

01:574:382 Imagining Disaster: Korea and the Apocalyptic Modern

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From Web comic *Distant Sky* (2015), Week 15

Description

The apocalypse, narrowly defined, refers to God's destruction of the world in the book of Revelation. Today the term is often used secularly to point to wide-scale devastation. Global warming and the environmental crisis have brought the apocalyptic imagination front and center in our consciousness, aided by the recent proliferation of disaster narratives — from popular novels to Netflix — about epidemics, zombie outbreaks, tsunamis, alien invasions, and earthquakes.

This course traces the apocalyptic imagination in Korea from the 1930s to the 2010s. We will see that far from being a new phenomenon, the apocalyptic aesthetic has been an intrinsic part of Korea's encounter with modernity. In the first part of the course, we will approach familiar topics of modern Korean history (such as Japanese colonial occupation, the unending Korean War, postwar industrial development, virtualization of consumer culture) through the apocalyptic lens, in order to consider the moral, socio-political, and philosophical questions that follow. The second half of the course focuses more on different genres of storytelling, involving monsters, aliens, zombies, earthquakes, and the state of quarantine and societal collapse. We will consider how representations of calamity can function as powerful allegories for re-mapping our past, present, and future. In lecture, students will also learn about issues of importance to contemporary Korea, such as the IMF financial crisis, mad cow disease scare, famine in DPRK (The Arduous March), pollution (e.g. fine dust, or "misemōnji"), population decline, "Hell Joseon," North Korean nuclear crisis, and the Sewol Ferry tragedy.

The course takes an interdisciplinary cultural studies approach, meaning that students will encounter different kinds of sources, including literature, feature films, cartoons, news articles, philosophical essays, and scholarly research. Classes are conducted in English. No previous knowledge of Korean language, culture, or history is required to succeed in the course, though some familiarity with analyzing visual and literary texts is recommended.

Learning Goals

The course is interdisciplinary and designed to create an environment in which students learn how to produce a compelling argument while marshalling a wide range of sources (film, literature, essays, theoretical writing, news articles, scholarship, etc.) Students will learn how to critically understand the idea, phenomenon, and representation of “disaster” across different modern contexts, which will have application beyond Korea and East Asia.

- Understand Korean history, politics, culture, and society from colonial era to the present while bearing in mind Korea’s evolving position within the region.
- Examine core concepts such as apocalypse, colonialism, modernity, fascism, biopolitics, existentialism, spectacle, simulacra, medium-specificity.
- Read and interpret texts and visual materials, synthesizing them to make persuasive and insightful arguments.

Requirements

Attendance Within the framework of a mandatory attendance policy, you are allowed up to 3 absences (excused or unexcused) without penalty. These absences do not require outside documentation, though e-mails or in-person touching of base -- preferably before, or if it cannot be helped, after -- is always appreciated. After 3 absences, any *unexcused* absence will result in an additional three-point reduction from your final grade. Excused absences include documented medical emergencies or prior permission from me at least a week in advance. Exceptions will be made, of course, for prolonged medical problems, illnesses (psychological or physical), family or other relationship crises, provided that you are able to document these situations through official channels.

Participation (15%) If you average one substantial contribution per class, you will receive 100% of this participation grade. Once every two sessions will be equivalent of 90%. Once every three sessions will be 80%, and so on. Class participation will be tallied once at Midterm period, and again at the end of the term. (You cannot “bank” comments from one week to the next, meaning if you participate many times on Tuesday and are silent on Friday, you may be covered for that week, but not for the following Tuesday.) In addition to logging their frequency, I reserve the right to evaluate your comments for their quality. If you are anxious about speaking up in class, you can make up for this by contributing on Canvas under the Discussion tab.

Presentation (15%) Each student will be expected, once during the semester, to open the discussion with a brief presentation of the assigned readings. You will discuss important themes that they raise (this should not be a retelling of the plot of the work). Last but not least, present questions for discussion that reflect your careful reading of the texts. (10-15 min.) You must submit a 1-2 page summary or outline on Canvas the night before the presentation. You do not have to write a reading response for the session you have chosen to present for.

Reading Response (20%) TEN short entries (one paragraph, 10-15 lines or so) to the class Canvas site are to be posted on a weekly basis, **due the night before class**. It’s a short think piece, in which you can raise questions or make comments about the topic and readings for that week. The point of the weekly posting is for me to see something that you are thinking about the course material each week, before we come together as a group to talk about it. These will not be individually graded but I will read all of them each week. *No responses posted after or during class will be accepted.

