

English 299/Honors 299
American Apocalyptic Literature.
MWF 11:00

Professor: ShaunAnne Tangney
Office: HH138; ph.no.: 858-3180
Office Hours: MWF 8:00-10:00,
11:00-1:00, and by appt.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Looking Backward, Edward Bellamy
The Day of the Locust, Nathaniel West
Palm Latitudes, Kate Braverman.
The Road, Cormac McCarthy

These texts are available at the MSU bookstore

Course Readings (CR): There is a collection of readings on reserve at the GBO library. It is your responsibility to check these materials out and photocopy them in their entirety. You need to read and bring them to class as the syllabus indicates. This collection runs about 160 pages; at .10 per copy it will cost you approximately \$16.00 to photocopy it all.

A Bible, from which we will read "The Revelation to St. John." Any Bible that contains this chapter will do. If you do not own a Bible, there are several in the stacks of the GBO library. You need to make a photocopy the chapter if you are using a Bible you cannot annotate.

We will watch one (1) film: *Blade Runner*. I have planned to watch the movie with you all in my home; I'll buy the pizza, you bring whatever you want to drink. Movie night is scheduled for Wednesday, October 21st. Please plan to have this evening free so that we can watch the movies. If this is impossible, *Blade Runner* is readily available at video stores and you could view it on your own.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

I finished graduate school and my Ph.D. by writing a dissertation titled *Children of the Word: From Image to Method in American Apocalyptic Literature*. My thesis was that apocalypticism has been a part of our culture and literature since the first Europeans, the first Christians, arrived. The English and the Spanish both came to America fueled by apocalyptic desire, inflamed by apocalyptic imagery and rhetoric. This imagery and rhetoric (not to mention desire) remained useful as the nation came to be, fought revolutionary and civil wars, moved westward and moved into its "American Century," filled as it was with world wars, "final solutions," hippies and commies, utopians and doom-sayers. My dissertation also argued that a shift took place in American apocalypticism consistent with the shift from modernism to postmodernism. Modern apocalyptic literature focused on the imagery of apocalypse; postmodern apocalypticism focuses on the narrative method of apocalypse. In this course we will consider all of the above: how apocalypticism got here, how it became entrenched in our culture and literature, and how (or perhaps if) it changes over time. We will read a variety of texts, from letters to sermons to poems to novels to movies to essays. We will examine these texts in order to discover what we can about them as literature per se, and also to discover what we can about the character of our nation.

COURSE GOALS

In this course you should become familiar with the tenets, images, and narrative method of apocalypticism. You should continue and improve your practice of critical reading of the variety of texts in the course. You should also continue and improve your practice of argumentative research writing; this includes the use and evaluation of sources, the use of the library (NOT the internet), and mastery of the standards of college-level written prose. Finally, you should continue to gain confidence in the oral presentation of your ideas, in both classroom discussion and in your presentation.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Seminar Paper: You will write one argumentative research paper on a topic of your choosing, so long as it relates to apocalypticism. You may write on one or more of the texts we address in class, or you can choose something else. If you write about a text we did not read in class, it must be approved by me. You will have the opportunity to have a conference with me about your paper/topic. An argumentative research paper must pose an interesting problem or question and then provide analysis of that problem or question. Another way to say this is that each paper must make a major claim (put forth in a thesis statement) and then use evidence from primary and secondary research sources to support or demonstrate that claim (see

also handout). The paper should be a minimum of ten (10) pages long, have a title, be typed or word-processed, be double-spaced, use a 10- or 12-point font in a plain style, have 1-inch margins, and use MLA style.

Presentation: At the end of the semester, you will give an in-class presentation on any apocalyptic text of your choice. My original idea was to have you find something from current-day American culture or literature and report on it, but I realize that some of you may be more “into” times past as so I won’t put any restriction on it. Your goal is to give a 20-minute presentation to the class on the text(s) you have chosen, discussing just how they are apocalyptic and what their specific kind of apocalypticism says about America. You can use any kind of “visual aids” you might want or need, just let me know in advance so that I can get the necessary equipment. There is no time scheduled out on the syllabus for a conference with me about your presentation, but you would be wise to make time to discuss it with me before you make your presentation.

Participation: As I envision it this course as a seminar, your participation in classroom discussion is absolutely imperative. I expect full, rigorous, intelligent, and brave participation in class. As such, it is worth a substantial part of your grade. While I do not have an attendance policy per se in this course, any accumulation of absences beyond, say, four or five, will negatively affect the participation percentage of your grade.

