



The image above is a photograph showing viewers with Dinos and Jake Chapman's mixed media installation, *The Sum of All Evils*, at White Cube (Gallery), Hong Kong, 2013.

GESM 120g

Section 3534OR 001

The Apocalypse in Literature, Art and Film

Fall 2019

MWF 11-11:50 pm

THH 119

Professor Michael du Plessis

Office: THH 174

(in Taper Hall of Humanities, Comparative Literature Department, ground floor, southeast corner, near French and Italian Department)

Email: duplessi@usc.edu

Phone: 323.854.2271 (my cell--please feel free to leave a text or a voicemail message if you need to contact me—it's my preferred means of communication)

Office hours: Monday, Wednesday and Friday 2-3 pm, or by appointment

A NOTE ON PRONOUNS:

My preferred third-person pronouns for myself are: "they," "them," and "theirs" or "she," "her," and "hers."

Please let me know if you have a particular pronoun preference and please let me know if your name is different from the one on the class roster.

Course description:

Will it all end and if so, how? This course will explore ways in which writers, filmmakers, and artists have imagined the unimaginable—the end of the world. We will look at different kinds of apocalyptic visions: ecological, secular, entropic, religious, mythic and nuclear. We will examine the very different kinds of media, genres and styles by means of which the apocalypse has been given form, images and narrative, ranging from prophecy and allegory to science fiction and the graphic novel.

We will read and watch key selected texts (verbal and visual) in detail, elaborating their contexts. As we read, we will also develop and build our analytic skills—what strategies are useful in approaching themes and imagery, genres and forms?

A note of caution: since this is a class about the apocalypse, some of the material may contain disturbing depictions of violence, so be forewarned. If you find yourself unable

to read/watch a particular text, feel free to let me know and I will make arrangements to accommodate you.

Course goals:

- * to familiarize ourselves with selected key texts that represent the ending of a world in a wide range of ways
- * to probe the responses you have to particular texts
- * to provide persuasive evidence for your response
- * to understand how looking closely at a text may reinforce or challenge your initial response
- * to learn to read texts in terms of both an overall problematic and detail
- * to consider the effects of form on meaning, especially in the case of end-driven narratives
- * to analyze how different kinds of media (verbal, visual, cinematic) have different effects for their particular presentation of an “end”
- * to understand texts in both their historical and artistic contexts
- * to sharpen and develop our skills of verbal analysis
- * to hone and develop our skills for verbalizing visual information in a precise and insightful manner
- * to apply with insight specific terminology for analyzing the visual arts and cinema
- * to practice writing skills both in shorter and longer papers as well as in essays and exams
- * to demonstrate understanding with persuasive and thorough reference to precise textual evidence in clear and logically organized college-level prose, whether in class discussions, exercises, exams or essays

Course requirements:

Students will write three 2-page papers, one final 4-page paper, a mid-term exam and a final exam.

In addition, throughout the semester there will be a number of unannounced writing exercises in which students engage with class material.

Students’ contribution to class discussion and level of preparation for class will also be taken into consideration when I calculate final grades.

Grade assignment and distribution:

First 2-page paper:	10%
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Second 2-page paper:	10%
Classroom presentation	10%
2-page written development of your classroom presentation	10%
Final paper (4 pages):	15%
Mid-semester exam:	15%
Final exam:	15%
Unannounced writing exercises:	10%
Class preparation and participation:	5%

Due dates:

Papers:

First 2-page paper due on Friday, September 20.

Second 2-page paper due on Wednesday, October 30.

Third 2-page paper (your paper based on the presentation) is due approximately 10 days after your presentation.

Final paper: 4-page paper is due on the last day of classes, Friday, December 6.

All papers must be submitted as a hard copy in class and electronically on Blackboard at Turnitin.

Exams:

Mid-semester exam: Week 7, Friday, October 11 in and during our class (time and room).

Final exam: Wednesday, December 11, THH 119, 11 am-1 pm.

Required texts:

Book of Revelation in the Authorized King James Version:

<http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Revelation-Chapter-1/>

Bozek, Jennifer. *The Tales*.

