The End of the World: Apocalyptic Film and Literature  
*Summer Session II*  
July 2-August 2, 2012  
ENGL 3723/401  
MTWR 12:20-2:20, DB 329

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Office Hours: MTWR 2:30-4:15 and by appointment

Prerequisite: ENGL 1123  
Why are we so fascinated by the end of the world? Why are we so drawn to scenarios of apocalypse and disaster? Why does the ten-headed dragon of Revelation frighten yet captivate us as much as the invading aliens of Independence Day? In this course we will examine these questions, studying visions of the end of the world in Western civilization from antiquity to the present day in the visual arts, literature, film, and music. We will situate these visions within their historical and cultural contexts and discuss how and why they have changed over time. The course will proceed both thematically and chronologically, and the readings will be complemented by visual imagery and film clips. We will discuss the enduring Western fascination with the end of the world, its significance for our world today, and contemporary manifestations of this veritable obsession.

**Ancient Visions of the End**

**July**  
2 Introduction  
3 Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War* (6th-5th c. BC, excerpts)  
The New Testament, Revelation (1st c. AD)  
Boccaccio, *The Decameron* (1353, excerpt)  
4 No class

**Gothic and Romantic Visions**

5 Jean Baptiste de Grainville, *The Last Man* (1805)  
9 Mary Shelley, *The Last Man* (1826, excerpts)  
Edgar Allan Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), “The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion” (1839), and “The Masque of the Red Death” (1842)  
Richard Jefferies, *After London* (1885, excerpts)

**Extinct Cities: Atlantis and Pompeii**

10 Plato, *Timaeus* and *Critias* (4th c. BC, excerpts)  
Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834, excerpts)  
Jules Verne, “A Vanished Continent” from *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1870)  
Garrett P. Serviss, *The Second Deluge* (1912, excerpt)
Harlan Ellison, “Phoenix” (1969)

**Alien Invasion**

11 Film: Matt Reeves, *Cloverfield* (2008)
12 H.G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds* (1898)
16 Wells, continued

**Plague**

17 Stephen King, *The Stand* (1978, excerpt)
Nancy Kress, “Inertia” (1990, *Wastelands*)
Albert Camus, *The Plague* (1947)
18 Film: Steven Soderbergh, *Contagion* (2011)
19 Camus, continued
23 Camus, continued

**Destruction by Technology**

Ray Bradbury, “There Will Come Soft Rains” (1950)
Harlan Ellison, “I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream” (1967)
Cory Doctorow, “When the Sysadmins Ruled the Earth” (2006, *Wastelands*)

**Natural Disaster**

30 Goldberg, continued
Dale Bailey, “The End of the World as We Know It” (2004, *Wastelands*)

**The Post-Apocalyptic Journey**


**Aug.**

1 McCarthy, continued
2 Final Exam
Course Requirements:

1. **Attendance and Punctuality (30%)**: This is an intensive (but fun) course: we cover an entire semester in four weeks! The reading is therefore intensive, and you will miss a lot of material if you miss just one class. (However, it should be noted that most of the stories and excerpts are quite short.) It is therefore essential that you attend class regularly. You are permitted one unexcused absence. Other absences will be excused on the basis of a note from a doctor, dean, or coach. If it is not possible for you to get a note but you feel your absence is justified, you must inform me of your situation and I will decide whether or not to excuse you. *Communication is absolutely essential!* *If you are absent and do not tell me why, your absence will be counted as unexcused.* Repeated lateness may add up to an absence. If you are absent, you are still responsible for all material covered in class and posted on Blackboard.

2. **Participation (10%)**: You will get the most out of class and improve the verbal formulation of your thoughts if you participate in the discussions. Please bring the readings to class. I encourage you to speak with all of your classmates and respond to one another’s ideas during discussion, rather than addressing your thoughts only to me.

