

SYLLABUS

EN 387.01 Seminar: Imagining Apocalypse in Contemporary Literature Spring 2019 Dr. Osteen

Office: HU 242B; Hours: TTH 10-12, and by appointment

Phone: x2363; e-mail: mosteen@loyola.edu

COURSE SUMMARY

In this course we will chiefly explore the apocalyptic visions of three distinguished authors in three major works (we may add a fourth). Each text offers not only a vision of how civilization might end, but also reveals how the mere prospect of such an end has changed human beings' sense of our place on the planet and in the cosmos. During the Cold War, for example, authors imagined the end of the world occurring through a nuclear conflict. Don DeLillo's *Underworld* considers this possibility and its causes, anatomizing the military industrial complex that created the danger, while also demonstrating how the threat of apocalypse has affected every citizen. Other novelists have imagined apocalypse occurring through an accident or a pandemic. Each text also incorporates a vision or theory of time, history and human agency, indicated in the text's structure: repetitive motifs, embedded narratives, reverse chronology, flashbacks. Finally, each text analyzes the perils that result when technological advances are not tempered by a humane, ecological or social ethos. Ultimately, each author also provides reason for hope that tempers the possibility of extinction.

COURSE LEARNING AIMS

- ▶ To enable students to create their own research paper topics and to write substantial, sophisticated research essays.
- ▶ To provide a discussion-oriented format that encourages everyone to participate, exchange ideas, and benefit from the fruits of challenging intellectual discourse.
- ▶ To consider why and how literary artists have envisioned the end of civilization, and to explore how such visions might help us avoid such a fate.
- ▶ To come to terms with Western civilization's lethal love affair with technology and its consequences.
- ▶ To master some of the most important and innovative fictional texts of the past 25 years.
- ▶ To have fun!

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*. Random House, 2004
2. Don DeLillo, *Underworld*. Scribner, 1997.
3. Margaret Atwood, *The Maddaddam Trilogy*:
 - a. *Oryx and Crake*. Doubleday, 2003.
 - b. *The Year of the Flood*. Doubleday/Random House, 2009.
 - c. *Maddaddam*. Doubleday, 2013.
4. Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*. Knopf, 2006; or post-apocalyptic short stories. On our first

meeting after Spring Break, we will decide whether to read *The Road*, by Cormac McCarthy, or together to select two or three short stories with an apocalyptic or end-of-civilization theme. One of these two texts will be our assignment for April 23rd.

REQUIRED FILMS

1. *Cocksucker Blues*. Dir. Robert Frank, 1972. Youtube

Part One:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0hbpDTZ0pk&list=RDX0hbpDTZ0pk&start_radio=1.

Part Two: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qayYbvrPaRI>.

2. “The Zapruder Film.”

3. Youtube videos of Lenny Bruce, Jackie Gleason, Truman Capote, and other figures in *Underworld*.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Participation. Each student is expected to attend *every* session and come prepared. If you miss a class, your grade will be adversely affected. Remember: one class session equals an entire week’s work. This is a discussion-based course; full preparation requires that you read the text assigned *and* consider the study questions I post each week, even if you don’t write out answers. **You must keep up with the reading! The success of the class depends on it.**

2. Moodle Posts. To keep our discussions lively and to ensure that you are keeping up with the readings and thinking critically about them, **each student must write a substantial post every week.**

a. These should not be reviews or reading notes, but short essays. Focus on one or two significant themes, details, or ideas, and analyze them. **You should write three or four solid, well-considered paragraphs.** As we learn more about these issues and get deeper into the novels, I’ll expect more thoughtful and sophisticated responses.

b. Each student **must also respond to at least three** student posts each week. Responses such as “awesome post, Lauren” don’t contribute much. The point is to engage with your peers and discuss the texts and ideas beyond the classroom walls.

c. You should post your main response on the forum **by noon each Tuesday**, and preferably the night before. That deadline gives each of us a chance to read them, think about them, and respond to them before class begins. All responses to initial posts should be **on the forum by 3 pm on Tuesday.**

3. Presentation. Each student will deliver, with a partner or alone, an oral presentation on a subject of his/her choice. These will be assigned at the first class meeting. Each group or student presenter will meet with me before the date of the presentation to determine a topic.

