

# THE END . . .

## Post-Apocalyptic Fiction, Film and Art

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why do we feel such an attraction to disaster? Why do we produce novels, films, and other forms of art that contemplate the end of humanity? Scholars from many disciplines have offered theories about the appeal and meaning of such spectacles of apocalyptic destruction. We will read some of this critical literature, examining views from disciplines such as psychology, sociology, cultural studies, and religion. In addition to these assigned readings, each of you will engage in your own original process of inquiry on a related topic of your choosing. You will present your findings frequently to the community of scholars in our class, sharing and discussing your research discoveries and insights. Ultimately, you will produce a lengthy work of original scholarship that will contribute to this field of inquiry.

### REQUIRED TEXTS

*The Road*, Cormac McCarthy.

 *The Open Handbook*, Alan C. Taylor.

- ↪ Other course readings may be downloaded from **Canvas**.
- ↪ Several films are available on Canvas or through the Jones Media Library.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

Writing 003 has a number of **important course outcomes** that are described at great length on the Institute for Writing and Rhetoric website. To briefly summarize them, this course continues our focus on inquiry, critical thinking, and argumentation. The course additionally involves an introduction to academic research. Our libraries hold an impressive collection of traditional and electronic research tools as well as hundreds of thousands of books, journal articles, and assorted media. Navigating this ocean of information can be intimidating; however, excellent research skills are fundamental to your training. Therefore, we will spend a significant amount of time learning how to perform academic research and use our library resources effectively. By the end of this course, you should be able to do the following:

1. Formulate research questions that may be used to guide a research process.

2. Discover background information on a topic using reference materials.
3. Locate books, periodicals, and other physical media within library collections.
4. Locate electronic databases and query them with precision.
5. Understand the importance of the process known as “peer review.”
6. Critically evaluate sources for credibility and suitability for research.
7. Use bibliographic software and a research journal to track and manage references.
8. Craft a lengthy argument that contributes to an ongoing critical conversation.

## **ACADEMIC POLICIES**

All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written *exclusively* for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. Please read the **Academic Honor Principle** for more information about plagiarism. Your handbook and the **Sources and Citations** document also contain valuable information on documentation and avoiding plagiarism. If you are confused about when or how to cite information, please consult me before submitting your work.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Regular attendance is expected. Bracketing religious observance, severe illness, or personal tragedy, no more than three unexcused absences will be acceptable for this course. Four or more unexcused absences may result in repercussions ranging from significant reduction in GPA to failure of the course. If you have a religious observance that conflicts with your participation in the course, please meet with me before the end of the second week of the term to discuss appropriate accommodations.

↪ This policy applies to regular class meetings, assigned X hours, and TA meetings.

## **GRADED COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **1. Formal Research Essay**

You will write one formal research essay 15 pages or more in length. The project will involve many of the core competencies we developed in the previous term including argumentation, critical thinking, close reading, synthesis, and theoretical analysis. I encourage you to write on one of the texts, films, or issues encountered during the class. However, if you would like to write on a different text or film you may do so if it is a contribution to our course conversation and theme. If you take this route, please discuss your ideas with me before you get too far along. I am happy to meet with each of you to discuss ideas and help formulate a research plan.

↪ The essay must be submitted in the Chicago format and contain a minimum of 15 peer-reviewed sources.

### **2. Research Workshops**

Several workshop assignments will be assigned to help you gain confidence with using library resources and managing a large research project.

### **3. Presentations**

You will make one formal presentation at the conclusion of the term to explain your research project. You will also make a number of informal presentations about your ideas, research, and writing as they evolve over the term. *These informal presentations may not be announced, so be prepared to discuss your project at any time.*

## 4. Author Page

Each of you will curate a page on our course website—**The End**—to display your research project as it evolves over the term. Your page should contain the following:

- ✓ a short research proposal of no more than 250 words.
- ✓ an annotated bibliography of all the sources used or consulted to construct your research project.
- ✓ a current draft of your research essay.
- ✓ a weekly reflective blog post about the progress of your research project (see #7 below).

★ I have placed a **model author page** on the course website.