3. **Daily Assignments (25%)**: For each class meeting, except on days before a film screening, I will post one question on the readings on Blackboard under **Assignments**. You should briefly respond to that question and pose one discussion question of your own by 9 a.m. on the day of the class. Your question should not be a yes/no or a factual question, but rather one that you believe will stimulate class discussion. If you would like, you may post additional questions, including factual questions, for me to respond to individually. Only I will see your responses and questions, though I may use them in class anonymously. I will also publish the most interesting assignment responses of the day online, particularly if we did not get around to discussing them in class. Please read all published responses! This will not only stimulate your thinking about the material, but also help you to improve your own responses and study questions. **PLEASE NOTE** that I will respond to all assignments and send you your HW grade (√-, √, √+) as soon as possible, usually within one day. You must read my responses to your assignments— they are for you! No late responses will be accepted after the beginning of the relevant class, unless you have an excused absence. *If you will not have regular Internet access, please see me at the start of the summer session.*

4. **Opening Discussion (10%)**: At the beginning of the semester you will sign up to open discussion on one day. You will be expected to briefly discuss something that interests you in the assignment and raise a topic to initiate class discussion on that day. You should briefly explain the topic, say why you think it is significant, offer a few of your own thoughts on it, and then ask the class what they think (max. 5 minutes).

5. **Discussions (5%)**: By July 26, you must post at least three links to relevant websites, videos, or other relevant materials under **Discussions** on Blackboard, and briefly comment on at least three links posted by other students or by the instructor. Your
comments must demonstrate that you have actually viewed the material (i.e., you should say more than, “That’s a cool video!”).

6. Final Exam (20%): The final will be an essay exam.

Other Important Information:

Assignments on Blackboard: Some course materials will not be available in print. I will provide either a link to the assigned text or a scanned copy on Blackboard. Unfortunately, stricter copyright laws prohibit me from distributing these texts to you, even if they are in the public domain.

Additional Film Screenings: If enough students have time and are interested, I will screen one or two additional films outside of class, including Roland Emmerich’s Independence Day (1996) and a film of the students’ choice. Some possible films, in order of my recommendation, include Danny Boyle’s 28 Days Later (2002), Ubaldo Ragona and Sidney Salkow’s The Last Man on Earth (1964), Lars von Trier’s Melancholia (2011), Roland Emmerich’s The Day After Tomorrow (2004), and Steven Spielberg’s War of the Worlds (2005).

PowerPoint Presentations and Film Clips: Links to presentations and clips shown in class, if possible, will subsequently be posted on Blackboard so that you may review them. Additional recommended and required materials will occasionally also be posted on Blackboard.

Office Hours: My office hours are given above, and I am always happy to help you with any questions you may have, whether they are about the texts we are reading, assignments, absences, or anything else—or you may just come by to talk. If you can’t make my office hours, we can make an appointment or even have a live chat on Blackboard!

Academic Accommodations: If you require special accommodations, please contact Disability Support Service, 168 Clark Student Center, 397-4140, at the beginning of the summer session so that appropriate arrangements can be made. Arrangements cannot be applied retroactively.

Course Policies:

Plagiarism: Plagiarism will not be tolerated, including on the daily assignments. If you plagiarize on the assignments or the exam, or engage in any other form of academic dishonesty as defined by the MSU Student Handbook, you will get an F in the course and disciplinary proceedings will be initiated.

Cell Phones: No cell phones should be visible in class at any time! If you try to hide your phone under your desk or behind your bag, don’t think I won’t see it. If I see you use your cell phone during class, you will be marked late or absent without any warning.
You may not leave class to use your cell phone except under exceptional circumstances, of which you have informed me beforehand. You may not use your cell phone during the final exam. The same policy applies to iPods and other electronic devices.

**Food:** You may bring beverages to class, but please do not eat while class is in session.

**Computers:** You may bring your computer to class only to consult the texts we are discussing or to take notes. If you use your computer for any other purpose during class, you will be marked late or absent without warning.

**Attention:** Please be alert and do not lay your head down on your desk during class, or I will mark you late or absent without warning.

**Class Dismissal:** Please do not start to pack up your things or leave until I have dismissed the class. If you believe I have gone over the allotted time, please raise your hand and let me know.

**Email Communication:** The only way I can communicate with you outside of class is through email. You are responsible for checking your “preferred” email daily for any reminders, clarifications, or other communications from me.

**Safe Zone Statement:** This classroom is a “safe zone” in which all students will be treated and will treat one another equally, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, political beliefs, age, or ability. Diversity of thought is encouraged.

**Break:** We will have a five-minute break halfway through class, during which you may use your cell phone, have a quick snack, go to the restroom, lay down your head, or whatever you wish.

**REPEATED AND/OR SERIOUS VIOLATIONS OF ANY OF THESE POLICIES WILL RESULT IN A LOWERED GRADE WITHOUT WARNING, ESPECIALLY IF YOUR GRADE IS BORDERLINE.**

**Required Texts** (available at the College Bookstore):