Los Angeles: Les Figue Press.
ISBN-10: 1934254509

Byatt, A.S. *Ragnarök*.
Canongate.
ISBN-10: 0802120849

Ma Ling. *Severance*.
New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Sold by Macmillan.
ISBN-10: 0374261598

Moore, Alan and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*.
New York: DC Comics.
ISBN-10: 1401245250

On Blackboard:

Ballard, J.G. "The Deep End."
---. "The Voices of Time."
Butler, Octavia. "Speech Sounds."
Tiptree, James, Jr. "The Last Flight of Dr. Ain."
Zoline, Pamela. "The Heat Death of the Universe."

On reserve at Leavey Library:

Fessenden, Larry, director. *The Last Winter*. USA. 2007.
Sang-Ho Yeon, director. *Train to Busan*. Korea, 2016.
Recommended: Sang-Ho Yeon. *Seoul Station*. Korea, 2016.

Topics:

With each text, I will give you a set of questions that encourage thinking rigorously, both in detail and in whole, about the text. You may select one of these questions as a possible paper topic. You are also free to construct your own topic after discussion with me.

Presentations:

Your presentation should be 5 minutes long. The aim of the presentation is to give you the chance to generate a collaborative analysis with your peers and colleagues. You may focus your short presentation however you want, but its aim should be very clear—to provoke thought and discussion in a productive manner. As a very simple formula, you might think in terms of three points, statements, questions, hypotheses, connections,

contextualizations, etc. I am happy to help you plan your presentation and work with you—after all, the goal of the presentation is collaboration.

Paper based on your presentation:

Keep notes during the class discussion of your presentation and then write up your presentation in the light of the class discussion. This should be approximately 2 pages long. Again, you are welcome to discuss your planning for the paper with me.

Exams:

Nether exam is cumulative. They will cover the texts you've read until that particular exam. In other words, you will not write again about texts you've covered for the midterm in your final exam.

Both exams will be "open book"—you may use your class notes, your computers and your texts

Essays:

All essays will show evidence of your critical responses and interpretations of the texts you are analyzing. You may rewrite the first 3 essays for a potentially higher grade. You must do so within two weeks after you receive the graded essay. You will not have the chance to rewrite the fourth paper and the final paper.

The three shorter essays should be 2 pages long, double-spaced, in 12-point font, with numbered pages.

The final essay should be 4 pages long, double-spaced, in 12-point font, with numbered pages.

The essays are due in the due dates (obviously), unless you communicate with me beforehand and offer some urgent reason for extension.

All essays must be submitted on Blackboard and in hard copy form in class.

Classroom norms and expectations:

I expect that you will have a copy of the text.

I expect you to have read the complete text when we begin our classroom discussions of that text.

Be prepared and read ahead.

If, for whatever reason you are late, please enter the class as quietly and without disruption as possible. *Do not let the classroom door bang shut.* Find a seat as near to the door as possible, so that you do not take other students off-task.

Please respect your classmates and colleagues and do not talk while others are speaking. You are welcome to enter into discussions with each other and with me, but this has to be part of the open classroom conversation.

Absences:

In this class, I ask that you stay in touch and communicate with me as we progress and ask about work if you have any concerns, questions: do not “disappear” so that I need to track you down.

Please let me know (in person or via text, for example) if you are going to miss class.

Missing more than 3 classes unexcused in the course of the semester will have an impact on your participation grade.

It is very important that you check in with me about work from classes you may miss, so that you do not fall behind.

Office hours:

I keep office hours as part of my instruction—that time is for you to discuss any aspect of the course and your learning. I am also happy to arrange meetings outside the set office hours if our schedules conflict.

I expect at least one office visit from every student this semester as part of your participation grade.

Using computers and devices in class:

Computers, Kindles, smartphones and other devices are obviously an integral part of our learning environment.

I encourage you to take charge of your own learning in using these devices.

However, the focus should always be on learning—and sharing what you have learned.

It's very clear when students are using devices for reasons other than classwork.

I will call on you if you seem to be off-task—please note.

Please avoid using social media while in class, unless such use pertains directly to what we are doing and can help everyone's learning.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems:

Academic conduct:

Plagiarism--presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words--is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university.

You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/departments/departments-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community - such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member - can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage <http://sarc.usc.edu/> describes reporting options and other resources.

Support systems:

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Student behavior:

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action. These strictures may extend to behaviors outside the classroom that are related to the course.

Students with disabilities:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

http://www.sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html

WEEK 1

Monday, August 26: Introduction to the course, endings and beginnings.

