

LS 811: Apocalypse Now (and Then)

Spring 2017 | Dr. Thomas Grieve

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In this course, we will examine a selection of classic dystopian literature produced over the last hundred years or so. We will move chronologically through the 20th and 21st centuries, beginning with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899 in serialized form, 1902 as a novella) and ending with Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men* (2005). Our journey will take us through T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953), Allen Ginsberg's *Howl* (1956), Joan Didion's *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (1968), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Supplemental readings may provide focus for seminar presentations that will encourage us to think about the classical precedents for dystopias and utopias, imperialism, war, technology, existential angst, rampant materialism, drugs, phallocentrism, and other topics.

As you can see, there will be a good deal of not-so-light reading. Much of the literature of the 20th century that matters, and that keeps and will keep getting read, gives voice and image in challenging, disturbing and engaging ways to various negative epiphanies. The first "apocalypse" was St. John's (his Book of Revelation uses this Greek word in the title). Those who came after worry in their own ways about the nature of the Second Coming and the destruction of the world. We too will worry such issues – not unpleasantly, I hope – to enquire into the purpose and effect of such revelations. The course will be graded on the basis of seminar participation, seminar presentations and responses, and a final paper or project.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

TBA