

## A Phenomenology of Gede: Thinking with the Dead in Haiti

**Instructor: Nathan H. Dize (contact: [Nathan.h.dize@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:Nathan.h.dize@vanderbilt.edu))**

**Time: TBA**

**Location: TBA**

**Office Hours: TBA**

### **Description:**

In the Haitian religious tradition of Vodou, Gede is the *lwa*, or spirit, concerned with the beginning of life and the passage into the afterlife, death and regeneration. Gede is often regarded as the spirit of the people in Haiti because he has a direct connection to every living being, everyone may call on Gede for protection. Gede's appeal also resides in his freedom, his ability to transgress the borders that constrain the living and the dead. This course proposes a study of Haitian literature through the lens of Gede as authors transgress temporal, spatial, and linguistic boundaries to communicate with and through the dead. Taking a case-study approach to Haitian literature and history, you will engage in the study of real and mythical figures of the Haitian past to explore how writers and artists "perform" Gede's work of communicating with and through the dead. This course aims to provide a *longue durée* approach to Haitian time (more than 500 years of history) and to expose you to the variety of genres Haitians have used to regenerate the presence of those who have passed.

There are three objectives for this course: to familiarize you with a broad spectrum of Haitian writing about and through the memories of the dead; to facilitate student exposure to Haitian modes of thinking and religious praxis; to develop your skills in identifying, interpreting, and constructing historical narratives that foreground the voices of the dead through written and presentational assignments: 1) Vodou archive assignment 2) close reading annotations 3) Flash Analyses and 4) a final paper interpreting Haitian visual culture OR poetry.

### **Assignments:**

Vodou Archive Assignment: The goals of this assignment are to think through and process the rhetoric of Vodou culture through the visual and auditory, presentational modes that work in concert with, rather than against the grain of Haitian folk knowledge. You will have to find a painting, song, photograph, or other visual or audio source in the Digital Library of the Caribbean's 'Vodou Archive' (<http://ufdc.ufl.edu/vodou/all>) that you will annotate and present as part of a visual curation to be done in Adobe Spark (<https://spark.adobe.com/>). Further details on Adobe Spark® and the assignment parameters to follow.

Close Reading Annotations: The goal of this assignment is to train you in the analysis of written discourse and rhetoric through the dissection of language. Over the semester you will have to select a two-paragraph segment of one of the week's readings (for poetry this could be one to three poems) and perform a textual mark-up of the passage. You will have to underline, highlight, and write in the margins of your excerpt (by hand) to extract the elements of style and

figures of speech employed in the texts. This assignment is meant to serve as the necessary training for writing your final papers, which will perform the same type of literary analysis in long-form. A list of figurative language will be provided at the beginning of the semester on the course webpage. You will turn in **EIGHT** sets of annotations over the semester.

Flash Analysis: Using **FOUR** of your “Close Reading Annotations” you will write a page-long (single-spaced) analysis of the literary work in question. These “Flash Analyses” will help you hone the close reading and written skills necessary to complete your end-of-term final research paper. Further details on the formatting of this assignment to be provided during the first week of class.

Final Paper: This assignment is meant to be the product of the accumulation of the skills that you have learned over the course of the semester. You will have to write a 5-7 page analysis of a selection of poems OR a Haitian painting that assesses the work’s rhetoric and expression of the themes discussed throughout the semester regarding life, death, and spiritual regeneration. For poetry, you may consult online archives and/or the university library. For painting and visual culture, I have provided links to archives and galleries that hold collections of Haitian art.

### **Grading:**

Participation & Attendance: 20%  
Close Reading Annotations: 15%  
Flash Analysis: 20%  
Vodou Archive Assignment: 20%  
Final Paper: 25%

### **Schedule:**

#### ***Weeks 1 - 3: Anacaona***

Danticat, Edwidge. *Anacaona, Golden Flower*. Scholastic, 2005.

Alexis, Jacques Stephen. “La Fleur d’Or.” *Romancero aux étoiles*. Gallimard, 1960. in Bell, Sharon. *Instructing Revolution: Didacticism in the Short Stories of Jacques Stephen Alexis, with a Translation of His “Romancero Aux Étoiles” (Haiti)*. Brown University, 1987.

#### ***Weeks 4 - 6 François Makandal***

Trouillot, Évelyne. *The Infamous Rosalie*. Translated by M.A Salvodon, University of Nebraska Press, 2013.

Josué, Erol. “Depi m soti nan Ginen” (<http://www.dloc.com/AA00005046/00001?search=josue>)

Carpentier, Alejo, and Pablo Medina. *The Kingdom of This World*. 2017.

*Due: Vodou Archive Assignment*

***Weeks 7 & 8: Toussaint Louverture***

James, C. L. R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. 2d ed., Vintage Books, 1963.

***Week 9: Massillon Coicou***

"Madness" in

Vieux-Chauvet, Marie. *Love, Anger, Madness: A Haitian Triptych*. Translated by Myriam Rose-Réjouis and Val Vinokur, Modern Library, 2010.

***Weeks 10 & 11: Jacques Stephen Alexis***

Antonin, Arnold. *Mort sans sépulture: Jacques Stephen Alexis* (film)

Alexis, Jacques Stéphen. *In the Flicker of an Eyelid*. University of Virginia Press, 2002.

***Weeks 12 & 13: Jean Léopold Dominique***

Demme, Jonathan. *The Agronomist* (film)

[Radio Haiti Archive](#) @ Duke

***Weeks 14 & 15: Les Morts anonymes***

Orcel, Makenzy. *The Immortals*. Trans. Nathan H. Dize. SUNY Press, 2020.

Peck, Raoul. *Assistance mortelle* (film)

*Due: Final Paper*