## 5 – Reading Response Posts

Before we meet to discuss a new course text, write a critical response and post it to our online discussion forum in **Canvas**. The post should discuss ideas, arguments, or questions that arise from the reading(s). These are writing and thinking exercises, not polished essays; however, I do expect that your posts will grapple with the readings in an intelligent way and demonstrate a great deal of thought and care. Here are some principles to consider as you craft your posts:

- ↪ *Good posts do not merely summarize*; rather, they should seek to *evaluate* and *engage* the writer’s claims or ideas. Use your posts to try to come to grips with the reading’s ideas (or some aspect of them).
- ↪ *Good posts may seek to take issue with some of the thinking put forth in the reading*. However, a good post doesn’t just say “I agree with X” or “I disagree with Y.” Instead, *explicit reasons are stated* and *explanations are made* that challenge or support the writer’s ideas. As you will discover, part of this class involves learning to take responsibility for your claims and arguments. This can only be done by providing reasons for the views you hold.
- ↪ *Good posts might alternatively attempt to forge a connection with another reading by demonstrating a relationship between the ideas or arguments involved*. For example, how might Author A respond to Author B? How do their views compare? Can their views be reconciled? Be specific. Show evidence.
- ↪ *Good posts may ask questions or express confusion*. Ignorance or confusion is not something to be feared. As Henry David Thoreau **once argued**, ignorance is often more useful than positive knowledge: confusion generates questions; questions inspire inquiry; inquiry produces knowledge and more interesting questions. Although you are free to pose questions in your posts, you should also make good efforts to answer them. Questions exist to drive us toward answers, not leave us spinning our wheels.
- ↪ *Good posts are not sloppy and demonstrate a high degree of care*.
- ↪ *Good posts avoid narcissism*. Don’t make everything about you or something that happened to you. While you will of course draw on your own experiences, your focus should be on the text(s).
- ↪ *Good posts are not derivative*. By this I mean that your post should be original and not a parasite clinging to the work of other students. Demand that everyone contribute their unique and individual perspective to our discourse community. Posts that clearly derive their very lifeblood from other posts should be met with hostility by the class. One way to avoid this problem is to post your response before reading the work of others. This does not mean that you should avoid responding to the thoughts of your colleagues. You should feel free to disagree or question the ideas of others (including your professor). This behavior is actually healthy for our discourse community.

★ Posts are due by 10pm **on the evening prior** to our first discussion of a text.

## 6 – Critical Reading Notes

Create an electronic document for composing critical notes. Take detailed notes on each reading. Since you will write essays about these texts, these notes will be of significant help to you later. Your aim here should be to *reduce the entire argument to its bare essentials using paraphrase, summary, and selective quotation*. Carefully document page numbers

during this activity. Interrogate the text by asking questions, raising objections, and noting observations. Connect and compare the reading to others we have read. Link to any outside research you perform and define unfamiliar terms or words. At the end of this process you should have a simplified version of the essay as well as a number of critical observations, questions, and ideas that emerged in your process of reading.

↪ For more detailed information on the creation and purpose of these notes, read the chapter entitled “Annotation and Critical Reading” in the *Open Handbook*.

★ Attach your critical notes file to your response post for each reading or film in the **Canvas** discussion forum.

## 7 – End-of-Week Journal Reflection

By Friday each week, compose a reflective post on your author page at the course website that looks back over the week’s reading and discussions. What is your big takeaway for this week? What was the most meaningful thing that you heard, thought, or read? Do you see any connections between this week’s readings and previous ones? Perhaps you see connections to your other coursework?

As your research for your final project intensifies, *your posts should also include the steps that you took that week to further the project*. What kind of research problems or difficulties did you encounter? Where did you find some new, helpful information? In essence, blog your experience as a novice researcher engaged in your first big research project.

Write as much as you like, but submit at least a half a page. We’ll often talk about these on Fridays and I will periodically evaluate them.

## DIGITAL PORTFOLIOS

A large **body of academic research** indicates that students who curate their academic performances over time and periodically revisit them experience measurable benefits in learning and development. For this reason, the **DartWrite** program provides every incoming student with a WordPress blog for use as a **digital portfolio**. The portfolio is yours. You own it. You may design it in any way you choose. You may post anything you like there—your writing, photography, reflections, whatever. We will talk more throughout the term about these digital portfolios and how they may be used. To access your portfolio, visit the login page at [journeys.dartmouth.edu](http://journeys.dartmouth.edu). Use your NetID credentials to log in.

## REQUIRED CONFERENCE

Each of you must attend a brief conference with me and our teaching assistant during the first two weeks of class. This is an informal meeting designed to discuss any concerns that you may have about the fall term or any goals that you may have going forward into the winter term. If there are particular things you would like to work on, please come prepared to discuss them.

To sign up for a session, **follow this link** and place your name in a slot.

