London after some unspecified disaster (presumably war though first the city becomes hot in February and then unnatural cold descends in summer) delivers a message about the horrors of war, but mostly it shows the devastating effect of the debacle on the protagonist. The novel begins in summer, but the first-person narrator, who, because of the horror, has forgotten even her own name, gradually remembers. The story then becomes a puzzle unraveled through the pages of the novel. She imagines finding her dead children (she killed three of them herself) on a higher floor in the office building where she and four other people have taken refuge, and finally remembers gang rape. The story includes sudden unexplained catastrophe, dead bodies lying in the streets, hunger, and sickness with no medical help available. Unequipped to live on the land and survive, these city people have lost their police force, their hospitals, their transportation, their food supply, and their concern for one another. This novel is about loss of the means of survival, purpose, a future, family, love, and hope. Unfortunately, Myerson, perhaps deliberately distancing the reader (as Orhan Pamuk, the winner of the 2006 Nobel Prize for Literature chose to do in *Snow* in emulation of Bertolt Brecht), has not made her heroine likeable. The story is written with artistry and skill, but the main character has brought so much havoc into her life and that of her family in the back story that the reader does not much care what happens to her. Another 2011 apocalyptic offering is Maureen F. McHugh's short story collection *After the Apocalypse*, whose title story ends with the main character's securing food, water, and shelter for

herself by deserting her thirteen-year-old daughter to fend for herself. These fictions suggest that given apocalypse, all of humankind will revert to the lowest possible level to fight for survival.

There are other possible futures, however, as seen in Cormac McCarthy's beautiful 2006 apocalyptic novel *The Road*, whose protagonist deeply loves his son; the reader cries for them both. Suzanne Collins's recent riveting page-turner, *The Hunger Games Trilogy*, written for teenagers but like C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* a superb read for adults also, alerts readers to the horrors and after effects of war as they cheer on the protagonist who willingly offers her life for her sister. The dangers of war bore far deeper into the psyches of McCarthy's and Collins's readers because they are concerned about what happens to the characters. After all, the best things in life have to do with relationships. William Faulkner says in his 1950 Nobel Prize Speech that literature should be a prop to help us prevail. *Then* pulls the reader down and is worth neither the money it takes to buy it nor the time it takes to read it. Leave *Then* on the shelf of the bookstore and pick up *The Road* and *The Hunger Games*.