The end of the world is one of the most durable of mankind's obsessions. From prophetic texts of the ancient world to recent fascination with zombie plagues, environmental disaster, and nuclear winter, the genre of apocalypse has proven an extraordinarily fertile way to give expression to religious, moral, political, and economic beliefs, desires, and anxieties. In this course we will explore what is both fearful and alluring about catastrophe on an unimaginable scale, as we read and view some paradigmatic apocalyptic works across a wide historical range. The course will focus on close attention to the aesthetics of individual works, locating those works in their historical contexts, and the theoretical analysis of the texts’ motivating concerns.

**Required texts (available at the Seminary Co-op Bookstore)**

Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (Dover)
N. K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season* (Orbit)

**Required text in pdf on course Canvas site**

The Book of Revelation, from the Christian Bible (King James version)

**Required films to watch**

*Planet of the Apes* (1968)
*Night of the Living Dead* (1968)

**Course Schedule**

(Friday discussion sections TBA)

Jan. 11 (M)  Introduction to the course: reading apocalyptic tropes
In-class screening of the opening montage of *World War Z* (2013)

**Why Zombies?: Capital, the Nation, and the Politics of Survival**

Introduction, Warnings, and Blame
Jan. 18 (M)  No Class – MLK Day


Jan. 25 (M)  finish *World War Z*

Paper #1 (500-750 words) due on Canvas by midnight

**Horror and Desire in the Christian Tradition**

Jan. 27 (W)  The Book of Revelation

**Do the Right Thing: Ethics, Politics, and Medieval Ends**

Feb. 1 (M)  William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue; Morton Bloomfield, selection from *Piers Plowman* as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse; Charles Muscatine, selection from “The Locus of Action in Medieval Narrative” (all in the Norton *Piers Plowman*)

Feb. 3 (W)  *Piers Plowman*, Passus VI and Passus XX

**The First Zombie Apocalypse: Crisis-Management and Crisis Affect in Early Modernity**


Feb. 10 (W)  finish *A Journal of the Plague Year*

**Feb. 12 (F)  No class—College break**

**Disease and the Other: Class, Race, and Sexuality**

Feb. 15 (M)  Octavia Butler, *Clay’s Ark*, Part 1

Noon: Paper #2 (750-1000 words) due on Canvas

Feb. 17 (W)  *Clay’s Ark*, Parts 2 and 3
Feb. 22 (M) finish *Clay’s Ark*

**Whose World? Belonging, Exclusion, and Abjection**


Mar. 1 (M) *The Fifth Season*, 150-296

Mar. 3 (W) finish *The Fifth Season*

**The End of the World, US 1968**

Mar. 8 (M) *Planet of the Apes* (1968)

Mar. 10 (W) *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)

**Mar. 15 (M)** Final paper (1500 words) due on Canvas
Course Requirements

The first requirement of the course is to do all of the readings with care, to think about what is interesting in the texts and the questions the texts raise, and to come to class prepared to discuss them. While Mondays and Wednesdays will be lecture, it will be in a somewhat open format, allowing for the class to pose and explore questions. For the Friday discussion sections in particular, everyone should come to class with specific things they would like to discuss: not just abstract topics, but specific places in the text to turn to that you think can help us ask larger questions of the text and about the topics of the course. As you prepare for class, you should be thinking about the texts thematically, formally, and historically. How does the literary form of the text affect the way you understand it? What kinds of representational choices does the author make? What images and metaphors and narrative structures help to shape the text? What insight does the text provide into its historical moment? What questions does it raise for you about its historical moment? Asking such questions will help us get beyond merely sharing our personal responses to the readings.

In accord with that aim, the second requirement of the course is a minimum of one posting per week to the discussion board on the course Canvas site. Think of this not just as a chance to respond to the reading, but as a chance to begin the discussion we will continue in class. To this end, everyone is encouraged to actually discuss things on the discussion board. That is, if someone has already posted some thoughts that seem interesting to you, that coincide with what you were thinking about, or that you disagree with, take your post as an opportunity to engage your classmates' ideas. Since the discussion board should be the beginning of our collective discussion of the material, everyone is also required to read each other's posts. To make this possible, everyone must post at least once by the end of Thursday. That way we can all be sure to read all the posts before discussion sections meet on Friday.

The third requirement is completion of the three papers. We will post rubrics for the papers on the Canvas site.

Course Policies

Grading: The final grade for the course will be based on 20% for class participation (including the discussion board posts), 20% each for the two shorter papers, and 40% for the proposal and final paper. Anyone who needs an extension on a paper should contact Professor Miller a minimum of 24 hours before the due date. Late papers without an extension will lose 1/3 of a grade for each day they are late (i.e. from B+ to B, B to B-, etc.).
**Accommodations:** I am committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in this course. If you require any accommodations, please let me know right away so we can work together to make that possible. You will receive the most comprehensive support throughout the University by obtaining an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Please contact the office at 773-702-6000/TTY 773-795-1186 or disabilities@uchicago.edu, or visit the website at disabilities.uchicago.edu. Student Disability Services is located at 5501 S. Ellis Avenue. Student Disability Services will help you document your disability and provide you with an Accommodation Determination Letter so you can receive reasonable accommodation to participate in class, complete course assignments, and benefit from the University’s programs and services in other ways. To receive reasonable accommodation, you must obtain an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services.