

**Department of Anthropology**  
**ANTHRO 9225F: Zombies in Cultural and Historical**  
**Perspective COURSE OUTLINE**  
**Fall 2025**

*Date: September 4, 2025*

**Instructor and Course Information:**

Instructor: Dr. Greg Beckett

Credit value: 0.5

Antirequisites: none

Prerequisites: Registration in third year or above.

**Course Description:**

As one of the most popular monsters in film, zombies speak to us about our own desires and fears. 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. The primary focus will be on 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.

A full course schedule, including a week-by-week breakdown of topics and assigned readings, will be posted on the OWL Brightspace course site at the beginning of the term.

**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 labour 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.
- Understand and apply anthropological approaches to studying cultural texts, popular culture, and monsters.
- Identify how power relations connect societies in different regions and how subordinate groups respond actively to the circumstances that confront them.
- Analyze anthropological concepts and cases and effectively communicate that analysis both orally (through participation in regular class discussions) and in written assignments.
- Work collaboratively with a group of peers to develop shared understandings of course materials.

### **Course Materials:**

Most of the readings for this course can be found in digital format through the "Course Readings" tool in the course OWL site, at no cost to students.

Note that the Course Readings service passes the readings through optical character recognition (OCR) software to render them accessible and searchable. If you encounter readings that are not formatted for accessibility, please bring this to my attention.

You will also need to watch a series of films as required "texts" for this course. Most films are available free online (links are in the weekly schedule). Some are available to stream through Western's library. You may need to rent some films if they are not otherwise available.

### **Textbook and Other Learning Materials**

#### **Required textbooks:**

Jonathan Lear, *Freud*, second edition, Routledge, 2015. **The textbook costs** \$51.95 CAD new. Other editions are fine, and you should be able to find cheaper used copies online. The book is also available through Western's library.

Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, WW Norton, 2010. **The textbook costs** \$13.95 CAD new. Other editions are fine (but I recommend this one) and you can find it used online. You can probably even find the whole text free online! The book is also available through Western's library.

#### **Evaluation:**

Student evaluation for this course will be based on weekly quizzes on the readings and films, an in-class mid-term exam, an analytic assignment on the course readings and films, and a final project.

Weekly Quizzes	10%
Midterm Exam	30%
Analysis Project	25%
Final Project	35%

### Quizzes (10%)

There will be weekly quizzes starting week 2, to be completed online in Brightspace before each class session. Weekly quizzes are meant to motivate you to complete all the reading before class and to give us all a starting point for discussion. There will be no make-up quizzes, but the lowest two quiz grades will be dropped.

### Midterm Exam (30%)

Students will write an in-class midterm exam that will cover all relevant course material from the preceding meetings. The exam will feature multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions. The exam will be held in our regular class on **Tuesday October 14**.

*Designated Assignment:* Students may not use their self-attested (undocumented) absence for the midterm exam. Any consideration for missed midterms will need documentation.

### Analysis Project (25%)

Students will complete a project on Marx's theory of alienation and the figure of zombies in some cultural texts. Several options for how to approach this project will be given closer to the assignment date, but may include a group project (e.g., a podcast that analyses course films with Marx), an annotation project (that supplements an AI-generated answer with additional analytic insights from the course), or a more standard essay prompt. More info will be posted to Brightspace.

### Final Project (35%)

Students will complete a final project due during the final exam period (date TBD). The final project will explore key themes from the course material and apply key concepts and theories to the ethnographic cases (films). More information about format and ways to approach final projects will be given in class.

For Western's policy on Academic Consideration, see [this link](#).

### **Late Assignments and Flexibility**

I will consider any reasonable requests for extensions, as long as you discuss it with me before the deadline. Any work not submitted on time and without approved consideration, will not be accepted.

### **Course Specific Conditions Required to Pass This Course**

The Writing Assignments in this course are designed to help you meet the course learning outcomes. They give you an opportunity to go back over the readings and films, deepen your understanding of them both in relation to the readings for other weeks and to the contextual information shared in the weekly lessons, gather evidence to support your analysis, and communicate that analysis. In order to pass this course, students must complete and pass all writing assignments.

### **Accessibility**

This course is designed with accessibility and flexibility in mind. In addition to the built-in flexibility in Writing Assignment submission, you can miss two of the Weekly quizzes (the lowest two grades will be dropped). After lectures, I will add my slides to the weekly lessons to help with your notes. I

will also offer several options for some of the writing assignments (more information will be provided when the assignments are given out).

## **Additional Statements**

### **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, academic considerations, academic appeals, plagiarism and scholastic offences, and code of student conduct.

### **Statement on Use of Electronic Devices**

You may use laptops, tablets, or other electric devices to take notes in class. You may not record class lectures or discussion. Phones or other devices, including smart watches, cannot be worn during exams or tests.

### **Statement on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

Any submitted assignments should be your own original work. Plagiarism or the use of generative-AI tools to produce student work is an academic offence. You may use generative-AI tools to brainstorm ideas (although it would be better to talk to fellow students in the course or to come see me in office hours!), but you cannot use such tools to produce your assignments.

### **Statement on Academic Offences**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at [this website](#).

All required written work 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 Western University and [Turnitin.com](#).

Computer-marked multiple-choice texts and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

### **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. All students are expected to uphold academic integrity by appropriately attributing all sources of information and avoiding plagiarism. Writing assignments should reflect the student's own thoughts and independent written work.

### **Support Services**

For student support services please see the [Office of the Registrar](#) and [Student Support Services](#).

### **Statement on Gender-Based and Sexual Violence**

Western is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence (GBSV) and providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at [this link](#).

To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact [support@uwo.ca](mailto:support@uwo.ca).

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

**Accommodation for Religious Holidays:** Students should review the policy for [Accommodation for Religious Holidays](#). Where a student will be unable to write examinations and term tests due to a conflicting religious holiday, they should inform their instructors as soon as possible but not later than two weeks prior to writing the examination/term test. In the case of conflict with a midterm test, students should inform their instructor as soon as possible but not later than one week prior to the midterm.

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