

**Department of Anthropology**

**ANTH 3355F-001**

**Zombies in Cultural and Historical Perspective**

**PROVISIONAL COURSE OUTLINE**

**Fall 2023**

*Version date: August 31, 2023*

**Instructor and course information:**

Instructor: Dr. Greg Beckett

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Credit Value: 0.5

Antirequisites: None

Prerequisites: Registration in third or fourth year in any program.

**Course Description:**

This course locates the contemporary figure of the zombie in cultural and historical perspective, with specific focus on the zombie in Haitian and American cultures. We will use a seemingly simple trope — the figure of the zombie — to explore the deep layers of history that have shaped the Atlantic world. We will begin by looking at the meaning of the zombie in Haitian culture, in relation to the experience of the transatlantic slave trade and the Haitian revolution (the only successful slave revolution in modern history). We will then look at how the zombie migrated to American popular culture during the US military occupation of Haiti from 1915–1934. During this period, the American use of the zombie has much to tell us about race and gender relations amid US imperialism. The course will then explore how the figure of the zombie took on new meaning in American cinema, in light of the tensions around race, gender, and class in US society. The contrast between the zombie in Haiti (a figure that should be saved by “raising” its consciousness) and the zombie in the United States (a dead body that consumes endlessly until it is killed again) will be used as the basis of a broader comparison between two very different but related experiences of modernity and capitalism within the broader Atlantic world.

Students will read ethnographic texts on Haitian and America culture alongside an exploration of philosophical readings and popular films. This is an essay course. Alongside weekly quizzes on the assigned readings, students will write a short analysis paper and a longer essay. There will also be a midterm exam held during a regular class session. More information on all assignments will be given in class and will be available on the course OWL site.

A full course schedule including a week-by-week breakdown of topics and assigned readings will be available on the course’s OWL site before the first day of class.

## Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Analyze cultural texts, including oral histories, folktales, travel writing, film, comics, and other imaginative narrative forms;
- Interpret cultural texts by drawing on historical, religious, political, or other factors related to production and distribution of these texts;
- Explain how the meaning of zombies has changed over time in relation to changing patterns of labor organization and in relation to religious definitions of the body and soul;
- Compare the meaning of zombies in Haiti and the United States, both orally (through participation in regular class discussion) and in written assignments;
- Explain zombies in relation to other aspects of social, economic, and political life by using key concepts in anthropological theory.

## Course Materials:

The following books are required and are available for purchase at the Western Bookstore (note, they may be available at lower prices elsewhere). Jonathan Lear's book, *Freud*, is also available as an eBook through the Western library.

Sigmund Freud. 2010. *Civilization and its Discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton. (Required);

Jonathan Lear. 2005. *Freud*. New York: Routledge. (Required).

Additional readings will be available through the Course Readings link in our OWL site.

Please note (CW): we will be watching films in class during some of our weekly meetings. These films, and some readings, will contain graphic content.

## Evaluation:

Weekly Quizzes	15%
Mid-term Exam	25%
Analytic Essay	25%
Final Essay	35%

Student evaluation for this course will be based on weekly quizzes on the readings and films, an in-class mid-term exam, one short analytical paper on the course material, and a final paper.

I expect you to come to class prepared to engage in discussion of the assigned readings. If you must miss a class session you are responsible for getting notes from another student. Lecture notes for missed classes will not be provided and there will be no make-up quizzes.

Students may use laptops during class for taking notes or for accessing the readings. Other devices, including cell phones, music players, etc. must be turned off.

### **Weekly Quizzes – 15%**

There will be ten quizzes (weeks 2-11) during the term. Quizzes are to be completed online in OWL before the start of class. They will focus on the main ideas in the readings for the week and are meant to motivate you to complete all the readings before class and to give us all a starting point for discussion. There will be no make-up quizzes, but the lowest two grades will be dropped.

### **Mid-Term Exam – 25%**

Students will write an in-class mid-term exam on Wednesday October 17th. The exam will cover all relevant course material from the preceding classes (from weeks 1-4). The exam will feature multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay-style questions.

### **Analytic Essay – 25%**

Students will write a short (1000-word) paper analyzing one of the films from the course. You will have a range of prompts to choose from for your paper topic. More details will be given during class and on OWL. Analysis papers will be due in OWL on Wednesday November 14th.

### **Final Essay – 35%**

Students will write a larger paper (2500-word) that explores key themes, theories, and cases/films from the course. Students will develop their own thesis and argument based on prompts and suggested topics distributed in class. The final essay should be an in-depth analysis of the cultural meanings explored in the course readings and films and must be based on your own original writing, with citations to course readings. Final essays will be due during the exam period.

More information on writing assignments, including due dates, will be made available to students on the course OWL site.

## **Academic Statements and Policies:**

### **Institutional Statements and Policies**

All students should familiarize themselves with Western's current [Academic Rights and Responsibilities](#) policies in the Academic Calendar. Such items include accommodations for students with disabilities, religious holidays, consideration for medical illness, academic appeals, plagiarism and scholastic offences, and code of student conduct.

### **Course Specific Conditions Required to Pass this Course:**

In order to pass this course students must submit all writing assignments and receive at least a passing grade on their final essay.

### **Late Policy for Assignments**

Unless a student receives accommodation for illness through Academic Counselling, late assignments will be penalized at the rate of 5% of the assignment grade per day late for up to a total of 5 days (including weekends) following the due date. Late assignments will not be accepted after 5 days.

