

University of Alabama
Department of Religious Studies
Portraits of the Apocalypse in Contemporary Films
Religious Studies 240
FALL 2020
Mondays 3:30-5:50

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What is "The Apocalypse"? How does the human imagination construct a vision of the future? To refer to TS Eliot: What "is the way the world ends"? What purpose does the apocalyptic genre serve? These questions have fascinated and haunted humanity from the beginning of time. After an initial investigation of the biblical *Book of Revelation*, this course will examine contemporary portrayals of the eschaton, that is, the "end times," in five more-or-less popular films: *The Left Behind*, *Twelve Monkeys*, *Daughters of the Dust*, *V for Vendetta*, and *Whale Rider*. While these films and the *Book of Revelation* will constitute our basic "texts," our conversations about them will be supplemented with careful readings of religious, cultural, and literary scholarship. The class will be conducted in both seminar and lecture formats and primarily—while the pandemic prevails—online.

Course Objectives

- To participate actively in the class discussions
- To become familiar with basic vocabulary of the religious studies discipline
- To become familiar with the themes and basic structure of the *Book of Revelation*
- To recognize apocalyptic themes in works of popular culture
- To contemplate the relationship between texts that are revered as "sacred" and popular contemporary texts
- To theorize the relationship between imagined ends and one's own orientation to the world in this moment

Course Requirements

There are no prerequisites for this course, but students should be aware that all writing exercises will be evaluated according to the standards of excellence established during the first-year English composition sequence at the University of Alabama. Each participant is expected to contribute actively to the on-going, in-class conversation and will be called upon, from time-to-time, to elaborate upon remarks made in writing assignments and online forums. Written work will include five brief (350-500 words) writing assignments and six very brief (3-5 sentences) "instigating remarks." Each writing assignment will be worth 15% of the final grade and the four highest grades will count toward the final grade. Each "instigating remark" will be worth 5% of the final grade and the five highest grades will be counted toward the final grade. The remaining 15% of the final grade will be based on class participation. These assignments are described in more detail below.

Grading Scale

A+	980 – 1000	C+	775 – 799
A	930 – 979	C	730 – 774
A-	900 – 929	C-	700 – 729
B+	875 – 899	D+	675 – 699
B	830 – 874	D	630 – 674
B-	800 – 829	D-	600 – 629

This class will meet on 14 occasions this semester. More than three absences from the class meeting will be considered excessive. After three absences, the student's final grade will be reduced one half grade for each additional absence. For example, a student with an A- average at the end of the semester plus four absences would have her grade reduced to a B+. **If you know—or even suspect—that you cannot honor the attendance commitment, do not take this class.** Of course, consideration will be granted for exceptional circumstances, such as viral infection, the suspicion of viral infection, or technological difficulties resulting from the need to conduct class remotely. Please keep the instructor apprised of any irregularities you may encounter that would adversely affect your ability to be present during assigned class times.

Class discussions are central to how this course will proceed. Please come to, or Zoom into, class with prepared written comments at hand and questions in mind that you would like us all to pursue together. Good class discussion is a sustained, wide-ranging-yet-focused, fun and exhilarating inquiry. It increases in quality and intensity as the semester progresses. Participation involves attentive listening as well as talking. We have a great deal to learn from each other! Listen respectfully to your colleagues; respond to their questions; build on their comments.

Feel free to visit me remotely during my office hours or by appointment with any concerns you may have about this class. Among other things, I am here to help you develop your writing and speaking skills. If you have general writing composition issues, questions, or interests, you should also consult one of the specialists at the Writing Center on the third floor of Lloyd Hall (room 322)—available online for the duration of the Quarantine at: <https://writingcenter.ua.edu/>. Your tuition pays for this kind of expert assistance.

Additional Logistical Concerns

Health and Safety under Threat of Plague

All University faculty, staff, and students are expected to maintain a commitment to the health and safety of our campus community. Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, specific health and safety standards are in place to minimize exposure and community spread on campus. In the interest of your health and safety and that of all UA students, faculty and staff, the University reserves the right to change the mode of instruction or schedule of instruction at any time, based upon prevailing public health and other guidance. While the method of delivery may change, educational instruction and opportunities will continue. As such, the University will not provide a refund of tuition, in whole or in-part, based on any such changes. Detailed information on changes in format or schedule can be found at <https://studentaccounts.ua.edu/> and <https://financialaid.ua.edu/>.