Papers (20% & 30%): There will be TWO papers assigned for the course, the first due at mid-semester and to be 5 pages in length, the final paper is due at the end of the semester and to be 8 pages long. The first paper due at mid-semester will be 5 pages in length. It is an analytical essay, in which you choose a theme or a question drawn from the primary course materials, and construct an argument based on close

reading of one or two texts. No research beyond course materials is required. Final Research Paper will be 8 pages in length. Discuss a theme, an issue or an aspect of apocalyptic imagination, based primarily on one or few of your reading responses. Research beyond course readings is also required. The paper needs to have a cogent and original argument and evaluates both primary and secondary sources. It should include proper citations using footnotes and a full bibliography. Suggested topics will be distributed beforehand, and a proposal is required.

For citations, you may use CMS, MLA, or APA, as long as the citation practice is consistent throughout the paper. Quick guides for all three styles can be found under the “Research and Citation” tab at the Purdue Writing Lab website: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html

Assessment Plan

The instructor will evaluate the student’s mastery of the major themes of each week’s readings and assignments. The reading response assignments will help the instructor assess their progress, to see if they are on track to produce competent papers come midterm and final periods. The presentation component of the course will give students the opportunity to identify important critical questions and share them with the class. It will also provide more space for students to interact with one another. By the final paper assignment, students will be able to use the course materials as a point of departure to incorporate sources outside of the syllabus to cogently report on their research parameter and present a compelling thesis.

Academic Integrity Policy

Students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity at all times. Violations include cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity. If you ever have questions about academic integrity in the course, please talk to me or send me an email immediately with your concerns. See full statement of current Academic Integrity Policy at: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Students with Disabilities

It is the policy of Rutgers to make reasonable academic accommodations for qualified individuals with disabilities. If you have a disability and wish to request accommodations to complete your course requirements, please contact the office of disability services and ask to speak with a coordinator (848-445-6800 or dsoffice@echo.rutgers.edu) about accommodations.

Primary Readings

All course materials will be available as electronic files on Canvas.

Films

No separate session of film screening will be scheduled. All films will be made available as online resources. Students are required to finish watching the films before each session of the class. Select clips will be chosen by the instructor and shared during class.

I. Introduction

Week 1 Course Overview

- Essay, Susan Sontag, “Imagination of Disaster,” *Commentary Magazine*, 1965.
<https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/the-imagination-of-disaster/>
- News Article, Reed Johnson, “Japan Crisis Evokes Comparisons to Its Pop Culture Disaster Narratives, Historic Events,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 2011
<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-xpm-2011-mar-28-la-et-japan-apocalypse-20110328-story.html>
- Film clip, Dir. Hwang Tong-hyök, *The Fortress* (2017)

Supplementary Reading:

- Kyung Moon Hwang, *A History of Korea*, Palgrave, 2016
- James Berger, "Twentieth-Century Apocalypse: Forecasts and Aftermaths," *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 46. No. 4, Literature and Apocalypse (Winter, 2000), pp. 387-395.

II. Colonialism as Apocalypse

Week 2 Assimilation

- Short Essays, Yi T'ae-jun, *Eastern Sentiments*, Columbia University Press, translated by Janet Poole, 2009. Read "Night" pp. 27, "Early Ripening" pp. 28-29, "Death" pp. 29-30, "Dawn" pp. 45-46, "Loneliness" pp. 46-47, "History" pp. 49-51, "For Whom Do We Write?" pp. 51-55, "The Short Story and the Conte" pp. 59-63, "Korea's Fiction" pp. 66-71, "Brush and Ink" pp. 93-95, "After Illness" pp. 105-111, "Antiques and Daily Life" pp. 141-145
- Research, Janet Poole, "A Private Orient," from *When the Future Disappears: The Modernist Imagination of Late Colonial Korea*, Columbia University Press, 2014, pp. 85-114

Week 3 Total Mobilization

- Film, Dir. An Sŏk-yŏng, *Volunteer* (1941), 56 min.
- Research, Brandon Palmer, "Imperial Japan's Preparation to Conscript Koreans as Soldiers 1942-1945," *Korean Studies* Vol. 31 (2007), pp. 63-78
- Short Fiction, Ch'ae Man-sik, "My Innocent Uncle" (1938), pp. 95-112

Supplementary Reading

- Serk-Bae Suh, "The Location of 'Korean' Culture: Ch'oe Chae-sŏ and Korean Literature in a Time of Transition," *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 70, No. 1 (February) 2011: 53-75
- Rey Chow, "Reading Derrida on Monolingual," *New Literary History*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Spring 2008), pp. 217-231

III. War as Apocalypse

Week 4 Literature as Refuge

- Short Fiction, Han Sŏrya, "The Jackals" (1951), pp. 157-188
- Short Fiction, Han Mu-suk, "The Fragment" (1951), pp 22-40

Week 5 Spectacle as Refuge

- Film, Dir. Yi Si-myŏng, *2009: Lost Memories* (2002), 136 min.
- Research, Gavriel Rosenfeld, "Why Do We Ask 'What If?' Reflections on the Function on Alternate History" *History and Theory* Vol. 41, No. 4 (Dec., 2002), pp. 90-103.
- Research, David Martin-Jones, "Decompressing Modernity: South Korean Time Travel Narratives and the IMF Crisis" *Cinema Journal* Vol. 46, No. 4 (Summer, 2007), pp. 45-67.