PART ONE: CATASTROPHIC ECOLOGIES

Wednesday, August 28: Tiptree, "The Last Flight of Dr. Ain."

Friday, August 30: Butler, "Speech Sounds."

WEEK 2

Monday, September 2: LABOR DAY. NO CLASSES.

Wednesday, September 4: Ballard, "The Deep End."

Friday, September 6: Ballard, "The Voices of Time."

WEEK 3

Monday, September 9: Discussion of Tiptree, Butler and Ballard continued.

Wednesday, September 11: Zoline, "The Heat Death of the Universe."

Friday, September 13: Zoline, concluded. (I've allowed more time to permit us to explore a particular text at greater length.)

WEEK 4

Monday, September 16: Fessenden, *The Last Winter*.

Wednesday, September 18: *The Last Winter*, continued.

PART TWO: REVELATION(S), WORD AND IMAGE

Friday, September 20: The Book of Revelation—see website in required texts. While there are many translations into English available, it's vital that you read the King James Authorized Version—it has had more impact on literature in English than any other book since the 17th century. (Please read the entire book before our class.)

FIRST 2-PAGE PAPER DUE IN CLASS AND ON BLACKBOARD.

WEEK 5

Monday, September 23: Revelation.

Wednesday, September 25: Revelation.

Friday, September 27: Revelation.

WEEK 6

Monday, September 30: Dürer's illustrations for Revelation.

Wednesday, October 2: Dürer, continued.

Friday, October 4: Dürer, concluded.

WEEK 7

Monday, October 7: Bosch and Doré.

Wednesday, October 9: Blake and Martin.

Friday, October 11: MID-TERM EXAM IN CLASS.

WEEK 8

Monday, October 14: In these two classes, we will examine some ways of thinking about terminal endings outside the scope of dominant Christianity.

Wednesday, October 16: Our discussion continues...

Friday, October 18: FALL RECESS. NO CLASSES.

PART THREE; NORSE MYTHS AND THE END OF AN ENDING

WEEK 9

Monday, October 21: Byatt, *Ragnarök*, from the beginning through "Homo Homini Lupus Est."

Wednesday, October 23: *Ragnarök*, "Jörmungandr" through "Frigg."

Friday, October 25: *Ragnarök*, "Hel" through Acknowledgements.

WEEK 10

Monday, October 28: *Ragnarök*, concluded.

PART FOUR: ZOMBIES AND THE AFTER-ENDING

Wednesday, October 30: *Train to Busan*.

SECOND 2-PAGE PAPER DUE AS A HARD COPY IN CLASS AND ON TURNITIN ON BLACKBOARD.

Friday, November 1: *Train to Busan*.

WEEK 11

Monday, November 4: *Severance*, reading schedule to be arranged.

Wednesday, November 6: *Severance*, t.b.a.

Friday, November 8: *Severance*, t.b.a.

WEEK 12

Monday, November 11: *Severance*, t.b.a.

Wednesday, November 13: *Severance*, t.b.a.

PART FIVE: “NOTHING EVER ENDS” — AN INFINITY OF SUPERHEROES

Friday, November 15: *Watchmen*, Chapters 1-3.

WEEK 13

Monday, November 18: *Watchmen*, Chapters 4-6.

Wednesday, November 20: *Watchmen*, Chapters 7-9.

Friday, November 22: *Watchmen*, Chapters 10-12.

PART SIX: THE ENDS OF LANGUAGE

WEEK 14

Monday, November 25: Bozek, *The Tales*. (Since this book is very short, I’d like you to complete your reading of the text by the first class—this class).

Wednesday, November 27: THANKSGIVING. NO CLASSES.

Friday, November 29: THANKSGIVING. NO CLASSES.

WEEK 15

Monday, December 2: *The Tales*, continued.

Wednesday, December 4: *Tales*, continued.

Friday, December 6: *Tales*, concluded.

FINAL ESSAY—4 PAGES LONG—DUE AS A HARD COPY IN CLASS AND ON TURNITIN ON BLACKBOARD.

FINAL EXAM: WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, THH 119, 11 am-1 pm.
1 PM ON WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 11, IS THE VERY LATEST TIME FOR THE SUBMISSION OF ANY WORK NOT YET SUBMITTED.

A final glimpse:



Detail from Chapmans, *The Sum of All Evils*, full information above.