Mark Patterson 11:30 MW

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English 379: Time Travel, Extinction, and Tools for Survival

**Course Description.** We have always lived in End Times.  And we have always created stories to help us understand ourselves in relation to these moments of destruction or extinction.  What is different about our present condition (e.g., global warming, forced migration, economic disparity), however, is not necessarily the scale of destruction.  Humans have always faced different forms of annihilation (some self-imposed, some not), from the Black Death to wars to nuclear destruction. What is different, however, is the temporal scale of our understanding, which has become possible by the greater sweep of our scientific and literary stories.  Science offers us the multiple scales of Deep Time (the Permian extinction, the destruction of the dinosaurs, etc.), so, although we individually face our mortality one by one, we measure extinction by larger geological scales or on the biological terms of species rather than individuals.

However depressing this description might seem, this course is about creation, not destruction, not about individual death or species extinction, but about the narrative creativity that has come to be one of our tools for engaging and, perhaps, embracing these disturbing possibilities.  “Death is the mother of beauty,” writes Wallace Stevens, and the texts we’ll be studying in this course will consider the many ways that stories have created “alternative temporalities – alternate ways of thinking our histories, inhabiting our present, and conceiving our futures.”  As a course about creation and extinction, English 379 will focus on the different ways narratives “tell time,” that is, the ways that different temporal modalities or ways of telling time create for us new ways of understanding our fates and the fate of the world. Along the way we will seek answers to the following questions: 1. How and to what end do narratives employ multiple temporal modalities?  2. How does narrative construct ideologies of freedom and contingency? 3. Are the politics and aesthetics of extinction complementary or in conflict?  Studying the aesthetics of extinction will offer us opportunities to consider the ideologies that underwrite our sense of the precariousness of our time.

**English 379 Online and in the Age of Pandemics.** This course, like most English courses, works best through discussion. That said, our current online reality makes discussion difficult, but not impossible. In fact, it opens up new possibilities and forums for conversation that I hope to use this quarter. It’s impossible for you and for me to spend two hours straight on Zoom, but I think it’s important that we all meet at regular times so I can create a context for our readings, to discuss the theories and novels, and to provide an opportunity for you to ask questions. The class meetings, therefore, will be organized around some full-class discussions followed by small group breakouts on Zoom. I will try to give each of you the opportunity to offer your own ideas and understandings, whether in general class discussion, small groups, through your essays, or in your various shorter online posts. My job, as I see it, is to help provide historical and intellectual backgrounds, to raise open-ended questions, and to offer some respectful, but pointed, resistance to some of your responses and ideas. Your job is to come prepared to discuss by having read *and thought about* the works.

**The Online Version of English 379**

**How will we work online?**   For the next ten weeks we'll be teaching and learning with Canvas as our main classroom.  It's not ideal for you or for me, but I've learned that being limited in some ways can make us more creative in others.  The course is about facing challenging situations, so I want these works to offer us the creative tools to survive.  But, as we learn in Station Eleven, "survival is insufficient!"  This course will offer a range of ways to think about Time Travel narratives.  We will meet on ZOOM as a whole class some days; we will meet in smaller groups on Zoom some days.  We will do asynchronous discussion groups on Canvas.  In some cases, you will watch videos, do research on your own and report back the class or to your smaller groups.  In short, we'll mix it up and see what happens!

**Zoom Conventions, Etiquette, and Rules.** I assume you've all had enough experience with Zoom to understand its possibilities and limitations.  For this course, please use your Zoom hand signal or raise your actual hand if you want to speak.  I'll try to keep an eye out for you.  If I miss you, then please speak up and interrupt.  I understand it's an awkward forum for discussion, but we need to try to make it work for the course to do its best, and there will be many opportunities for you to talk in your breakout small group sessions.  **Please keep your cameras on unless there's a good reason to go dark.**  If you're not interested in being present online, then perhaps this isn't the right course for you to take at the moment.   If there is a good reason, then please contact me and we can discuss.

**Learning Objectives.** You need to have three related skills in order to succeed in English. Simply put (although not so simply done), you need to be good readers, good writers, and good critical thinkers. As a 300 level English course, English 379 will offer work to help develop and sharpen these skills. In particular, I expect the literary texts, secondary readings, and other assignments will provide some of the necessary experience and work to help you achieve all or some of the following objectives:

* Understand the generic makeup of Time Travel narratives and demonstrate an understanding of the aesthetics, structures, and functions of literary texts
* Identify the different uses of temporal modalities in narrative
* Employ key terms like Anthropocene, Deep Time, narratology
* Integrate primary and secondary sources into your writing
* Make use of textual analysis (close reading) to enunciate arguments about literary and critical texts

**Religious Accommodations.** “Washington state law requires that UW develop a policy for accommodation of student absences or significant hardship due to reasons of faith or conscience, or for organized religious activities. The UW’s policy, including more information about how to request an accommodation, is available at [Religious Accommodations Policy (https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/)](https://registrar.washington.edu/staffandfaculty/religious-accommodations-policy/). Accommodations must be requested within the first two weeks of this course using the [Religious Accommodations Request form (https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/)](https://registrar.washington.edu/students/religious-accommodations-request/).”

