

French 441—Monsters, Hybrids, and the Infected:  
Dehumanizing Society in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century French-Language  
Literature and Visual Culture

MWF 10:00-10:50, Pardee Room 102A

**Prof. Lucy Swanson**

Office: Pardee Hall 431

Office Hours: M 12-1, W 3-4 & by appointment

[swansonl@lafayette.edu](mailto:swansonl@lafayette.edu)

Telephone: 610-330-3198

### **Course Description**

This course examines representations of monstrous figures, such as the zombie or human-animal hybrids, in contemporary literature and visual culture of the francophone world. More specifically, students will read and view texts by writers and filmmakers from the Caribbean (Haiti), French-speaking Africa (Senegal and Rwanda), as well as France and Belgium, in order to study how these entities are used to interrogate historical, social, and political divisions in these societies.

### **Course Goals**

This course will:

- Foster students' understanding of various francophone societies through the cultural specificity of their monsters
- Examine monsters from a variety of perspectives (aesthetic, anthropological, psychoanalytical, historical)
- Develop students' comprehension of the role of repetition and transformation in the creation of monster legends
- Study different representational modes (literature vs. cinema) and aesthetic movements (i.e. magical realism) as they influence the portrayal of creatures like the zombie

### **Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Outline the evolution of the zombie from Afro-Caribbean folklore, where it is a figure of enslavement, into a vicious "cannibal"
- Identify important social conflicts within some francophone societies (Haiti, Rwanda, France) and assess how contemporary authors and filmmakers use hybrid figures to critique these internecine struggles
- Establish connections between monstrous figures and the socio-historic contexts producing them (or which they are used to critique)
- Analyze the function of monstrous beings in popular and "high-brow" literature and film
- Evaluate representations of monsters as figures of the popular imaginary, reflections of socio-historical "realities," and vehicles for social critique

## Course Policies

### Attendance

Students are allowed three unexcused absences for the semester, which should be reserved for minor illnesses or family obligations. Excused absences include Deans' excuses and sports-related absences excused by an official letter from your coach provided at the beginning of the semester. Each additional absence will lower a student's final grade by one third of a letter grade (i.e. an A- will become a B+ after a fourth unexcused absence, a B after a fifth, and so on).

### Academic Honesty

*Course-specific policy:* Online translation tools are strictly prohibited in this course, even to look up a single word. This is not merely a question of violating academic integrity; since one word often has a variety of possible translations, translation software will often suggest a word with a different meaning than the one you intend. Please see the "Resources" section on Moodle for a variety of online dictionaries instead, and pay attention to examples to understand contextual usage. Use of online grammar- and spell-checking software—I recommend BonPatron.com—is permitted (however, use it conscientiously to ensure you make the *correct* corrections!).

*This course also adheres to the following college-wide academic honesty policy from the Student Handbook:* "To maintain the scholarly standards of the College and, equally important, the personal ethical standards of our students, it is essential that written assignments be a student's own work, just as is expected in examinations and class participation. A student who commits academic dishonesty is subject to a range of penalties, including suspension or expulsion. Finally, the underlying principle is one of intellectual honesty. If a person is to have self-respect and the respect of others, all work must be his/her own."

### Disability Statement

In compliance with Lafayette College policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that you may require as a student with a disability. Requests for academic accommodations need to be made during the first two weeks of the semester, except for unusual circumstances, so arrangements can be made. Students must register with the Office of the Dean of the College for disability verification and for determination of reasonable academic accommodations.

### Discussion Policy

It is very important to maintain an open and considerate classroom atmosphere so that everyone feels comfortable participating in discussion. Please strive to demonstrate your respect for others in the class, even as we engage with challenging and complex questions. If you feel uncomfortable in class for any reason, I encourage you to bring it to my attention.

### Late Work Policy

There are no make-up quizzes except in the case of absences excused by the Deans, or of pre-arranged absences due to religious observance or sports events.

Other late assignments will be penalized by 25 % for each day they are turned in beyond the due date.

