Mark Patterson 3:30 MW (on Zoom)

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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 masked 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. In-person discussions are important to 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. 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.

**Covid Protocols.** We will all be learning how to be in-person this fall. That said, I remind you that face coverings are required in the classroom. We should all try to maintain a healthy distance (three feet or greater), if possible, in the classroom. If there are small groups meetings, I will give you the opportunity to move outside or out into the hall in order to maintain a safe distance between members. Here are the commonsense protocols:

* If you have symptoms, stay home. Also, contact me.
* If you test positive, quarantine. And contact me, so that I can help with contact tracing.
* You are free to bring laptops or phones into class in order to help with your learning. Don’t abuse this privilege.

The University’s Covid protocols and plans are available at:

<https://www.washington.edu/coronavirus/autumn2021/?utm_source=uwhp&utm_medium=tiles&utm_campaign=autumn-2021-planning>

**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. I do not have a participation grade; participation is assumed as part of your engagement in this course.

**Response Papers (25% or 100 points).** You will be asked to write four short response papers (due on 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. You will have five opportunities to write these responses. You can either miss one or drop your lowest grade.

**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: Traveling in Time**

Wed. Sept. 29: Introduction: Time Travel, Film, the End of the World

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

Mon. Oct. 4: The Origins of Time Travel

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

**Discussion Group A should post by Monday noon**

Wed. Oct. 6: The Chronotope of Time Travel

*The Time Machine*, chapters 5-9

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

**Discussion Group B should post by Wednesday noon.**

**Week 3: The Anthropocene and Extinction**

Mon. Oct. 11: The Time Machine and the Anthropocene

*The Time Machine*, chapter 10-epilogue

Aaron Rosenberg, “Romancing the Anthropocene”\*

**Discussion Group B should post by Monday noon**

Wed. Oct. 13: Time and Progress

R. A. Lafferty, “Rainbird”\*

**Discussion Group C should post by Wednesday noon**

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

**Week 4: Versions of Time Travel**

Mon. Oct. 18: Narrative Paradox

Jack Finney, “Such Interesting Neighbors”\*

**Discussion Group C should post by Monday noon**

Wed. Oct. 20: Tobias Wolfe, “Bullet in the Brain”\*

**Discussion Group A should post by Wednesday noon**

**Week 5: Reading Time Travel Films**

Mon. Oct. 25: Time Travel in the Apocalypse

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

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

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

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

**Week 6: Trauma and Time Travel**

Mon. Nov. 1: Enslaved to History

Octavia Butler, *Kindred* (through “The Fall”)

Lisa Woolfork, “Trauma and Time Travel”\*

**Discussion Group A should post by Monday noon**

Wed., Nov. 3: Trauma, Past and Present

Butler, *Kindred* (through “The Fight”)

**Discussion Group B should post by Wednesday noon**

**Week 7: Pandemic Time**

Mon. Nov. 8: Surviving Slavery

Butler, *Kindred* (through “Epilogue”)

Wed. Nov. 10: What Happens to the Everyday?

Emily St. James Mandel, *Station Eleven* (through “A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream”)

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

**Week 8: Survival is Insufficient**

Mon. Nov. 15: Emily St. James Mandel, *Station Eleven* (through “Toronto”)

Henri Lefebvre, “The Everyday and Everydayness”\*

**Discussion Group B should post by Monday noon**

Wed. Nov. 17: Well Being and Catastrophe

Mandel, *Station Eleven* (through the end, Chapter 55)

**Discussion Group C should post by Wednesday noon**

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

**Week 9: Working Through the Apocalypse**

Mon. Nov. 22: Work and Family

Ling Ma, *Severance* (through Chapter 8)

Wed. Nov. 24: No Class

**Week 10:**

Mon. Nov. 29: Can We Imagine the End of Capitalism?

Ma, *Severance* (through Chapter 18)

**Discussion Group C should post by Monday noon**

Wed. Dec. 1: How the Apocalypse Ends

Ma, Severance, (through the end, Chapter 26)

**Discussion Group A should post by Wednesday noon**

**Response Paper Due Friday by 5:00 pm**

**Week 11: Extinction or Survival?**

Mon. Dec. 6: *Children of Men* 2006, dir. Alfonso Cuarón (please view before class)

Wed. Dec. 8: *Snowpiercer* 2013, dir. Bong Joon Ho (please view before class)

**Final Project Due Wednesday Dec. 15 by 5:00 p.m. on Canvas**