If you require accommodation owing to a disability immediately contact the Disabilities Resources for Students Office (DRS) in Schmitz Hall 448 (206-548-8924; [uwdss@u.washington.edu](mailto:uwdss@u.washington.edu)) or the Disabilities Services Office (DSO) at [dso@u.washington.edu.](mailto:dso@u.washington.edu) *It is your responsibility to notify me in writing and in advance of any accommodations to be arranged by either the DSO or DRS office and—should forms be involved—to deliver those to me in person during office hours, with time enough to allow for us to arrive at a mutual understanding of the means by which those accommodations are best met.*

Do not plagiarize. Plagiarism includes lifting material from the web, collusion, and the use of sources without citation. If you have any questions regarding what constitutes plagiarism, consult me. All sources must be documented, and papers are to be the result of your own labor.

This syllabus is subject to change. You are responsible for keeping up with any modifications to schedule or assignments.

**Requirements.**

**Online Conversations (25% or 100 points).** Our course blog (on Canvas) is a way to initiate and continue classroom conversations. It’s a place where you can track your reading process and work through thoughts, reactions, and questions in informal, low- stakes writing. Because of the online nature of this course, I will not have a participation grade. Participation is assumed as part of your engagement in this course. I’ve you’re not going to show up synchronously or do your assigned work asynchronously, then you shouldn’t take the course.

**Response Papers (25% or 100 points).** There will be four short response papers (due on four Fridays on Canvas). These papers will be 1-2 pages, single-spaced, and function like the middle portions of essays with no introduction and no conclusion. They will ask a question and try to work it out in reference to one of the texts. They will be submitted on Canvas to me and to your other group members. Part of your grade for this course will include commenting on at least one of your group member’s responses.

**Final Project (50% or 200 points).** Build your own Time Machine. Although this is your final assignment, it will be something you can work on for the last half of the course. You can call it a long reflective piece on the issues, questions, texts, and assignments of this course, but how it looks or functions depends entirely on your interests, your engagement, and your creativity. More on this later in the quarter.

**English 379 Syllabus: Time Travel, Extinction, and Tools for Survival**

**Required Course Materials.**  There are four novels required for this course:  H.G. Wells, The Time Machine (Penguin); Octavia Butler, Kindred (Beacon Press), Emily St. John Mandel, Station Eleven (Vintage); Ling Ma, Severance (Picador).  These will be the only texts you need to purchase. They are available at the University Book Store or online.  There will also be films you'll be required to view, which you may have to access through one of the streaming platforms.  Any essays or short stories will be available on Canvas.

**Note:** Readings are expected to be done by the date indicated. An asterisk (\*) indicates weekly readings available on Canvas in the weekly Modules.

**Week 1: Travelling in Time**

Mon. Jan. 4 Introduction:

Wed. Jan. 6 The Origins of Time Travel

H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, chapters 1-4

Elana Gomel, “Shapes of the Past and Future”\*

**Week 2: The Narrative Machinery of Time Travel**

Mon. Jan. 11 The Chronotope of Time Travel

*The Time Machine*, chapters 5-9

Wed. Jan. 13 The Time Machine and the Anthropocene

*The Time Machine*, chapter 10-epilogue

Aaron Rosenberg, “Romancing the Anthropocene”\*

**Week 3: Versions of Time Travel**

Mon. Jan. 18 **Martin Luther King Holiday**

Wed. Jan. 20 Narrative Paradoxes

Jack Finney, “Such Interesting Neighbors”\*

R. A. Lafferty, “Rainbird”\*

**Response Paper Due Friday 5:00 pm on Canvas**

**Week 4: Reading Time Travel Films**

Mon. Jan. 25 Time Travel in the Apocalypse

*La Jetée*, 1962 Dir. Chris Marker (Link in Canvas Module: please view before class)

Wed. Jan. 27 *Terminator*, 1984 Dir. James Cameron (please view before class)

Constance Penley, “Time Travel, Primal Scene and the Critical”\*

**Week 5: Trauma and Time Travel**

Mon. Feb. 1 Enslaved to History

Octavia Butler, *Kindred*

Lisa Woolfork, “Trauma and Time Travel”\*

Wed., Feb. 3 Trauma, Past and Present

Butler, *Kindred*

**Response Paper Due Friday 5:00 pm on Canvas**

**Week 6: Pandemic Time**

Mon. Feb. 8 Surviving Slavery

Butler, *Kindred*

Wed. Feb. 10 What Happens to the Everyday?

Emily St. James Mandel, *Station Eleven*, pp.

Henri Lefebvre, “The Everyday and Everydayness”\*

**Week 7: Survival is Insufficient**

Mon. Feb. 15 **Presidents Day Holiday**

Wed. Feb. 17 Well Being and Catastrophe

Mandel, *Station Eleven*, pp.

**Response Paper Due Friday 5:00 pm on Canvas**

**Week 8: Working Through the Apocalypse**

Mon. Feb. 22 Work and Family

Ling Ma, *Severance*

Wed. Feb. 24 Where to Choose?

*Severance*

**Response Paper Due Friday 5:00 pm on Canvas**

**Week 9: Filming Extinction**

Mon. March 1 Can We Imagine the End of Capitalism?

Ma, *Severance*, pp.

Wed. March 3 *Snowpiercer* 2013, dir. Bong Joon Ho (please view before class)

**Week 10: Extinction or Survival?**

Mon. March 8 *Children of Men* 2006, dir. Alfonso Cuarón (please view before class)

Wed. March 10 TBD

**Final Project Due Wednesday March 17th by 5:00 p.m. on Canvas**