All students must be familiar with, and abide by, the requirements outlined in the UA Return Plan | UA System Comprehensive Health and Safety Plan. Students must: (1) wear a mask or face covering at all times while participating in face-to-face class; (2) adhere to social distancing standards; and (3) comply with all other health and safety restrictions. If a student refuses to comply with the requirements, the student will be asked to leave the class and reported for a conduct violation. Unless a student has an exemption from the requirement to wear a face covering, (more information can be found at <http://ods.ua.edu/covid-19-disability/>), the student will be reported to Student Life for further disciplinary action. More information on these requirements and UA Healthcheck system and screening can be found at healthinfo.ua.edu/returnplan. You are expected to visit the site and comply with all noted requirements related to in-person class attendance."

Academic Honesty

Academic honesty is expected of all students. All acts of dishonesty (plagiarism, cheating) in any work constitute academic misconduct. Please note: students are prohibited from "resubmitting your own previously submitted work without proper citation and permission from the current instructor to whom the original work is subsequently submitted." The Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Policy will be followed in the event of academic misconduct.

Accommodations

To request disability accommodations, please contact Disability Services (348-4285). After initial arrangements are made with that office, please contact me.

Required Texts

Films available commercially for rent or purchase include:

The Left Behind

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B07PXXWVPSF/ref=atv_dp_share_r_em_4365c6e4236c4

Daughters of the Dust

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B084DKNGF6/ref=atv_dp_share_r_em_2738ed693a9b4

Whale Rider

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B074TK1DPG/ref=atv_dp_share_r_em_58dd21755dc4

The films *12 Monkeys* and *V for Vendetta* are available through services provided by the University of Alabama Library System.

In addition to the *Book of Revelation*, other readings of interest to the class will be posted on the BlackBoard course page throughout the semester. For example:

1] *Revelation*, from *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, pp. 2307-2337.

- 2] John J. Collins, chapter one and epilogue in *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish Matrix of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 1-32; 205-215; plus notes on 217-224; 249-250.
- 3] Adela Yarbro Collins, introduction and chapter 5 in *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 13-23; 141-176.
- 4] Conrad E. Ostwald, "Movies and the Apocalypse" in *Secular Steeples: Popular Culture and the Religious Imagination* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2003), 157-188.
- 5] Margaret Miles, "'Older, Wiser, Stronger': Representation and Self-Representation" in *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 117-135.
- 6] Jon R. Stone, "'A Fire in the Sky': Apocalyptic Themes on the Silver Screen" in eds. Mazur and McCarthy, *God in the Details: American Religion in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 65-82.
- 7] Conrad E. Ostwald, "Hollywood and Armageddon: Apocalyptic Themes in Recent Cinematic Presentation" in eds. Martin and Ostwald, *Screening the Sacred: Religion, Myth, and Ideology in Popular American Film* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1995), 55-64.

Assignment Due Dates

Each of the following assignments is due at or before NOON on the designated date:

August 28, Friday	Instigating Remark 1: Revelation (Book)
September 25, Friday	Instigating Remark 2: The Left Behind
October 5, Monday	Writing Assignment #1 Due: The Left Behind and Revelation
October 9, Friday	Instigating Remark 3: 12 Monkeys
October 19, Monday	Writing Assignment 2 Due: 12 Monkeys and Revelation
October 23, Friday	Instigating Remark 4: Daughters of the Dust
November 2, Monday	Writing Assignment #3 Due: Daughters of the Dust
November 6, Friday	Instigating Remark 5: V
November 16, Monday	Writing Assignment #4: V
November 20, Friday	Instigating Remark 6: Whale Rider
November 30, Monday	Writing Assignment #5: Whale Rider

Note: No late assignments will be accepted. An "instigating remark" is 3-5 sentences; a "writing assignment" is 350-500 words. Six "instigating remarks" will be offered over the course of the semester; you must submit five remarks to receive full credit; you may submit all six remarks, in which case your five highest scores will count toward your final grade. In addition, five "writing assignments" will be offered over the course of the semester; you must submit four remarks to receive full credit; you may submit all five assignments, in which case your four highest scores will count toward your final grade. For further information, see "Assignment Guidelines" below.

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Course Schedule

1. Aug 24 **Discussion: Introduction to the Class**

Syllabus; Overview of the Class; Introduction of Class Participants

Assignment: Read the *Book of Revelation*; View Online Lectures: *Revelation* and Popular Imagination Overview, *Book of Revelation*

Instigating Remark 1: Elements of *Revelation*, Due Friday August 28

2. Aug 3 **Discussion: Book of Revelation PART ONE**

Assignment: Re-read the *Book of Revelation*; View Online Lectures: *Revelation* and Popular Imagination Overview, *Book of Revelation*

3. Sept 7 NO CLASS

4. Sept 14 **Discussion: Book of Revelation PART TWO**

5. Sept 21 **Film: *The Left Behind***

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B07PXWVPSF/ref=atv_dp_share_r_em_4365c6e4236c4