### **Policies on Written Work**

All written assignments must be submitted electronically. Essays should be formatted for 8.5x11" paper, have 1" margins on all sides, and be written in a double-spaced, 12-point font. All papers must include your first and last name and a title.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com).

Within this course, students are permitted to use AI tools exclusively for information gathering and preliminary research purposes. These tools are intended to enhance the learning experience by providing access to diverse information sources. However, it is essential that students critically evaluate the obtained information, exercise independent thinking, and engage in original research to synthesize and develop their own ideas, arguments, and perspectives. The use of AI tools may serve as a starting point for exploring a topic, but **all students are expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources of information and avoiding plagiarism. Essays and writing assignments should reflect the student's own thoughts and independent written work.**

### **Academic Integrity - Statement on Plagiarism:**

Students must write their assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing. It is also a scholastic offence to submit the same work for credit in more than one course. Plagiarism is a major scholastic offence.

### **Academic Consideration for Student Absences**

For students who have missed, or will miss, any course work, whether it be for medical related or non-medical related, please read the details and instructions on "[What is Academic Consideration](#)".

No accommodations will be granted retroactively more than 10 days after an assignment's due date or a missed quiz or test. Please see your academic counsellor immediately if you will be seeking accommodations based on medical or compassionate grounds.

PLEASE NOTE: *The evaluation methods described in this course outline are essential requirements for the course. The midterm and final exam make use of multiple-choice questions to evaluate student learning. The multiple-choice format allows for assessment of students' detailed knowledge of a broad range of concepts, theories, principles, and research that other formats do not permit.*

### **Accessible Education**

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. Please see [Accessible Education](#) for information.

### **Religious Accommodation**

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if

their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. Additional information is given in the [Western Multicultural Calendar](#).

## **Provision Weekly Schedule of Topics and Readings**

### **WEEK 1 (Sept 12) – Witches, Vampires, and Cannibals: Monsters in Anthropological Perspective**

- Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny"
- Jeffery Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)"
- Sarah Juliet Lauro, "Playing Dead: Zombies Invade Performance Art ... and your Neighborhood"

### **WEEK 2 (Sept 19) – The Birth of the Zombie**

- Rosalind Shaw, "The Production of Witchcraft/Witchcraft as Production"
- William Seabrook, "Dead Men Working in the Cane Fields"
- Louis P. Mars, "The Story of the Zombie in Haiti"
- Zora Neale Hurston, "Zombies"

**FILM:** *White Zombie* (Victor Halperin, 1932)

### **WEEK 3 (Sept 26) – Capitalism and Slavery, or, a History of Alienation**

- Karl Marx, "Alienated Labor,"
- Erich Fromm, "Alienation"
- Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism*, Chapter 2 ("The Devil and Commodity Fetishism," pp. 13–38)

**FILM:** *I Walked with a Zombie* (Jacques Tourneur, 1943)

### **WEEK 4 (Oct 3) – The Haitian Zombie as a Theory of Alienation**

- Leslie Desmangles, "The Faces of the Cosmic Gods"
- Maya Deren, "The Trinity: Les Morts, Les Mystères, et Les Marasa"

- Erika Bourguignon, "The Persistence of Folk Belief: Some Notes on Cannibalism and Zombies in Haiti"

### **WEEK 5 (Oct 17) — Mid-Term Exam (in class)**

### **WEEK 6 (Oct 24) — The Birth of the American Zombie**

- Erich Fromm, "The Social Unconscious"
- Jonathan Lear, *Freud*, Chapter 1, "Interpreting the Unconscious"

**FILM:** *Night of the Living Dead* (George Romero, 1968)

### **WEEK 7 (Oct 31) — Neoliberalism and the American Zombie**

- Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, "Alien-Nation: Zombies, Immigrants, and Millennial Capitalism"
- David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (selection)

**FILM:** *Dawn of the Dead* (George Romero, 1978)

### **WEEK 8 (Nov 7) — Repression and Sublimation**

- Jonathan Lear, *Freud*, Chapters 5–7, pp. 145–219

**FILM:** *Shaun of the Dead* (Edgar Wright, 2004)

### **WEEK 9 (Nov 14) — Dreams, Sex, and the Formation of Desire**

- Jonathan Lear, *Freud*, Chapters 2–3, pp. 55–116
- Recommended: Lear, Chapter 4

**FILM:** *Warm Bodies* (Jonathan Levine, 2013)

**\*\* Analysis Paper due \*\***

### **WEEK 10 (Nov 21) — Civilization and its Discontents**

- Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, Chapters 1–6, pp. 23–111

**FILM:** *28 Days Later* (Danny Boyle, 2002)

**WEEK 11 (Nov 28) – The Death Drive Unleashed**

- Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, Chapters 7–8, pp. 113–149
- Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, Chapter 6: “The Historical Limits of the Established Reality Principle,” and Chapter 11: “Eros and Thanatos”

**FILM:** *Zombieland* (Ruben Fleischer, 2008)

**WEEK 12 (Dec 5) – Why Does the Zombie Have to Die?**

- Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (“The Ban and the Wolf,” “The Politicization of Life,” and “Politicizing Death”);
- Jay Smith, *Monsters of the Gévaudan: The Making of a Beast*, “Introduction: The Beast and Its World,” and “Conclusion: The Beast in History.”

**\*\* Final Paper Due TBD\*\***