

The Post-Apocalyptic Pacific

ENG 90S, AMES 80S, AADS 90S | Course Codes: ALP, CCI, STS, W

Spring 2025: WF 3:05pm – 4:20pm

Perkins LINK 059 (Seminar 1)

Office Hours: by appointment

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Godzilla emerges from the radioactive currents of the Pacific Ocean. “Mecha” evangelion robots and cyborgs fight against kaiju-monsters and ghostly hackers. A giant everything bagel creates a blackhole that threatens to demolish the multiverse. This course brings together monstrous, cataclysmic disasters set in the Pacific region to understand the geographical, oceanic, and cultural ties of that space. How do we talk about global catastrophes in the Pacific? Is it possible to shift away from a Western-centered imagination of the post-apocalypse? And what exactly constitutes the Pacific area? Is it based on national borders? The Pacific Ocean itself? With existing terms like the “Asia Pacific” and the “Pacific Rim” originating from colonial histories, is it possible to imagine a transpacific solidarity, especially after world-scale destruction?

To answer these questions, we will take global Asian and Asian American literature in the broadest sense of forms and genre, from fictional narratives (monster invasions, female cyborgs, environmental disasters) to real events (the Vietnam War, the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the COVID pandemic). Materials include acclaimed Hollywood films like Guillermo del Toro’s *Pacific Rim* and Daniel Kwan’s and Daniel Scheinert’s *Everything Everywhere All at Once*; Japanese sci-fi anime (*Neon Genesis Evangelion*); a Korean film by Oscar-winner Bong Joon-ho (*The Host*); essays from Asian American and transpacific scholarship, as well as short and long fiction by award-winning authors Keri Hulme, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Han Kang, and Ruth Ozeki.

Assignments will include weekly reading responses (150 words) and two close-reading essays (each 2-3 pages). These exercises will prepare students for the final paper (6-8 pages). No exams, no prerequisites necessary.

COURSE GOALS:

In this course, students will learn to:

- Analyze a variety of narrative and media forms including short stories, novels, films, anime, and documentaries that portray real and fictional cataclysmic disasters set in the Pacific region.
- Establish working definitions of the Pacific region, considering a myriad of perspectives including geographic borders, national histories, ocean studies, and the economic, political, and aesthetic imaginations of transpacific solidarity.

- Explore both Western and non-Western perspectives on global catastrophes based in the Pacific, and how these texts address recurring themes like diasporic displacement, multi-racial and gender identities, transnational histories, anxieties of technology, and environmental concerns.
- Foster critical thinking and analytical skills through discussions, theoretical scholarship, as well as written assignments.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The concept of the “post-apocalyptic Pacific” was first coined by Professor Hyungji Park in her Spring 2019 graduate course at Yonsei University, South Korea. This syllabus draws inspiration from that course which I gratefully acknowledge.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Please obtain a copy of the following texts, preferably in the editions listed below:

- Han Kang, *Human Acts*, translated by Deborah Smith, Random House Publishing Group, 2017
- Larissa Lai, *Salt Fish Girl*, Thomas Allen Publishers, 2008
- Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*, Penguin Books, 2013



(Abe Books is a great, affordable website to get second-hand copies. Please note however, that their shipping often takes weeks to arrive, so order well ahead of time:

<https://www.abebooks.com/>).

All other readings, critical essays, films, etc. will be available on Canvas as pdfs or links.

GRADE BREAKDOWN AND ASSIGNMENTS:

- Class Participation – 20%
- Weekly Paragraphs – 20%
- Short Essay 1 – 15%
- Short Essay 2 – 15%
- 1st Draft Final Paper – 5%
- Final Paper – 25%

Class Participation (20%):

This is a seminar class where a major portion of our learning will occur during in-class discussions. This includes attending class, reading or watching all materials beforehand, actively participating in discussions, and listening to others with attention and respect. Active participation can mean speaking frequently in class, which is great! It can also take many shapes and forms, such as active listening, note-taking, posting your questions and comments on Canvas, responding to each other's weekly posts on Canvas, etc.