## GRADING BREAKDOWN

The following assignments comprise your grade for the Winter term:

Research essay:	50 %
Response posts:	20 %
Presentations:	10 %
Participation:	10 %
Author page:	10 %

## HELP WITH YOUR WRITING

Assistance with your writing is available all term during my office hours. In addition to our course meetings, each of you will meet with your TA for 45 minutes per week. If you require additional help, the **RWIT** program offers excellent peer tutoring on all phases of the writing process—from generating ideas to formal citation.

## STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

All students are entitled to full access to this course, regardless of disability. If you have a disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please contact me as soon as possible to arrange a confidential meeting. Students requiring disability-related services must register with the **Student Accessibility Services** office. Once SAS has authorized services, students must show the originally signed SAS Services and Consent Form and/or a letter on SAS letterhead to me. As a first step, if you have questions about whether you qualify to receive academic adjustments and services, you should contact the SAS office. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential.

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

### 1 → COURSE INTRODUCTION, ACADEMIC RESEARCH, CULTURAL STUDIES

- 1.6 Syllabus, course overview, end-of-term meeting scheduling.
- X 1.7 ★ Conferencing: sign up for mandatory meeting.
- 1.8 ★ Conferencing: sign up for mandatory meeting.
- 1.10 ★ TA teaching session; introduction to Cultural Studies; create author page.

### 2 → DISASTER, APOCALYPSE, AND THE STATE OF NATURE

Philosophers and social scientists have attempted to explain the origins of civilization and the rise of the modern state for centuries. A key concept in this conversation is the “state of nature,” a hypothetical condition wherein human beings lived without government. In this primitive state there is no law or authority, only anarchy and the pervasive threat of violence. Thinkers of the past such as Hobbes, Rousseau, and Locke used this hypothetical condition to explain why the state of nature no longer exists and how civilized orders came to be. Today, however, many writers, filmmakers, and social scientists imagine apocalyptic scenarios of disaster by which society regresses again to chaotic states of nature. Why do we produce such imaginings? What purpose(s) do they serve? Why have these narratives become so prominent of late?

- 1.13 ★ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (selections).
- 1.15 ★ Claire Curtis, *Post-Apocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract*, “Introduction.”
- 1.17 ★ Mathias Nilges, “The Aesthetics of Destruction: Contemporary US Cinema and TV Culture.”  
✓ **Due:** End-of-week reflection.

✿ **Research lectures:** the research question; finding a topic; utility of subject searches; Chicago style.

### 3 → IMAGINING THE END: CORMAC MCCARTHY'S *THE ROAD*

- X ★ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, 1-96.
- 1.22 ★ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, 96-190.
- 1.24 ★ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, 191-287.  
✓ **Due:** End-of-week reflection.

✿ **Research lectures:** *finding background information; peer review; research guides; searching for books.*

### 4 → TEOTWAWKI: PREPPING FOR THE END

Recent years have seen an explosion of “reality” television programming based in survival skills or challenges. Popular shows in this regard include gameshows like *Survivor* and adventure shows like *Man vs. Wild* and *Survivorman*. Newer programming includes the Discovery Channel’s *Dude, You’re Screwed*, *Alaska Bush People*, *Dual Survival*, and the rather prurient *Naked and Afraid*. While these shows give viewers the vicarious thrill of braving the wilderness from the comfort of their armchairs, there has recently been an explosion in real survivalist culture, known as “prepping.” Preppers build bomb shelters and other fortifications where they stockpile food, supplies, firearms, and ammunition in preparation for TEOTWAWKI: The end of the world as we know it. A number of shows have emerged in response: *Doomsday Preppers*, *Doomsday Castle*, and *Doomsday Bunker*. The list of prepper fears is long: generalized civil unrest, total social collapse, global weather catastrophes, the return of Christ, peak oil, attacks using EMPs, and, of course, zombies. Are these views largely fueled by paranoia or a desire for self-reliance? Do these fears and anxieties signify some larger, unarticulated criticism or anxiety about modernity or capitalism?

- 1.27 ★ *Doomsday Preppers* (Episode is located in Files > Week 4).  
★ Casey Kelly, “The Man-pocalypse: Doomsday Preppers and the Rituals of Apocalyptic Manhood.”
- 1.29 *Research Session*.
- 1.31 ✓ **Due:** Author Page: research proposal (250 words), annotated bibliography of current research.  
✓ **Due:** End-of-week reflection.