Guidelines:

- a. The presentation should treat critically some theme, technical issue, or idea in the texts and films for that week.
- b. Each presentation **must be accompanied by an audio-visual aide**, such as a handout, film clip, musical excerpt, website, PowerPoint, Prezi, etc.
- c. Each presentation should last no more than 20 minutes; I'll give one warning, then I will cut you off.
- d. Each student will also evaluate other students' presentations by completing a form with comments and a grade. Each student will be graded on the helpfulness and accuracy of his or her evaluations; this grade will be included in the participation grade.
- e. A research bibliography containing at least **four** sources is **due on the day of your presentation**. These should be annotated: that is, you should describe the source's topic or thesis in a few sentences. Check with me before including any Internet sources; sources found on the library's research database are okay.
- f. You must provide **two** questions for discussion. The questions should be photocopied or presented visually in class. **You should not ask discussion questions that you've already answered in your presentation.**

4. Research Paper: You will write a research paper of 8-12 pages. **The paper should expand upon the topic of your presentation.**

Guidelines:

- a. The paper **must incorporate at least three secondary sources—that is, criticism of literature or interviews**—as well as primary texts. You may use Internet sources if they are from refereed journals such as those found on the library databases. *Check with me before using any other web-based source.*
- b. The paper is due **no more than two weeks after the date of your oral presentation**. Please meet with me after your presentation to work out a topic. **All late papers are graded down 1/3 grade per day late**, unless you make arrangements with me in advance.
- c. You must give me hard copy of your paper **AND** send it to me as an e-mail attachment or upload it to the "Research Paper" assignment on Moodle. ***The e-mail attachment alone is not acceptable.***

5. Deadlines. Late assignments are **penalized one-third of a letter grade per day late**, beginning five minutes after class on the day it is due. Make-up exams are given only in case of dire emergency. If you know you must miss an exam, **make arrangements ahead of time**. All term grades are final.

6. Exams. There will be a take-home midterm essay. I'm keeping open the possibility of a final exam. Whether we have one will depend on whether you show me that you need one. If we have a final, it will consist of two take-home essays to be turned in by the final day of class. Rather than having a timed exam on May 7th, as scheduled, we will convene during Finals Week to do something fun, such as an end-of-the-world party.

7. Percentages. The final grade will be determined according to the following ratios:

Participation and Moodle posts and reflections:	30%
Mid-term essays:	20%
Term Paper and Presentation:	30%
Final Exam:	20%

If we decide not to have a final exam, the participation grade will count for 40%, as will the paper and presentation grade.

ACCOMMODATIONS NOTICE

To request academic accommodations due to a disability, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS), Newman Towers West 107, at DSS@loyola.edu or 410-617-2750/2062. If you have already registered with DSS and have requested an accommodations letter (and DSS has sent the letter to your professors via email), please schedule a brief meeting to discuss with me the accommodations you might need in this class. If you have any questions please contact Marcia Wiedefeld, Director of DSS, at mwiedefeld@loyola.edu or 410-617-2062.

HONOR CODE NOTICE

This course is covered by the Loyola College Honor Code. **All students guilty of plagiarizing or cheating on any assignment will fail the course, regardless of their grades on other assignments or activities.**

The English department regards plagiarism and other forms of cheating as the antithesis of scholarship, learning, collegiality, and responsible citizenship. The department defines plagiarism as any unacknowledged use of another's words or ideas. This definition applies to non-print media, including (especially!) the Internet, as well as to books, magazines, journals, newspapers, and other print media.

It is the student's responsibility to understand what constitutes plagiarism and to avoid it in all assignments. Students should familiarize themselves with the *Loyola Undergraduate Catalogue's* statement on "Intellectual Honesty," and with the section "Integrating Sources and avoiding Plagiarism" (pp.197-202) in Lunsford's *Easy Writer*, the Loyola English Department's grammar and style handbook. Anyone having questions or uncertainties about plagiarism should consult with the instructor before submitting any assignment. When in doubt, err on the side of safety! Neither ignorance of the definition of plagiarism nor the lack of intention to deceive constitutes an acceptable defense in matters of scholarly dishonesty.

EN 387.01 SCHEDULE OF READINGS

January 15: Introduction to course, postmodernism, and apocalyptic literature.

January 22: David Mitchell, *Cloud Atlas*, through Part Five (p. 237).

January 29: *Cloud Atlas* to end. Presentation.

February 5: Don DeLillo, *Underworld*, through Part Two, Chapter Five (p. 209).

February 12: *Underworld*, through Part Four, Chapter Two (p. 422). Film: *Cocksucker Blues*.

February 19: *Underworld*, through Part Five (p. 637). Presentation.

February 26: *Underworld*, to end. Presentation. Midterm essays due by Thursday.

March 4-8: Spring Break.

March 12: Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, through p. 184 (“Happicuppa”).

March 19: *Oryx and Crake* to end. Presentation.

March 26: Atwood, *The Year of the Flood*, through Chapter 40.

April 2: Atwood, *Year of the Flood*. Presentation.

April 9: Atwood, *Maddaddam*, through p. 198.

April 16: *Maddaddam*, to end. Presentations.

April 23: Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*; or post-apocalyptic short stories.

April 30: Catch-up session; share paper abstracts.

Note: the English Department awards reception and senior party is scheduled for April 30th. If we don't have a snow day on a Tuesday, we will meet only briefly on April 30th to share paper abstracts.