The end of the world is one of the most durable of mankind’s obsessions. From prophetic texts of the ancient world to today’s 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 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)
Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (Vintage)

**Required text in pdf on course Canvas site**
The Book of Revelation, from the Christian Bible (King James version)

**Required film screenings**
*Planet of the Apes* (1968)
*Night of the Living Dead* (1968)
*A Quiet Place* (2018)

**Course Schedule**

Jan. 7 (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

Jan. 17 (W) finish *World War Z*
Jan. 21 (M) **No Class – MLK Day**

Noon: Paper #1 due (500-750 words) by email

Horror and Desire in the Christian Tradition

Jan. 23 (W) The Book of Revelation

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

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*)
Jan. 30 (W) *Piers Plowman*, Passus VI
Feb. 4 (M) *Piers Plowman*, Passus XX

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

Feb. 6 (W) Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, pp. 1-middle of 58
Feb. 11 (M) *A Journal of the Plague Year*, pp. 58-116 bottom
Feb. 13 (W) finish *A Journal of the Plague Year*
Disease and the Other: Class, Race, and Sexuality

Feb. 18 (M) Octavia Butler, *Clay’s Ark*, Part 1  
**Noon:** Paper # 2 (750-1000 words) due by email

Feb. 20 (W) *Clay’s Ark*, Parts 2 and 3

Feb. 25 (M) finish *Clay’s Ark*

Going on Past the End of Time: Catastrophe and Futurity

Feb. 27 (W) Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, pp. 3-77

Mar. 4 (M) *The Road*, pp. 77-161

Mar. 6 (W) finish *The Road*

Mar. 8 (F) **Noon:** Final Paper Proposal (200-250 words) due by email

The End of the World in America, 1968 and 2018: a mini Film Festival

Mar. 10 (Sun) Pizza and movie night: Planet of the Apes and Night of the Living Dead, location and time TBA

Mar. 11 (M) *Planet of the Apes* (1968); *Night of the Living Dead* (1968)

Mar. 12 (Tu) film screening: *A Quiet Place*, location and time TBA

Mar. 13 (W) *A Quiet Place* (2018)

Mar. 18 (M) **Noon:** Final paper (1500 words) due by email
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 (beginning in Week 2). 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 section on Friday.

The third requirement is completion of the two short papers, the final paper proposal, and the final paper itself. We will hand out rubrics for the proposal and paper closer to the dates they are due.

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.