Weekly Paragraphs – 150 words (20%):

You will submit a weekly paragraph to Canvas once a week (see schedule) before class. The weekly responses are free topic where you choose *one* scene or quote from the readings and discuss why you think it is interesting and significant. You do not have to summarize or contextualize the scene/quote in detail—primarily focus on explaining your interpretation.

- The weekly paragraphs will be graded upon completion. This is a low stakes opportunity for you to do some critical thinking beforehand to help prepare you for class discussions. Moreover, it is to help you accumulate notes that will make it less daunting when you start the longer written assignments.
- You will NOT be allowed to use AI for your weekly paragraphs. If you are caught using AI for these assignments, the rules of plagiarism will apply and will negatively impact your grade.
- You are allowed to miss 2 weekly paragraphs without penalty, **except for the week of April 9**. On that date, you are required to write your research questions, the materials you'll be exploring, and the thesis statement for the final paper.

Two Short Essays – each 2-3 pages (each 15%)

The two short essays (2-3 pages) are literary analysis essays where you will choose *one* of the texts we've covered so far. Analyze an aspect of the work (a scene, a character, a motif, etc.) and describe its significance in the overall narrative. Your essay should be *argumentative* rather than descriptive. Think of these assignments as longer, more substantiated versions of your weekly paragraphs. The essay should include a short introduction that briefly summarizes the scene and your thesis statement. You should support your argument with quotes from the text. You can choose which topic or themes you want to discuss (you are not obligated to connect your essay to the Pacific or the post-apocalypse).

1) First Short Essay – Due February 7 (Friday), 11:59 pm

- The first short essay will be focused on close reading a *film*. Choose between *Godzilla Minus One*, *Matango*, or *The Host*, and follow the description above.
- I will meet with you one week before submission to help you develop a topic of interest, answer any questions about the writing process, and serve as a regular check-in during the semester.

2) Second Short Essay – Due March 7 (Friday), 11:59 pm

- The second short essay will be a close reading of a *literary text*. You may choose a short story by Keri Hulme, Nam Le, Viet Thanh Nguyen, or a longer novel (Han Kang's *Human Acts*, Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*).
- On March 5, we will have an in-class peer workshop to revise your first draft before you submit your final drafts.

1st Draft of Final Paper – 3 pages (5%); Due April 16 (Wednesday, before class)

You will bring to class a minimum of 3 pages as a first draft for your final project. In those 3 pages, make sure to identify the primary text(s) you examine, your research question(s), your argument, methodology, and a brief outline of secondary criticism, examples or evidence you will use to support your argument.

- The first draft will be graded upon completion and is to help you start thinking about your final project in advance.
- On April 16 (Wed), we will have an in-class peer workshop to revise your first draft before you submit your final papers.

Final Paper – 6-8 pages (30%); Due April 29 (Tuesday), 11:59 pm

For the final paper, you will choose a primary text (or multiple texts, if you prefer) from the syllabus. Supplement your close analysis with secondary and criticism sources (**at least 4**) obtained via independent research. If you choose to write on multiple texts, you may include a mix of media and literature. Your essay should center around one or more principal texts and explore their implications regarding genre, politics, history, culture, etc. related to the post-apocalypse and/or Pacific. Your final paper should be *argumentative* rather than descriptive.

*** More detailed guidelines and information for each assignment will be made available closer to the due date.*

Grade Scale

Letter grades map approximately onto the following scale, which I will use to calculate your final grade for the course:

F 0-59	D- 60-62	D 63-66	D+ 67-69	C- 70-72	C 73-76
C+ 77-79	B- 80-82	B 83-86	B+ 87-89	A- 90-92	A 93-100

COURSE POLICIES

Office Hours and Email

Do not hesitate to email me whenever you have any questions, concerns, or comments related to the class. **Please include [ENG 90S] in the header for all emails** and I will respond within 48 hours. Office hours are not regularly scheduled, but I'm happy to schedule a meeting with you in person or on Zoom throughout the week. You will meet with me at least once this semester so that I can get to know you as a person and hear your thoughts about the class.