COURSE POLICIES:

Plagiarism Policy: Plagiarism is unacceptable in this (or any) course. The Minot State University Academic Integrity Code states:

Incidents of academic dishonesty may be documented by the faculty member with a copy of the documentation maintained by the department/division chair. A letter of explanation will be sent to the student. Cheating may affect the student in accordance with the faculty member’s grading policy. The student may appeal the faculty member’s penalty to the department chair. Student disciplinary action may result in accordance with the Student Conduct Policy. Academic dishonesty would include, but is not limited to, the following types of behaviors:

- Misrepresenting another individual’s work as one’s own, e.g. plagiarism from hard copy or the Internet.
- Copying from another student during an exam.
- Altering one’s exam after grading for the purpose of enhancing one’s grade.
- Submitting the same paper to more than one class without prior approval of the instructors.
- Use of any material or device not approved by the faculty during an exam.
- Turning in reports intended to be based on field collection data but, which are, in fact, not.
- Failure to respect the confidentiality of persons served or studies and to maintain the professional standards for ethical conduct as set forth in *The Handbook of School Psychology* published by the national Association of School Psychologists.

Plagiarism is our main focus here. There are various forms of plagiarism, in addition to the obvious one of misrepresenting someone else’s work as your own. Failing to cite sources in your work is one.

Incorporating large sections of other people’s work—including material from the Internet—into your own without acknowledging the source or author is another. And downloading or purchasing whole papers from the Internet is a third. The penalty for plagiarism in this course is failure of the course. The offending student will be sent a letter notifying him/her of the offense and the penalty. In addition, a letter will be to the Vice President of Student Affairs, asking him to consider probation for a first offense, suspension for a second offense, and expulsion for a third offense. This letter will also be kept on file in the Division of Humanities office.

Late Work Policy: *I do not accept late work. Period. End of discussion.* When something is due, it is due in class, at the beginning of class. If you do not put the finished assignment in my hands, at the beginning of class, it is late and will not be accepted. Do not slide things under my office door. Do not leave things in my mailbox. Do not give things to me after class—even 5 minutes after class. On *very, very* rare occasions, under *extremely extraordinary* circumstances, I *might* make an exception (note italics). Do not kill off your grandparents over the course of the semester. Don’t tell me about athletic events, trips with the drama club, or your car broken down in Fargo. Do not invent sick children, grumpy husbands, or flaky computers. Here’s the deal: assignments are due in class at the beginning of class. I do not accept late work. If you do not put your finished assignment in my hands, at the beginning of class, it is late and will not be accepted. Any questions?

Technology Policy: I do not allow technology of any kind in the classroom. No lap-tops. No cell phones. No MP3 players. No electronic/digital/technological devices of any kind. I know how helpful and enjoyable these devices are, but I need your full attention in class. You also need to be taking notes in class—this is imperative to your doing well in the course! Some people may prefer to take notes on a lap-top, but the problem here is that I don't know if you're taking notes or surfing the 'net—so use the old fashioned way of actually writing things down. If I see a lap-top up at the beginning of class I will ask you to shut it down. If I see your ear-buds in at the beginning of class I will ask you to take them out and shut off the player. If you are unwilling to comply, I will ask you to leave class for the day. If your cell-phone rings, I will ask you to leave class, and not return for the rest of the day. Class time is class time and I need your full attention. Furthermore, as Maggie Jackson points out in her book *Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age*, our near-religious allegiance to a constant state of motion and addiction to multitasking are eroding our capacity for deep, sustained, perceptive attention—a crucial building block of intimacy, wisdom and cultural progress—and stunting society's ability to comprehend what's relevant and permanent. Reading and writing has much to do with intimacy, wisdom, and cultural progress, and this class requires your deep, sustained attention and perception. Towards those ends: no technology allowed during class.

GRADING

Your paper is worth 60% of your final grade.

Your presentation is worth 25% of your final grade.

Your participation is worth 15% of your final grade.

“Up until the apocalyptic day on which the new continent revealed itself to the Occident, it was possible to consider Earth the creation of the gods. But, even so, as the achievement of the gods, Earth was lame, unfinished; a marvelous machine, yes. . . but lacking an essential part. [Upon discovery of the “New World”] Europe would soon be new, the Occident would be new, and new also would be the compass of man's imagination.”

--German Arciniegas

It's evident / the art of losing's not too hard to master / though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.”

--Elizabeth Bishop

“The atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima in the summer of 1945. At that point I tore up every page of a book I had nearly finished. Every sentence was out of date. We had entered a new age.”

--Margaret Mead

“It's the end of the world as we know it / And I feel fine.”

--R.E.M.

