Apocalypses: Reflections on the End of the World
First-year Seminar
Spring 2020 (Thursdays, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.)

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19 University Pl.

Office Hours: TBA

Course Description:

In this course, we will explore, discuss, and dissect several important works of post-apocalyptic fiction. As we exam these works (through close readings, small-group and class discussions, lectures, reflective writing assignments, considerations of cinematic adaptations, etc.), you will have the opportunity to discover and articulate, both collectively and individually, potential answers to the following central questions posed by the best works in this genre:

- What do the different ways in which we envision the end of the world as we know it reveal about our society’s collective concerns and fears?
- How might society play a central role in precipitating its own demise?
- Who will survive the apocalypse (or rather, the different types of apocalypse that we will see) and what does that survival mean?
- How do survivors try (or not try, or try and fail) to restructure a new society?

As you share your insights on the assigned texts in the classroom, we will also discuss ways in which you can improve your ability to present your ideas and arguments about these texts in a clear, concise, well-structured, and convincing manner both in writing and speaking. Furthermore, you will have the chance to discover how best to find, read, and appreciate relevant research on literary work and genre and apply it to your own work.

Required Texts:

The following texts are available at the NYU Bookstore as well as through most book sellers (e.g., Barnes and Noble, amazon.com, etc.). It is important that you purchase the edition indicated on this syllabus for each book.


One of the works we will be reading is available online:


There will further readings, mainly secondary sources, that will be distributed in class or shared via our NYU Classes site throughout the semester. You will see most of these readings indicated on the calendar below.

**Calendar:**

Below is the calendar for our semester. You will see indicated for each day what you are expected to have prepared. For example, for February 6th, you are to have prepared pages 3 through 107 of *The Road*. Please note that I wrote “prepared” and not simply “read.” You should read these texts actively and attentively, taking notes on what you read, marking passages that seem particularly important and that you would like to discuss in class, noting passages that you have difficulty with, etc. The goal is to be actively and critically engaged with these texts rather than be passive recipients of their content.

**What is Post-Apocalyptic Fiction?**

January 30th  
Introductions

**Nuclear Nightmares**  
“The Forbidden Zone was once a paradise. Your kind made a wasteland of it, ages ago.”  
“You maniacs! You blew it up!”  
– *The Planet of the Apes*, 1968 (film)

February 6th  
*The Road*, pp. 3-107

February 13th  
*The Road*, pp. 108-241

February 20th  
Ramo, Shelly L. “Beyond Redemption?: Reading Cormac McCarthy’s The Road After the End of the World.” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 41.2 (Fall 2008), 99-120.

**Dead Worlds**  
“He saw the world with his naked eyes as it was, as he’d always known it to be. Desolate and bleak.”  
– *Wool*, Hugh Howley

February 27th  
*The Death of the Earth*, pp. 4-64
Due: Reflection paper on *The Road*

Due: Choice of the novel for your final paper and scheduling of a meeting with me

**March 5th**  
*Snowpiercer*, pp. 1-50


**March 12th**  
*Snowpiercer*, pp. 51-110

**March 19th**  
Spring Recess – no class

**Contagious Fears**  
“And before science had caught up with the legend, the legend had swallowed science and everything.”  
– *I Am Legend*, Richard Matheson

**March 26th**  
*I Am Legend*, pp. 1-170

Due: Reflection paper on *The Death of the Earth or Snowpiercer*

**April 2nd**  
*World War Z*, pp. 1-104

**April 9th**  
*World War Z*, pp. 105-216

**April 16th**  
*World War Z*, pp. 217-342

Due: Final paper full outline and bibliography

**Technological Terrors**  
Had he been a lunatic or an intellectually honourable man who’d thought things through to their logical conclusion? And was there any difference?”  
– *Oryx and Crake*, Margaret Atwood

**April 23rd**  
*Oryx and Crake*, pp. 3-110

Due: Reflection paper on either *I Am Legend* or *World War Z*

**April 30th**  
*Oryx and Crake*, pp. 113-218

**May 1st**  
*Oryx and Crake*, pp. 221-374
Conclusions and looking forward (if we’re not afraid to!)


Due: Reflection paper on *Oryx and Crake*

Due: In-class final presentations

May 13th  Due: Final paper

Learning Outcomes:

The learning outcomes for the course are as follows:

- You will strengthen your overall critical reading and thinking abilities and become more adept at the analysis of literature.
- You will improve your ability to identify useful and academically valid secondary sources and to use such sources to strengthen your arguments.
- You will develop a better appreciation of what literature can reveal about human societies and the concerns that preoccupy them. In particular, you will have the opportunity to become intimately acquainted with several canonical texts from the post-apocalyptic genre of fiction and with what these texts may tell us about our own societies.
- You will learn how to better listen to the ideas and suggestions of others and incorporate those ideas and suggestions into your own intellectual arguments.
- You will have the opportunity to work toward a greater mastery of successfully organizing your ideas in coherent, well-supported and well-researched written and oral arguments.