Instigating Remark 2: Elements of *The Left Behind*, Due Friday September 25

6. Sept 28 **Discussion: *The Left Behind* and *Revelation*, Literally**

7. Oct 5 **Film: 12 Monkeys**

12 Monkeys available through SWANK via the University of Alabama Library System; also currently free from [Amazon Prime](#)

Assignment 1 Due: *The Left Behind* and *Revelation*

Instigating Remark 3: *12 Monkeys*, Due Friday October 9

8. Oct 12 **Discussion: *12 Monkeys*: Prophecy and the Plague**

9. Oct 19 **Film:** *Daughters of the Dust*

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B084DKNGF6/ref=atv_dp_share_r_em_2738ed693a9b4

Assignment 2 Due: *12 Monkeys* and *Revelation*

Instigating Remark 4: *Daughters of the Dust*, Due Friday October 23

10. Oct 26 **Discussion:** *Daughters of the Dust: Origins, Ends, and Metamorphosis*

11. Nov 2 **Film:** *V for Vendetta*

<https://digitalcampus.swankmp.net/ua278751/watch?token=6A17FA168B84ABC7>

Assignment 3 Due: *Daughters of the Dust*

Instigating Remark 5: *V*, Due Friday Nov 6

12. Nov 9 **Discussion:** *V: The Pandemic, The Beast, and the New EVE*

13. Nov 16 **Film:** *Whale Rider*

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B07JBXCBZF/ref=atv_dl_rdr?autoplay=1

or

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B074TK1DPG/ref=atv_dp_share_r_em_58dd21755dc4

Assignment 4 Due: *V is for Vendetta*

Instigating Remark 6: *Whale Rider*, Due Friday November 20

Nov 23 NO CLASS

14. Nov 30 **Discussion:** *Whale Rider: Reimagined and Redeemed Communities*

Assignment 5 Due: *Whale Rider*

Please feel free to raise questions about the schedule and the assignments at any time. You may do this during the class meeting—so that others might benefit from your inquiry; or you may contact me during my office hours or by appointment at any mutually convenient time. Have fun!

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ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES

A. Participation

Class participation includes active attendance (something of a redundancy) in the classroom or the classZoom. Our discussions will focus on the *Book of Revelation*, at first, and then the various films in relation to *Revelation* and in relation to each other. Our discussions will be guided by the insights provided by members of the class through the "instigating remark" assignments, to which everyone will have access in advance of the class meeting. Class discussions will advance through the voluntary or elicited remarks of the whole class.

B. Instigating Remarks

The "instigating remarks" assignments are accessible on BlackBoard. On the left tab under "My Groups" should appear the heading "Instigating Remarks Discussion Forum." Follow that to "Group Discussion Board." Then another page appears with the heading "Instigating Remarks Discussion Forum." Open this tab and six separate topics appear. Click on the one appropriate to the current assignment (for example: "Instigating Remark 1: *Revelation*") and reply to the initial message by "Theodore Trost." You may also reply to the responses of your classmates, if you are so inspired, but be certain, first of all, to reply to the initial message—since credit will be awarded on the basis of your response to that prompt. All of the "instigating remarks" questions (with the exception of the first one) ask variations of this question: "Identify (by context or time code) two or three scenes from the film that stand out in your mind as worth revisiting for the purposes of general class discussion. Why are these scenes important for our on-going study of apocalypse in popular films? How do these scenes influence your interpretation of the movie as a whole?" As the exercise progresses over the course of the semester, you will be invited to align your concerns to matters we've encountered in earlier works and in the *Book of Revelation*. Each "instigating remark" will be worth up to 50 points and the five highest grades will be counted toward the final grade.

C. Written Assignments

The "Written Assignments" are accessible on BlackBoard. On the left tab under "Tool Panel," activate the "Journals" feature. Click on the appropriate assignment (for example: "Assignment #3: *Daughters of the Dust*"). The journal page will appear, featuring the assignment question (for example: "What contemporary issues does this film address? What future does this film inaugurate or anticipate? In what ways is the film "apocalyptic" in general, and how is it related to the *Book of Revelation* and our previously-viewed films in particular?"). Above this question appear the words "Create Journal Entry." Click there, and a composition screen will become accessible. You may paste your pre-edited Writing Assignment into the screen (I recommend using the "Paste and Match Formatting" feature, if you are using Word). Review your entry for grammar, formatting, and spelling excellence before submitting your work by clicking on "Post Entry." Unlike the "instigating remarks," these assignments are visible only to you and the instructor. Each writing assignment will be worth up to 150 points and the four highest grades will count toward the final grade.

08-15-20