Writing An Argumentative Research Paper

Adapted from Purdue's OWL (on-line writing lab)

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>

16 November 2005

What is a Research Paper?

A research paper is a piece of academic writing that requires a more abstract, critical, and thoughtful level of inquiry than you might be used to. But not to worry, you'll gradually pick up that mindset the more you envelop yourself in tutorial discussions and lectures at the college level, and of course, the more you write.

Writing a research paper involves (1) first familiarizing yourself with the works of "experts"—for example, on the page, in cyberspace, or in the flesh through personal interviews—to build upon what you know about a subject and then (2) comparing their thoughts on the topic with your own. Your paper must have both—your ideas and the ideas of others. You begin by making claims (ideas about a given text you mean to demonstrate or prove) and then you use primary and secondary sources to support those claims.

You'll end up using relevant information—facts and/or opinions—from these expert sources, these "others," to support the topic you have been given or chosen to explore. Then, as our subsequent steps will outline, the final product will be a unique and appropriate integration of evidence you have located outside yourself and personal insights generated from your own internal think tank—your mind!

It is essential that your insights comprise the bulk of the paper. The inclusion of sources isn't just some arbitrary can-you-use-the-library? test in disguise, but complements your own ideas by providing academic context and credibility to what you are asserting. No professor will be marking *what* the published experts have to say, only how well *you use* what the experts have to say to advance *your* paper's purpose. Think of a paper as a conversation between you and the "other experts"—both together making the argument stronger.

Note: A mere *review* of the academic "literature" in a field—i.e. a summary of the existing body of knowledge on your subject—does not make a research paper. If you think about it, it's indeed reminiscent of the high school informative report except that instead of using encyclopedias, you'd be consulting academic journals. By itself then, such a review is not often assigned because it wouldn't test your capacity for critical thinking.

The Two Main Types of Research Papers: to Analyze or to Argue? That is the Question.

Regardless of the type of research paper you're writing, we hope the previous discussion of what a research paper is has established that your finished paper should be a presentation of your own thinking backed up by the ideas or information of others in the field. However, whether your paper is ANALYTICAL (uses evidence to analyze facets of an issue) or ARGUMENTATIVE (uses evidence to attempt to convince the reader of your particular stance on a debatable topic), is definitely going to have a bearing on your strategy from here on in. In fact, it will determine your paper's purpose. So here's a more thorough discussion of the difference between the two types, followed by a concrete example that directly compares the two.

The assignment in my classes is always for an argumentative paper. However, argument always requires analysis—of both primary and secondary texts—and so I include the section on analysis. I repeat: you are not assigned an analytical paper, but you cannot make a strong argument without using the analytical skills outlined below and so I include it as it might be helpful.

As the staff at the SUNY Empire State College Writer's Complex so aptly explains it: "To analyze means to break a topic or concept down into its parts in order to inspect and understand it, and to restructure those parts in a way that makes sense to you. In an analytical research paper, you do research to become an expert on a topic so that you can restructure and present the parts of the topic from your own perspective."

In this brand of research paper, therefore, you go into the researching stage with a specific topic about which you have not made any kind of conclusions. Often you will hear this called your research question.

Your task is to survey the information and views already out there—both *before* and *once* you become familiar with the topic. That will require critical thinking and reading, plus evaluation of the resources you handle. By the end of the paper you will be able to contribute your own thoughts to the academic discussion by drawing some conclusions about the topic you have just analyzed.

What exactly does critical thinking mean?

A term often thrown around at the post-secondary level, “critical thinking” is a broad concept that encompasses a lot about college or university academic expectations. But for our purposes it’s enough to say that in a research or reading context it means not considering any view as “truth” simply because a source has been published or seems to be an expert. It requires you to maintain some objectivity and ask questions to yourself as you read (or watch or listen). This slight air of initial skepticism urges the resource to convince you of its authority. In short, a critical eye teaches you to regard anything—*especially* if it's published or in other media—as if you're doing a peer edit or with the attitude your own professor will be adopting while marking your paper. No matter what your knowledge level, as a student with fresh eyes and unique experiences, you always have inquisitiveness as a skill; this is how students enter a research community with some authority of their own.

In addition to the concept of critical thinking (which *any* paper at the university level will demand of you), another widely-used term at the college level which you may or may not be familiar with in its academic context, is the term argument. This is the basis of the persuasive kind of research paper.

The Student Services staff at Charles Stuart University in Australia defines an argument as “a series of generalizations or propositions, supported by evidence or reasoning and connected in a logical manner, that lead to a justified conclusion. You must sustain your argument by giving evidence and reasons.” The series of generalizations or propositions are often referred to as “claims.” Evidence you use to support your claims can be gathered from researching primary and secondary sources, from doing field work, from conducting interviews, etc.