Your success in attaining these learning goals will be determined by a variety of assessment tools, all described in detail below.

Assessment:

The grading rubric for this class is as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 written homework assignments</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>(½ to 1 page each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 reflection papers</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>(1 to 1½ pages each)</td>
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</table>
Leading a class discussion about one text  15%
Final Paper                 30%
   (10 pages)
Final Presentation          10%

The following scale is the grading scale for all graded assignments as well as midterm and final grades.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93% – 100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90% – 92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>88% – 89%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83% – 87%</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>80% – 82%</td>
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<td>C+</td>
<td>78% – 79%</td>
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<td>70% – 72%</td>
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<td>68% – 69%</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>60% – 67%</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>0% – 59%</td>
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**AN IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS FOR THIS CLASS (HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS, REFLECTION PAPERS, AND THE FINAL PAPER):** All written assignments must be typed (double-spaced), and you are to turn in a printed paper copy of each assignment in class on the day that it is due. Keep in mind that a broken printer or a printer without ink or without paper is not a valid excuse for a late homework assignment, so plan ahead.

All your written work must be the product of your own mind, imagination, research, and pen (or keyboard!). NYU takes academic integrity very seriously. If you are found to have plagiarized any written work, you will not only receive an F for that assignment, but other serious academic penalties will apply. Please see the note about academic integrity at the end of this document.

**Participation (10%):** Your participation grade depends on more than your physical presence in the classroom. You need to be present both physically and mentally, ready to engage actively (and out loud!) with me, your classmates, and the text(s), which you will need to have prepared thoroughly for each session. If you are uncomfortable with speaking in the classroom or not accustomed to a seminar-style approach to teaching (i.e., an approach that places an emphasis on the active participation of every student in the class), this is the perfect opportunity for you to challenge yourself to become a more vocal member of the classroom. Some of our class will be lecture (although I am always happy to stop and answer relevant questions), some of it will be large group discussion, and some of it will be small group discussion, so there are numerous opportunities for you to demonstrate to me that you are engaged and participating.

You are allowed only one absence during the semester. For every absence over one, five percentage points (or ½ a grade) will be deducted from your final grade in addition to points you will lose from the participation component of your grade.
Arriving more than five minutes late to class for any reason will be counted as an absence. Please note that absences for religious holidays and university-sponsored events will not be counted against you as long as you notify me ahead of time.

If you find that a serious illness or family emergency will cause you to miss more than a two weeks’ worth of class, you should speak with me and your academic counselor about the possibility of arranging for a withdrawal from the class.

One final note about participation: meaningful participation depends on your paying close attention to what’s going on and being said around you during the entire class period. Having your head (and your mind) buried in a laptop or a smartphone will make it very hard for you to remain engaged with the class. Furthermore, such behavior has the potential to distract me and your classmates from our work, so there are no laptops, tablets, or cell phones allowed in the classroom unless I have made a specific exception (e.g., for final presentations or assignments that require the use of a computer).

**Homework assignments (15%)**: For almost every week of the semester, you will have a set of homework questions that you must answer and submit to me. These questions will focus on the reading(s) that you are to prepare for any given day on the syllabus. Some questions will focus on crucial plot elements or on character development, while some questions will provide you with the opportunity to share your opinions, insights, hypotheses, etc., about specific aspects of a given work. On the days that you are to submit a reflection paper (these dates are indicated in the calendar on this syllabus), you will not be expected to answer the homework questions in writing; however, I will expect that you think about them as you prepare the day’s text(s) so that you are ready to participate by sharing your ideas and answers with me and your classmates.

Each homework assignment will entail approximately ½ to 1 page of writing. You will not receive a grade on your homework assignment, since the goal of these assignments is to help you engage with and examine more deeply the texts and the ideas we are exploring in class; you will simply receive a check for satisfactory work or a check minus for unsatisfactory work. Satisfactory work is work that demonstrates to me that you have read the text(s) and provided answers to the questions in such a way that I can see evidence of your efforts to understand the text(s) in light of the ideas we have been discussing in class. Unsatisfactory work is work that demonstrates that you have not read the text(s), have not made an effort to answer the questions, and/or have copied your answers from another source.

Your final homework grade will depend on the number of satisfactory scores you have received. No late homework assignment will be accepted for credit.

**Reflection papers (20%)**: You will have four reflection papers to write throughout the semester, one for each sub-category of post-apocalyptic fiction that we exam. The due dates for these papers are indicated on the syllabus:
February 27th – reflection paper on *The Road*
March 26th – reflection paper on *The Death of the Earth* or *Snowpiercer*
April 23rd – reflection paper on either *I Am Legend* or *World War Z*
May 8th – reflection paper on *Oryx and Crake*

I will provide you well in advance of each reflection paper due date with a list of several possible questions from which you will choose one to address in your reflection paper. You also have the possibility of proposing your own question. I will provide you with a grading rubric for the reflection papers, as well, so that you can better understand how I will grade you on your writing (e.g., the mechanics of your writing itself, the clarity of your ideas, the organization of your argument, your ability to incorporate themes and ideas we have been discussing in class, etc.).