### Technology and Communication Policy

*Cellphones and smartphones* are not allowed in the classroom unless otherwise specified. Please turn them off, or put them on silent mode (not vibrate), and place them away in a closed bag or purse before entering the classroom. It is disrespectful to your instructor and your peers to check your phone or text during class time. Any student found using their phone during class time will receive an F for participation for the day.

*Computers* should also be left in your room or in a bag in order to reduce distractions and facilitate discussion. Please bring pen and paper to class for taking notes; print out assigned documents *before* reading them; highlight, write comments or questions in the margins, etc.; and bring them to class. (Studies suggest that reading on paper, rather than a screen, has advantages for reading comprehension, and that students who take notes by hand retain and synthesize information better: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>)

*Emails*: I respond to emails within 24 hours (over breaks, it may take a bit longer), and messages sent before 9pm will normally receive a response the same day. Most of your professors grew up in a time when email and texting were not widely used, and view the former as a formal means of communication. If you have a question regarding course assignments, etc., be sure to check the syllabus before emailing your instructor. Additionally, please use a greeting (such as “Dear Professor,” *not* “Hey”!) and closing (i.e. Sincerely, your name), and check spelling before sending your message. Here are more detailed tips: <http://m.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor>

*Requests for letters of recommendation* should be made at least four weeks ahead of time (6 weeks’ notice if possible). Additional guidelines can be found here: <http://www.wikihow.com/Ask-Your-Professor-for-a-Letter-of-Recommendation-Via-Email>

### Privacy Policy

Moodle contains student information that is protected by the Family Educational Right to Privacy Act (FERPA). Disclosure to unauthorized parties violates federal privacy laws. Courses using Moodle will make student information visible to other students in this class. Please remember that this information is protected by these federal privacy laws and must not be shared with anyone outside the class. Questions can be referred to the Registrar's Office.

### Federal Credit Hours Compliance

The student work in this course is in full compliance with the federal definition of a four credit hour course. This means that students may expect an additional 8-10 hours of work outside of class time per week. Please see the Registrar’s Office web site (<http://registrar.lafayette.edu/additional-resources/cep-course-proposal/>) for the full policy and practice statement.

### **Final Grade**

Participation and Preparation—20 %

Digital Footnote—15 %

Mid-term Paper (4 pages)—20 %

Final Paper (8 pages)—40 %

Weekly Response—5 %

## Assignments

### *Participation and Preparation*

Active participation is extremely important in both a language course and a discussion-based class. This means: showing up on time, having completed readings carefully (looking up significant words, rereading to clear up confusion, etc.), contributing comments and/or questions frequently in class, speaking exclusively in French during the class period, and listening respectfully to others (even as we seek to engage in lively discussions).

### *Digital Footnote*

In order to make the foreign cultural contexts we will be studying through film and literature more readily accessible, students will select a very specific topic (from a list provided by the professor), research it and write a ~200 word “footnote” synthesizing the essential information on the subject for other students. You will also be asked to provide links to relevant sources (including images and/or video clips) so students can explore in greater depth if interested.

### *Mid-Term Paper*

You will write one four-to-five page literary or cinema analysis paper on a very precise topic found in one work studied in class. For this paper, it is suggested that you select a film only if you have previous academic experience studying film. You will work with a WA on this paper.

### *Final Paper*

For your final paper, you will be asked to discuss two texts or films in a six-to-eight page paper, analyzing one specific element in the context of both works. Drafts to be submitted to a WA.

### *Weekly Response*

Students will also be asked to complete a roughly 100-word response to readings or viewings once a week (indicated “POSTER” on the schedule). Occasionally you will be given a prompt, announced in class the prior class. These will be graded at the end of the semester, primarily for completion. The goals of the activity are: to help students prepare for discussion; to provide another opportunity to flex your writing muscles in French; and, possibly, to spark an idea for one of the longer papers.

