

Adam Griffey

Dissertation Abstract

Tentative Title of Dissertation:

“Apocalyptic Youth: Literature at the End of the World”

Abstract:

Although passionate lip-service is paid to the value of young people as the most vulnerable members of the population, literature that takes them seriously is all too often held in contempt. My dissertation, “Apocalyptic Youth: Literature at the End of the World,” explores contemporary America’s fascination with the apocalyptic and argues that eschatological (or “end-times”) literature provides an essential staging ground for serious explorations of the violence that pervades the lives of young people. I consider how novels by Cormac McCarthy (*The Road*), James Baldwin (*Go Tell It on the Mountain*), Flannery O’Connor (*The Violent Bear It Away*), Philip K. Dick (*VALIS*), Suzanne Collins (*The Hunger Games*), and Orson Scott Card (*Ender’s Game*) imagine the education of young people during times of intense personal, social, and political upheaval – educative moments that can be empowering, but that are often violent and imprisoning. There exists no book-length study on the convergence of the apocalyptic and the pedagogical, despite the deep cultural investment that we pay to each. While there have been studies on the general theme of the apocalypse in literature, and on dystopian and trauma literature specifically, there is no scholarship that takes as its central question the way education and the apocalyptic work together. Such a remarkable gap in literary criticism and childhood studies provides new and significant avenues for research that explores the essential relationship between youth and violence, and how that is manifested in our cultural obsession with apocalyptic literature. This dissertation addresses that fact that scholarship that speaks to contemporary fears of humanity’s tenuous perch on this planet has become, not just interesting or useful, but imperative.