Attendance

You are allowed **3 absences**, including STINF (Short-Term Illness Notification Form) absences, or your attendance will negatively impact your final grade. Students who are more than ten minutes late without prior notification to the instructor will lose participation points for that class session. For more information about STINF procedures, see:

<https://trinity.duke.edu/undergraduate/academic-policies/illness>.

Technology and Texts

For books I require you to obtain for class, **you must bring hard copies** assigned for the day. Failure to bring assigned texts with you will be assessed as not participating in class. As a default, phones should be put away and silenced for the duration of the class time. Laptops are permitted to write notes on or to access the readings uploaded as pdfs on Canvas. However, if they are a distraction, I reserve the right to ask you to put them away. If you have special reasons or need accommodations for technology in class, please email me at the beginning of the semester.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Generative AI is revolutionizing how we access and process knowledge, but we're still defining its appropriate and ethical use in college classrooms. I'm open to discussing how we can use AI for class. I recognize that it is important to practice using AI to facilitate, rather than hinder, learning. We will openly discuss AI use closer to assignment deadlines (except the Paragraph of the Week), but here are my general standards for using AI in class:

- **Using AI should not replace critical thinking!** While AI can be helpful, it's not always accurate. For example, when asking media-related prompts about *Godzilla*, ChatGPT and CoPilot might pull from various sources, including different films from the Godzilla universe, blogs, pop culture, fanfiction, interviews, etc. which may not relate to the exact film we watch for class. It's ultimately up to you to discern what is misquoted or useful knowledge.
- **You are the author of your work!** Writing, analytical, and critical thinking skills are key learning outcomes of this course, so students must complete all their own assignments. But like all online research tools, you may use AI as an aid, such as for pre-writing (brainstorming ideas, finding sources) and revising (altering style/tone, spelling, punctuation, grammar).
- **Be transparent about using AI and make sure it aligns with academic integrity.** If you use AI, including the cases listed above, please cite your prompts and generated answers in a separate Appendix page to all written assignments.

Assignment Format

All written assignments will be composed on **Microsoft Word, double spaced, in 12-point Times New Roman font**, and with one-inch margins on all sides. All assignments will follow the **MLA format**. Please submit your written essays as a MS Word file because I will give written feedback through the "track changes" function. **All assignments will be submitted electronically via**

Canvas. File names should include your last name and assignment type (i.e. Koo_close-reading essay).

For more information on the MLA format, see the Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL): https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_general_format.html.

Late Papers and Assignments

Canvas “Assignments” will automatically close after the assigned due date. Late papers will be accepted without penalty only if you obtain permission for a deadline extension from me in advance (i.e. at least 3 days before the due date). If you do not permission or provide me with a legitimate explanation, late papers will be penalized by a half letter grade each day (e.g., A to B+), and will not be accepted after 3 days.

Academic Code of Conduct

In academic writing, quoting and citing sources enhance your writing by explicitly situating your argument within an ongoing conversation and body of evidence. In this course, we will learn and employ MLA style citation. We will discuss quotation, paraphrasing, and citation during in-class writing workshops. Please reach out to me when in doubt about what constitutes as plagiarism. You may also find the Duke library’s tutorial on plagiarism useful: <http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism/>.

Please familiarize yourself with Duke University’s Student Conduct policies, including especially “Academic Dishonesty” for concerns about plagiarism: <https://studentaffairs.duke.edu/conduct/about-us/duke-community-standard>.

I am obligated to report any instances of plagiarism to the Duke University Office of Student Conduct. Plagiarism can result in failure of the course and/or suspension from school.

SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

Writing Studio

The Thompson Writing Program’s Writing Studio is an excellent resource for all Duke students to practice their writing skills, receive non-evaluative feedback on any type of writing (i.e. in-class assignments, internship applications, etc.) and at any stage of the writing process (i.e. brainstorming, outlining, drafting, and revising). Visit the TWP website to access practical handouts and resources, to schedule an in-person or online synchronous, 1:1 consultation session, and to learn more about their services and locations: <https://twp.duke.edu/twp-writing-studio>.

Students with Disabilities

Students who may need special accommodation in this class are encouraged to contact the Student Disability Access Office (SDAO) as soon as possible to ensure that such

accommodations can be implemented in a timely fashion. Visit the following website for more information: <http://www.access.duke.edu/students/index.php>.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

Each of you will face some level of challenge during your time at Duke – whether an everyday challenge like procrastination, or a more profound challenge that impairs your ability to function. The CAPS staff includes psychologists, clinical social workers and psychiatrists experienced in working with college age adults. Information about their services and workshops is available here: <http://studentaffairs.duke.edu/caps/about-us>.

The Academic Resource Center

The ARC provides academic support and programming for all Duke undergraduates. Their services include one-on-one consultations and peer tutoring, and they work alongside the Student Disability Access Office to serve students with diagnosed learning disabilities. Their programs include opportunities for students to study together in structured groups (“learning communities”), as well as workshops offered throughout the semester. Further information and resources are available on their website: <http://duke.edu/arc/index.php>.

COURSE SCHEDULE

* The course schedule is subject to change with prior notice

DATE	ASSIGNED READINGS
WEEK 1: INTRODUCTIONS	
JAN 10 (FRI)	Introductions, Syllabus Review
WEEK 2: DEFINITIONS AND THEMES	
JAN 15 (WED)	What is the Pacific? What is the post-apocalypse? Writing Studio visit Read: - Erin Suzuki’s “Transpacific” (article) - Lisa Yoneyama’s “Toward a Decolonial Genealogy of the Transpacific” (article)
JAN 17 (FRI)	Monsters in Tokyo: World War II and the Threat of Nuclear War Read: - <i>Godzilla Minus One</i> (film, 2023) - Weekly Paragraph
WEEK 3: MUSHROOMS AT THE END OF THE WORLD	
JAN 22	Fungal Terror or the Attack of the Mushroom People

(WED)	Read: - <i>Matango</i> (film, 1963) - Weekly Paragraph - Priscilla Wald's "Botanophobia: Fear of Plants in the Atomic Age" (article)
JAN 24 (FRI)	Interspecies Living: Mushrooms and the Indigenous Pacific Read: - Keri Hulme's <i>Stonefish</i> selections (short stories, p.1-21) - Anna Tsing's <i>The Mushroom at the End of the World</i> (article, p.1-18)
WEEK 4: AFTER THE VIETNAM WAR	
JAN 29 (WED)	Ghosts and Writers after the Vietnam War Read: - Tim O'Brien's <i>The Things They Carried</i> selections (1990) - Viet Thanh Nguyen's "The Black-Eyed Woman" (short story, 2017) - Weekly Paragraph - Schedule 1:1 meeting for getting to know each other and brainstorming ideas for the first paper
JAN 31 (FRI)	The Perilous Pacific: Refugees after the Vietnam War Read: - Nam Le's "The Boat" (short story, 2008) - Schedule 1:1 meeting for getting to know each other and brainstorming ideas for the first paper
WEEK 5: TRAUMATIC UPRISINGS – SOUTH KOREA	
FEB 5 (WED)	Democratic Uprisings: The Korean Gwangju Uprising (1970s, 80s) Read: - Han Kang's <i>Human Acts</i> (2014/2016) p.1-104 - Weekly Paragraph - Schedule 1:1 meeting for getting to know each other and brainstorming ideas for the first paper
FEB 7 (FRI)	The Legacy of Student Protest and the 1997 IMF Crisis in Korea Read: - <i>The Host</i> (film, 2006) First Short Paper Due Feb 7, 11:59 pm
WEEK 6: MONSTERS AND ROBOTS	

