



FREN 800

STUDIES IN SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY IN FRENCH

PROF. PAUL SCOTT

SPRING SEMESTER 2023 • TUES & THURS 1:00-2:15PM • 1046 WESCOE

While we might think of science fiction and fantasy as being largely English-language genres, the first such examples of this genre were explored and published in French. This class looks at some representative works from the seventeenth century to the present, ranging from dark fairy tales written over 300 years ago to contemporary television. The class will look at novels, comic books, movies, and TV shows, examining in particular the cultural specificities which relate these works to a French-speaking identity. We will compare the original French version of *Planète des singes* with the 1968 US movie, released during a time of civil unrest and race riots.

We will look at Stefan Wul's short novel *Oms en série* (1957), later made into an animated movie, *La Planète sauvage* (1973), a powerful metaphor about colonialism. We will also study the very first science-fiction movie, Georges Méliès's *Voyage dans la Lune* (1902) and its damning depiction of imperialism and interference in other cultures. Among the graphic stories we will look at will be the four-decade long saga of *Valérian et Laureline*, in which it is never clear which of the time-traveling agents has the upper hand nor which side represents the right one.

Science fiction and fantasy have long functioned as a means of criticizing the reader's society through the strategy of distance (so, for example, some of the fairy tales we cover in the class were written by female writers and depict a world in which women exercise positions of power, turning the damsel-in-distress stereotype on its head).

We will analyze the time-traveling body-transfer TV show *Les 7 vies de Léa* (Netflix, 2022), the futuristic dating-app depicted in *Osmosis* (Netflix, 2019), and consider *Les Revenants* (2012-15), an innovative show that reconfigured the zombies and suggested that humans can pose a greater threat than any imagined undead creatures. This reboot of the zombie spearheaded a worldwide trend of rational zombies, highlighting France's centuries-old pioneering role in speculative fiction.

In short, this course will deal with not only the obvious entertainment factor involved with zombies, dysfunctional fairies, space and time travelers, utopias and dystopias, and aliens, but will also delve into their importance in understanding who we are what is (our) humanity.