In direct contrast to the analytical paper, your approach here is to take a stand on an issue and use evidence to back-up your stance, not to explore or flesh out an unresolved topic. This stance, this debatable statement or interpretation, is known as your thesis. Argumentative or persuasive papers, as these names suggest, are attempts—after all, essay does come from the French word *essai*, or “attempt”—to convince the reader of a debatable or controversial point of view. That point of view—your thesis—and not some research question, is the core of this breed of paper.

Writing a Thesis Statement

Since a good argumentative paper requires a sound and arguable thesis, it is worth our while to discuss thesis statements at some length. A thesis statement must appear at the beginning of your paper; it usually appears at or near the end of the introduction. Note that it is a thesis statement, not sentence, as it may take you more than one sentence to achieve it. A thesis statement must always indicate topic and purpose, and it must be in the declarative voice. While brainstorming a series of questions may help you decide what topic you want to explore and what argument you may want to make about that topic, a thesis statement must be a declarative one, not an interrogative one.

A thesis statement must also be debatable. That is to say, it must indicate controversy or complexity, not merely summary or the self-evident. For example, you would not want to make an argument of this sort:

Shakespeare's Hamlet is a play about a young man who seeks revenge.

That doesn't say anything—it's basically just a summary and is hardly debatable. A better thesis would be this:

Hamlet experiences internal conflict because he is in love with his mother.

That is debatable, controversial even. The rest of a paper with this argument as its thesis will be an attempt to show, using specific examples from the text and evidence from scholars, (1) how Hamlet is in love with his mother, (2) why he's in love with her, and (3) what implications there are for reading the play in this manner. This last—what implications there are for reading the play in this manner—is crucial as it speaks

to purpose. Indeed, your assumption at implications should be included in your thesis statement. Thus it might more properly read something like this:

Hamlet experiences internal conflict because he is in love with his mother. It is important that we recognize this love because it helps us understand something of the complexity of human nature.

You also want to avoid a thesis statement like this:

Spirituality means different things to different people. *King Lear*, *The Book of Romans*, and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* each view the spirit differently.

Again, that says nothing that's not already self-evident. Why bother writing a paper about that? You're not writing an essay to list works that have nothing in common other than a general topic like "spirituality." You want to find certain works or authors that, while they may have several differences, do have some specific, unifying point. That point is your thesis. A better thesis would be this:

King Lear, *The Book of Romans*, and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* each view the soul as the center of human personality. It is crucial that we understand human possibility so that society can move forward and improve.

Then you demonstrate it, using examples from the texts that show that the soul is the center of personality.

A Note on Secondary Sources/Texts

The work of literature you are writing about is called a "primary" source or text. Any texts you consult in order to support your argument about that primary text are called "secondary" sources/texts.

At the college level, acceptable secondary sources include scholarly books and journals. However, some topics may require that you delve into popular culture, and then newspapers and magazines may be helpful, as might other media such as television, movies, music, advertising, video games, etc. Likewise, some topics may require that you dig into the popular media of the past: newspapers, magazines, music, advertising, etc. Sources that are not acceptable are encyclopedias (other than specific or scholarly ones — an encyclopedia of Native American literature, for example), unscholarly, unprofessional, or otherwise dubious web-sites, dated or irrelevant material, material that is intended for a general and not a scholarly audience.

The Argumentative Writing Process

Now let's see how both analysis and argument work, and how both are required to write the argumentative research paper.

Say you're interested in "the purpose of madness in Renaissance tragedies." That's a topic; remember, without a purpose you don't have an arguable thesis. It is self-evident that there is madness in Renaissance tragedies; you have to say something about it, debate why there is madness in those tragedies. But you certainly have to start with a topic — a good idea generated from your first reading of a primary text. Next, you do some research to locate instances of insanity in various plays. Perhaps your research helps you discover several purposes to madness in these tragedies, or perhaps there's debate among scholars as to the main purpose of madness, so you decide to present some of these varying opinions. However you choose to explore the topic, in the body of your paper you'd be using evidence from the plays themselves (a.k.a. primary sources/texts) and expert opinions on the plays (a.k.a. secondary sources/texts). This is all analysis.

Your concluding paragraph(s) would finally incorporate some of *your* critical interpretations of both the plays and the experts' essays. Here, you'd include a critical evaluation and discussion of your overall findings as well as some conclusions based on the patterns you've researched or detected yourself to make some final comments about the purpose of madness in Renaissance tragedies.