Supplementary Reading

- Christine Hong, "The Unending Korean War," *positions*, Vol. 23, no. 4 (2015), pp. 597-617, edited by Christine Hong and Henry Em. (Add Suzy's article)
- Trevor Parfitt, "Are the Third World Poor *Homines Sacri*? Biopolitics, Sovereignty, and Development," *Alternatives* 34 (2009), pp. 41-58.

IV. Apocalypse of the Real: Spectacle, Simulation, Surveillance

Week 6 From Commodity Fetish to Spectacle

- Short Fiction, Yi Hyo-sök, "City and Specter" (1928), pp. 89-104
- Short Fiction, Ch'oe In-ho, "A Room of Another" (1971), pp. 181-194

Week 7 From Spectacle to Simulation

- Film, Pak Kwang-hyön, *Fabricated City* (2017), 126 min.
- Theoretical Essays, Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1995). Read "The Precession of Simulacra" pp. 1-43, "Holocaust" pp. 49-52, "Apocalypse Now" pp. 59-60, "Absolute Advertising, Ground-Zero Advertising" pp. 87-94, "Simulacra and Science Fiction" pp. 121-128, "The Spiraling Cadaver" pp. 149-154, "On Nihilism" pp. 159-163

Supplementary Reading

- Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Verso Books (2002)
- Rey Chow, "The Age of the World Target: Atomic Bombs, Alterity, Area Studies," p. 25-44 from *The Age of World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work*, Duke University Press (2006)

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V. Secular Gods: Monsters and Aliens (but not Zombies)

Week 8: Monsters

- Film, Dir. Sin Sang-ok, *Pulgasari* (1985), 95 min.
- Theoretical Essay, W.J.T. Mitchell, "Seven Theses on the Dinosaur" <https://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/532046se.html>
- Research, Peter H. Brothers, "Japan's Nuclear Nightmare: How the Bomb Became a Beast Called Godzilla" Vol. 36, No. 3 (Summer 2011), pp. 36-40

Week 9: Aliens

- Film, Dir. Chang Chun-hwan, *Save the Green Planet* (2003), 118 min.
- Research, Travis Workman, "Parodies of Realism at the Margins of Science Fiction" by Travis Workman, from *Simultaneous Worlds: Global Science Fiction Cinema*, University of Minnesota Press (2015), pp. 257-271.

Supplementary Reading

- David D. Gilmore, "Our Monsters, Ourselves," pp. 174-194 from *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*, University of Pennsylvania Press (2003)
- Patrick B. Sharp, "Yellow Peril to Japanese Wasteland: John Hersey's 'Hiroshima'," *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 46, No. 4, Literature and Apocalypse (Winter, 2000), pp. 434-452

VI. Apocalyptic Agency: Between Immortality and Annihilation

Week 10: Martyrdom and Vengeance

- Film, Dir. Kim Pyöng-wu, *The Terror Live* (2013), 98 min.
- Research, Hwasook Nam, "Reading Chun Tae-il: Making Sense of a Worker Self-Immolation in 1970s South Korea," from *Beyond Death: The Politics of Suicide and Martyrdom in Korea*, University of Washington Press (2019), edited by Charles Kim and Jungwon Kim, pp. 167-190
- Short Fiction, Kim Young-ha, "Diary of a Murderer" (2019), pp. 1-96.

Week 11: Eternal Endgame

- Film, Dir. Yang Wu-sŏk, *Steel Rain* (2017), 139 min.
- Web Essay, Suzy Kim, "The Cold War Never Ended: Historical Roots of the Current North Korea Crisis," August 15, 2017, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/summer-2017/the-cold-war-never-ended-historical-roots-of-the-current-north-korea-crisis>
- Short Fiction, Djuna, "The Bloody Battle of Broccoli Plain" from *Readymade Bodhisattva: The Kaya Anthology of South Korean Science Fiction* edited by Sungyoung Park and Park Sang Joon (2019), pp. 257-294.

Supplementary Reading

- Dahlia Schweitzer, "The Terrorism Outbreak," pp. 108-143, from *Going Viral: Zombies, Viruses, and the End of the World*, Rutgers University Press (2018)
- Akira Mizuta Lippit, "Phantom Cures: Obscurity and Emptiness," pp. 133-158, from *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*, University of Minnesota Press (2005).
- W. J. T. Mitchell, "Picturing Terror: Derrida's Autoimmunity," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Winter 2007), pp. 277-290.