### 5 → THE APOCALYPSE AND THE OTHER: *I AM LEGEND*

Cultural Studies scholars argue that post-apocalyptic narratives proliferate during periods of social crisis. During these moments of extreme social stress cultures transmute fear, anxiety, or dread into popular art forms such as novels or films. Thus, by examining popular media produced during these particular historical moments we are afforded a glimpse of how a culture worked through difficult social problems, reacted to challenges to its foundational values, and related to its various “Others.” In this section we will examine two films, *The Last Man on Earth* (1964) and *I am Legend* (2007), both adaptations of Richard Matheson’s 1954 novel *I Am Legend*. What cultural anxieties or problems do these films articulate? What social solutions do they seem to offer? Significantly, how do the differences between these two films provide a metric for measuring the evolving concerns of America from the 1960s to today?

- 2.3 ★ Film: *The Last Man on Earth* (1964).
- 2.5 ★ Film: *I am Legend* (2007).
- 2.7 ★ Deborah Christie, “A Dead New World: Richard Matheson and the Modern Zombie.” (*Read through page 76 only*).
- ✓ Due: Author Page: Update research proposal and annotated bibliography.

✿ Research lectures: *finding periodicals and assorted media; bibliographic software.*

## 6 → SLOW VIOLENCE, ECO-POCALYPSE, POVERTY

We tend to think of violence as an explosive event that erupts in a singular moment in time and space; however, scholar Rob Nixon argues that we must sensitize ourselves to what he calls “slow violence”—a form of violence “that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all” (2). In particular, Nixon’s focus in his influential work *Slow Violence* is on climate disaster: the slow-moving catastrophes of rising sea levels, mounting greenhouse gasses, toxic waste, nuclear fallout, deforestation, and acidifying oceans. These catastrophes, Nixon argues, are difficult to apprehend or represent in narrative form because they take place over years, decades, lifetimes, generations; as “spectacle deficient” events, they struggle for representation in a media environment that is biased toward more sensational forms of violence. Yet, these forms of ecocide are forms of violence surely, ones that remain invisible to many of us because they principally affect the impoverished and forgotten global poor. How can we recalibrate our perceptions to cognize these forms of slow violence? How do we convert “slow violence” into narrative form so that we can communicate its dangers, raise public awareness, and mobilize efforts for change?

- 2.10 ★ Film: *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012).
- ★ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, “Introduction.”
- 2.12 ★ Workshop.
- 2.14 ✓ Due: Research Essay Draft I (3-5 pages).
- ✓ Due: Author Page: Update research proposal and annotated bibliography.
- ✓ Student Peer Review.
- ✓ Due: End-of-week reflection.

✿ Research lectures: *boolean search terms, Borrow Direct, DartDoc.*

## 7 → THE ZOMBIE, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND RACE

Vampires, werewolves, and Frankenstein are all monsters of European extraction; the zombie, however, was made in America. This begs several questions. Why was the zombie born here rather than someplace else? What is it about the Americas and their history that made the figure of the zombie possible and popular? What does it say about us and our culture that we have created precisely *this* type of monster? In this section we will attempt to answer these questions by tracing the evolution of the zombie—from its origins in the slave-based plantation cultures of the Americas through modern interpretations of the figure in contemporary literature and film. Significantly, the zombie of today differs markedly from its precursors in the cinema of the 30s, 40s, and 50s. In these earlier films the zombie was a figure within an imperialist discourse that expressed racist ideologies and the anxieties of post-slavery cultures throughout the Americas. However, just as the figure of the zombie had nearly been forgotten, a new form of the creature appeared in 1968 in George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*. No longer was the zombie a folkloric figure born of the struggle between master and slave; now it was an mindless, cannibalistic creature that stalked the

countryside in swarms, mindlessly searching for human flesh. How do we account for this sudden transformation of the zombie? What cultural “work” did the zombie perform?

2.17 ★ Peter Dendle, “The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety.”

2.19 ★ Film: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968).

2.21 ★ Revision and Research workshop.

✓ **Due:** *End-of-week reflection.*

✿ **Research lectures:** *working on large research projects.*

## 8 → RESEARCH AND DRAFTING WEEK

2.24 ★ Workshop.

2.26 ★ Workshop.

2.28 ✓ **Due:** *Research Essay Draft II* (7-10 pages).

✓ **Due:** *Author Page:* update research proposal and annotated bibliography.

✓ Student Peer Review and presentation prep.

## 9 → CLASS PRESENTATIONS

3.2 ★ Presentation Group One.

2.4 ★ Presentation Group Two.

3.6 ★ Presentation Group Three.

## THE END . . .

3.13 ✿ **Final Essays Due.** *Update Author Pages with final drafts and bibliography.*