## Required Texts

### Films & Television (on Netflix or on reserve at Skillman)

Jacques Tourner, *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943) (reserve)  
 Georges Franju, *Les Yeux sans visage* (1960) (reserve)  
 George Romero, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) (reserve, Netflix)  
 Ousmane Sembène, *Xala* (1975) (reserve, Netflix)  
 Djibril Diop Mambéty, *Hyènes* (1992) (reserve)  
 Benjamin Rocher & Yannick Dahan, *La Horde* (2009) (Netflix)  
 Fabrice Gobert, *Les Revenants* (2012) (Netflix—“The Returned”)

### Literary Works (available at the Lafayette Bookstore unless otherwise specified)

Jacques Stephen Alexis, “Chronique d’un faux amour” (1960) (on Moodle)  
 René Depestre, *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves* (1988)  
 Marie Darieussecq, *Truismes* (1996)  
 Xabi Molia, *Avant de disparaître* (2011)

### Additional works (essays, graphic novel excerpt, autobiographical text) on Moodle.

Plan du cours (sujet à modification)

25 janvier	Introductions: Les monstres & la monstruosité
27	<i>Le Vaudou Haïtien</i> (Métraux, 1958) & « Ways and Nature of the Zombi » (Ackermann & Gauthier, 1991), articles sur Moodle
29	<i>I Walked with a Zombie</i> —à regarder avant le cours (POSTER une réponse)
1 février	« Chronique d'un faux-amour », partie 1
3	« Chronique d'un faux-amour », partie 2 (POSTER)
5	Réunion à Skillman avec bibliothécaire Sarah Morris, salle 004
8	« Du réalisme merveilleux des Haïtiens »
10	<i>Hadriana dans tous mes rêves</i> , chapitre 1 (POSTER)
12	<i>Hadriana dans tous mes rêves</i> , chapitre 2
15	<i>Hadriana dans tous mes rêves</i> , chapitre 3
17	<i>Hadriana dans tous mes rêves</i> , pp. 119-143
19	<i>Hadriana dans tous mes rêves</i> , chapitre 5
22	<i>Hadriana dans tous mes rêves</i> , pp. 144-170
24	<i>Hadriana dans tous mes rêves</i> , chapitre 6 #1-12
26	<i>Hadriana dans tous mes rêves</i> , jusqu'à la fin (POSTER)
29	<i>Night of the Living Dead</i>
2 mars	<i>La Nuit des morts-vivants</i> (bande dessinée sur Moodle)
4	<i>La Horde</i>
7	<u>Mid-term paper due.</u> Discuter d'autres zombies en classe.
9	<i>Avant de disparaître</i> , pp. 7-42
11	<i>Avant de disparaître</i> , pp. 42-83
14	<i>Avant de disparaître</i> , pp. 85-115 (POSTER)
16	<i>Avant de disparaître</i> , pp. 115-148
18	PAS DE COURS— <i>Avant de disparaître</i> , pp. 149-186 (POSTER)
21 au 25 mars	VACANCES DE PRINTEMPS !
28	<i>Avant de disparaître</i> , pp.187-219
30	<i>Avant de disparaître</i> , pp. 219-257 (POSTER)
1 <sup>er</sup> avril	<i>Avant de disparaître</i> , pp. 259-290
4	<i>Avant de disparaître</i> , pp. 291-313 (POSTER)

6	Poésie de Thierno Seydou Sall & Conférence obligatoire (required attendance!)
8	<i>Xala</i>
11	Peter Geschiere, <i>Sorcellerie et politique en Afrique</i> (extrait sur Moodle)
13	<i>Génocidé</i> (POSTER—sur <i>Génocidé</i> OU <i>Les Yeux sans visage</i> )
15	<i>Les Yeux sans visage</i>
18	<i>Hyènes</i>
20	<i>Truismes</i> (POSTER)
22	<i>Truismes</i>
25	<i>Truismes</i> (POSTER)
27	<i>Truismes</i>
29	<i>Truismes</i>
2 mai	<u>Final Paper due.</u> Regarder <i>Les Revenants</i> en classe.
4	<i>Les Revenants</i>
6 mai	Conclusions