To make an ARGUMENTATIVE paper you must lay out exactly *what you consider to be* the purpose of madness in Renaissance tragedies in a declarative sentence right in the introduction — the thesis statement. Thus, the template would change accordingly to "the purpose of madness in Renaissance tragedies is _____ (for comic relief? to provide a reflection of moral chaos? and so on and so forth, including your purpose)." Madness in Renaissance tragedies ceases to be just a topic and becomes instead an interpretation. The course of the paper will develop why you believe — and importantly, why the reader should believe — what you do.

At this point you'll need to narrow your evidence down to only that evidence (still examples from plays and opinions from experts) *which directly supports your thesis*. The body of your paper turns into a site for laying out the proof you've collected rather than a canvas for delineating a topic. And considering that scholars still debate the psychological state of Prince Hamlet (close to four hundred years after the play was written!), there is no right or wrong answer. You will not get a bad mark if your professor happens to completely disagree with your thesis. That's not the point. Solid back-up and convincing arguments, not safe thesis statements, are what make for happy profs.

Outline or Template for an Argumentative Paper

This is for an essay with four main points that aren't depicting a chronological event and so seem to arrange best as a list in ascending order (least to most important: this is a valuable organizational strategy because your audience will best remember what is last said). All the points must be important of course; it's just a matter of degree.

We've included ellipses within each paragraph because the number of examples you use will very much depend on what your topic for that paragraph is, how convincing the example is, and how much it would take to convince a reader. For example, if you were analyzing the language or diction used by a character in a novel, including *several* different examples of a recurring speaking habit would better illustrate that the pattern is representative of the character's behavior. If, on the other hand, you were talking about the significance of his or her suicide which is a huge part of the novel, you would likely have enough to say about the events surrounding that single event. Indeed, in the template that follows, only one paragraph for each claim is indicated. You will no doubt take more than one paragraph to exemplify or demonstrate your claim. The template is meaningful in that it shows you that for each claim you make you must provide multiple sources of evidence. You need to remember that the template is a suggestion and not a fact and can be modified as needed to fit the complexity of the assignment and your argument.

You'll note the template below also includes concluding sentences for each paragraph. These were added in not so much because every paragraph needs a formal conclusion, but rather to remind you how you should consistently be communicating to your readers why you're telling them what you're telling them.

Working Title (optional here—you may want to wait until after your first draft)

Introduction

An introduction need not be limited to a single paragraph and can do any of several things to “set up your thesis.” An introduction eases your audience into the discourse, serves to establish your authority, and may remove prejudice. It can be inquisitive, corrective, preparatory, anecdotal, or paradoxical, and must include your thesis statement.

Thesis Statement

Transition (you don't have to write these out now but you should know what they'd roughly be)

Background

You need to provide some background information before you launch into your argument. This background may consist of the defining of terms or theories, historical context, cultural contexts or ramifications, etc.

Transition

Note: the overall structure of this template moves through claims from the weakest (“#4”) to the strongest (“#1”). This is one model of organization; you might also “hide” your weaker claims in between stronger ones (and so the paper would mover from strong to weak to strong claims), or you might even organize not according to the strength of claims but moving from familiar to less familiar ideas, from general to specific, from simple to complex, etc.

Claim #4 _____

Examples + explication of how it supports topic sentence
Concluding sentence on how (all) the example(s) support thesis
It is essential that you provide multiple examples or sources of evidence. It is also essential that you refer directly to the primary or secondary sources, using either direct quotes or paraphrases. Remember that it may very well take you more than a single paragraph to thoroughly demonstrate or prove any given claim.

Transition

Claim #3 _____

Examples + explication of how it supports topic sentence
Concluding sentence on how (all) the example(s) support thesis

Transition

Claim #2 _____

Examples + explication of how it supports topic sentence
Concluding sentence on how (all) the example(s) support thesis

Transition

Claim #1 _____

Example + explication of how it supports topic sentence
Concluding sentence on how (all) the example(s) support thesis

Transition

Conclusion

A conclusion need not be limited to a single paragraph, and can do any of several things. It can provide a summary of the main points of the paper, make your topic relevant to the world at large, or encourage your audience to take some action. In your conclusion you may be more emotional than you were in the rest of the paper as you want to leave your audience with the feeling of the importance of your argument.

I strongly suggest that you use this template, follow this outline. If you do, you will set yourself up to write an argument. There is no guarantee, of course, that using this template/outline will produce an “A” paper; your grade depends upon the quality of your ideas, research, and writing. But, if you use this template/outline, you will be set up to make an argument and that is the very basis of the assignment. A paper that is not argumentative will certainly fail simply because it does not meet the assignment.