Each reflection paper should be 1 to 1½ pages in length. No late reflection papers will be accepted for credit.

**Leading a class discussion (15%):** You and a partner (or two partners) of your choosing will be responsible for leading the beginning of a day's discussion for a given text or portion of a text. You will have the opportunity starting on February 6th to indicate to me which day you would like to lead the discussion. (This will happen on a first come, first served basis, so the quicker you decide on your group and choose a day, the more likely you are to get the day you want.) The days available to you for leading a class discussion are the following: February 13th, February 27th, March 5th, March 26th, April 2nd, April 9th, April 16th, April 23rd, April 30th.

Once I have confirmed the date for you and your group, we will speak briefly about what you plan to focus on in order to better plan for the day. The day you lead your discussion, you will be expected to have prepared for distribution to your classmates a series of three to four discussion questions that will be the starting point for the discussion that you will lead, a discussion which you will need to contextualize with a brief presentation before launching into your questions. You should include at least one question for which you will have your classmates divide into smaller groups for approximately five to seven minutes before coming back together to share their thoughts, answers, etc. During the small group discussion, you will circulate to check on each group and suggest ideas, elements of an answer, your own interpretations, etc. You should count on your discussion lasting approximately twenty minutes.

I will provide you with a grading rubric for this assignment so that you can better understand how I will grade you on your discussion leading (e.g., your demonstrated familiarity with the text, your ability to answer your classmates’ and my questions, your ability to manage the class during small group discussion, etc.). Each member of the group leading a discussion will receive the same grade.
**Final paper (30%):** Your final written assignment for this course will be a ten-page final paper. For this paper, you will need to choose and read a post-apocalyptic novel that we will not cover in class. (I will provide you with a list of possible choices, although you are welcome to propose a novel not on the list.) You will then, in consultation with me, choose an element/elements of the novel to explore and explain in your paper. You can discuss the novel in light of ideas, approaches, theories, etc., that we have seen in class; you can compare an element of the novel you read (character, plot, etc.) with a novel we read in class; you can examine the novel in light of how it does or does not adhere to genre conventions; etc. I will provide you with a grading rubric for this assignment so that you can better understand how I will grade you on the final paper (e.g., the mechanics of your writing itself, your knowledge of the novel you have chosen, the clarity of your ideas, the organization and originality of your argument, your ability to incorporate themes and ideas we have been discussing in class, etc.).

In order to make sure that you have ample opportunity to produce your best writing, we will work on the final paper throughout the semester in several steps, the dates for which are indicated in the syllabus:

- **February 27**th – deadline to propose the novel that you have chosen for the final paper and to schedule a meeting with me to discuss what you intend to examine
- **April 16**th – deadline to submit a full, detailed outline of your paper and bibliography indicated secondary sources
- **May 13**th – deadline to turn in the final paper – please note that this date is after the end of class; you will need to leave a paper copy of your final paper in my mailbox in the Department of French Literature, Thought, and Culture (the 6th floor of 19 University Place) or my mailbox at the Resource Center at Lipton Residence Hall (33 Washington Square West)

The final paper should be 10 pages in length. No late final papers will be accepted for credit.

While the final paper counts as 30% of your final grade, that 30% is further broken down into 5% for the full outline and bibliography that you will be turning in on April 16th and 25% for the paper itself, which you will be turning in no later than May 13th.

**Final presentation (10%):** On our last day of class, you will make a five- to seven-minute oral presentation on the subject of your final paper. You will need to present the novel you have been working on and give a brief summary of the central argument of your paper. The format of your presentation is up to you, but you should make sure it is engaging for the class. I will provide you with a grading rubric for the final presentation so that you can better understand how I will grade you (e.g., the content and organization of your presentation, your ability to engage the class, your ability to speak in front of a group, etc.).
**Academic Integrity:**

As a student at NYU, you are a member of an intellectual community that places a high value on academic integrity. If you are not familiar with the university’s honor code, you can find it here:

http://cas.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/cas/academic-integrity/honor-code.html

Additionally, you can find the university’s position on academic integrity here

https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

In this class, rather than quizzes and tests, all your written work takes the form of homework assignments, reflection papers, and a final paper. It is essential that all of these assignments be made up entirely of your own work. If you are citing or paraphrasing another source (that is, another author’s ideas or text), you must clearly indicate that you are doing so. Failure to do so constitutes plagiarism. In addition, if someone else writes even a portion of your work (whether it be someone you know or someone you do not), this, too, is plagiarism. Plagiarizing someone else’s work is lazy and intellectually dishonest, and if I come across it in my classroom, I have to report it to the dean. Be sure to respect yourself and your ideas as well as those of others and produce your own original work, giving credit where credit is due if you incorporate the work of others.

**Moses Center Statement:**

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities through registration with the Moses Center. The Moses Center website is www.nyu.edu/csd. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.