FEB 12 (WED)	The Legacy of the Gwangju Uprising Today Read: - Han Kang's <i>Human Acts</i> (2014/2016) p.105-212 - Weekly Paragraph
FEB 14 (FRI)	Angels, Humans, and Robots in the Apocalypse Read: - <i>Neon Genesis Evangelion</i> (anime, 1995) - selections
WEEK 7: MONSTERS AND ROBOTS	
FEB 19 (WED)	The Alternative Endings of <i>Evangelion</i> Read: - <i>Neon Genesis Evangelion</i> (anime, 1995, 1997, 2021) – selections - Weekly Paragraph
FEB 21 (FRI)	Hollywood Adaptations of the Pacific Apocalypse Read: - <i>Pacific Rim</i> (film, 2013) - (I recommend beginning to read <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> ahead of time)
WEEK 8: QUEER MUTATIONS AND THE POSTHUMAN	
FEB 26 (WED)	The sense of smell at the end of the world Read: - Larissa Lai's <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> (p.1-146) - Weekly Paragraph
FEB 28 (FRI)	Queer Mutations and the Posthuman? Shapeshifters and Clones Read: - Larissa Lai's <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> (p.147-209) - Start thinking about/drafting the 2nd short paper
WEEK 9: THE DYSTOPIAN PACIFIC	
MAR 5 (WED)	The Pacific Northwest as an alternative dystopia In-class peer review workshop Read: - Larissa Lai's <i>Salt Fish Girl</i> (p.210-269) - Print 2 drafts of your short papers and bring them to class
MAR 7 (FRI)	No Class – Optional Office Hours - (I recommend beginning to read <i>A Tale for the Time Being</i> ahead of time)

	Second Short Paper Due March 7, 11:59 pm
WEEK 10: SPRING BREAK	
MAR 12 (WED)	No class – Spring Break
MAR 14 (FRI)	No class – Spring Break
WEEK 11: THE GREAT PACIFIC GARBAGE PATCH	
MAR 19 (WED)	The Great Pacific Garbage Patch and Ocean Pollution Read: - Ruth Ozeki's <i>A Tale for the Time Being</i> (p.1-235) - Weekly Paragraph
MAR 21 (FRI)	The Fukushima Nuclear Disaster, 9/11, the Dot-Com Bubble Read: - Ruth Ozeki's <i>A Tale for the Time Being</i> (p.236-298)
WEEK 12: THE FUKUSHIMA NUCLEAR DISASTER	
MAR 26 (WED)	Quantum Entanglements in the Pacific Read: - Ruth Ozeki's <i>A Tale for the Time Being</i> (p.299-418) - Weekly Paragraph
MAR 28 (FRI)	Rubenstein Archives Visit (Rubenstein 150)
WEEK 13: BLACKHOLES AND FUTURITY	
APR 2 (WED)	In-class screening on April 1 (Tues) Read: - <i>Everything Everywhere All at Once</i> (film, 2022) - Weekly Paragraph
APR 4 (FRI)	<i>Everything Everywhere All at Once</i> Discussion Guest Lecture by Luoshu Zhang
WEEK 14: THE PANDEMIC	
APR 9 (WED)	Library Instruction Session: How to find secondary resources Read:

	- Write your research questions & thesis statement (This is in lieu of the Paragraph of the Week and is required). We will have in-class exercises on how to find secondary sources relevant to your final papers.
APR 11 (FRI)	The COVID pandemic Course Evaluations Read: - <i>Coronation</i> (documentary, 2020) - Start thinking about your final paper drafts
WEEK 15: PEER REVIEW AND WRAP-UP	
APR 16 (WED)	1st Draft of Final Paper: - Bring a minimum of 3-pages for the first draft of your paper - In-class peer review workshop
APR 18 (FRI)	The Future of the Pacific, Course Overview Course Evaluations Read: - <i>Ghost in the Shell</i> (anime film, 1995)
APR 23 (WED)	LDOC – no class, 1:1 paper conferences Final Paper Due April 29 (Tuesday), 11:59pm