VII. The Quarantined City

Week 12 The Outbreak Narrative

- Film, Dir. Kim Sŏng-su, *Flu* (2013), 122 min.
- Research, Aaron Baker, "Global Cinema and *Contagion*," *Film Quarterly* Vol. 66, No. 3 (Spring 2013), pp. 5-14
- Research, Dahlia Schweitzer, "The Outbreak Narrative," *Going Viral: Zombies, Viruses, and the End of the World*, Rutgers University Press (2018), pp. 38-69.

Week 13 The Infested City

- Novel, Pyun Hye-young, *City of Ash and Red*, translated by Sora Kim-Russell, Arcade Publishing (2018), pp. 1-256.

Supplementary Reading

- Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Winter 2003), pp. 11-40.
- Elana Gomel, "The Plague of Utopias: Pestilence and the Apocalyptic Body," *Twentieth Century Literature* Vol. 46, No. 4 Literature and Apocalypse (Winter 2000), pp. 405-433.

VIII. Youth in Apocalyptic Allegory

Week 14: Zombies

- Animated Film, Dir. Yŏn Sang-ho, *Seoul Station* (2016), 92 min.
- Research, Richard Benjamin, "The Sense of an Ending: Youth Apocalypse Films," *Journal of Film and Video*, vol. 56, No. 4 (Winter 2004), pp. 34-49.
- Research, Jiyeon Kang, "Internet Activism Transforming Street Politics: South Korea's 2008 'Mad Cow' protests and new democratic sensibilities," *Media, Culture & Society*, Vol. 39, No. 5, (July 2017), pp. 750-761.

Week 15: Web Media

- Web Comic, Inwan Yu and Sunhŭi Kim, *Distant Sky* (2015)
https://www.webtoons.com/en/thriller/distant-sky/list?title_no=75&page=1
- Web Essay, Heekyoung Cho, "The Webtoon: A New Form for Graphic Narrative," *The Comics Journal*, July 18, 2016. tcj.com/the-webtoon-a-new-form-for-graphic-narrative/

Supplementary Reading

- Yerim Kim, “The Political Dynamics of Sacrifice and the Sacrificial Narrative in Modern Korea: The State and the Historical Ontology of Student Soldiers,” from *Beyond Death: The Politics of Suicide and Martyrdom in Korea*, University of Washington Press (2019)
- Thomas Lamarre, “Girl Computerized,” pp. 209-299, from *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*, University of Minnesota Press (2009)

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Suggested Further Readings

Weihong Bao, *Fiery Cinema: The Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915-1945*. University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

Frances Carey, ed. *The Apocalypse and the Shape of Things to Come*, University of Toronto Press, 1999.

John J. Collins, ed. *Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

John R. Hall. *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity*. Wiley, 2013.

Teresa Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel*. University of Toronto Press, 2008.

Thomas Lamarre, “Born of Trauma: Akira and Capitalist Modes of Destruction,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* vol. 16 no. 1 (Spring 2008), pp. 131-56.

Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. Oxford University Press, 2000.

Akira Lippit, *Atomic Light (Shadow Optics)*, University of Minnesota Press, 2005.

Christine L. Marran, *Ecology Without Culture: Aesthetics for a Toxic World*, University of Minnesota, 2017.

Colin McAllister, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Apocalyptic Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2020 (forthcoming).

W. J. T. Mitchell, *The Last Dinosaur Book: The Life and Times of a Cultural Icon*. University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Jean-Luc Nancy, *After Fukushima: the equivalence of Catastrophe*. Fordham University Press, 2015.

Natasha O’Hear and Anthony O’Hear, *Pipcturing the Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation in the Arts over Two Millennia*. Oxford University Press, 2015.

Lee Quinby, *Anti-Apocalypse: Exercises in Genealogical Criticism*. University of Minnesota Press, 1994

Elizabeth Rosen. *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the Postmodern Imagination*. Lexington Books, 2008.

- David Seed, ed. *Imagining Apocalypse: studies in Cultural Crisis*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.
- Stefan Skrimshire, *Future Ethics: Climate Change and Apocalyptic Imagination*. Continuum, 2010.
- M. Tanaka, *Apocalypse in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Xiaobing Tang, *The Chinese Modern: The Heoric and the Quotidian*. Duke University Press, 2000.
- Alan Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*. University of California Press, 2009.
- Karen Thornber, *Ecoambiguity: Environmental Crises and East Asian Literature*, University of Michigan Press, 2012.
- Ban Wang, *The Sublime Figure of History: Aesthetics and Politics in Twentieth-Century China*, Stanford University Press, 1997.
- Paul Williams, *Race, Ethnicity and Nuclear War: Representations of Nuclear Weapons and Post-Apocalyptic Worlds*. Liverpool University Press, 2011.