We will concentrate on how our sense of the present is undermined or enriched by past decisions, crucial decisions which in literature are often metaphors for the irreversible nature of time. Decisions are points of departure we live in retrospect and which subsequent events will not let us escape. We live in the double vision of past decisions and present consequences, sometimes fatal, sometimes liberating. Art (avant-garde, retro, post-colonial, post-human) is enabled by this double vision occasioned by the irremediable decision, the orientation point that magnetizes our subsequent steps.

Emphasis will be primarily on contemporary works since 1979, with some flashbacks to capture essential phantoms.


2. J-M G. Le Clézio, *La quarantaine* (1995). To recapture Rimbaud, the guiding phantom of Léon, the protagonist of the novel, we will read the following poems of Rimbaud: "Le bateau ivre," "Alchimie du verbe."


4. Antoine Volodine, *Des anges mineurs* (1999). The author who writes under a pseudonym and keeps his true identity closely guarded, created his own movement, post-exoticism, which relies on heteronyms, a labyrinth of multiple character masks, to disguise identities, in a world beyond the apocalypse where there are only survivors who rebuild artefacts of the past before the Disaster into new fantastic and bizarre constructions (which we might call art for art’s sake). You will recognize a number of phantoms of the twentieth-century in the "narrats," brief chapters that build this non-plot. We will view Jean-Luc Godard’s film *Alphaville* (1975) to bring in a filmic sci-fi phantom.

5. Marie Ndiaye, *Les serpents* (2004) and *Trois femmes puissantes* (2009, Prix Goncourt). Ndiaye’s plays are part of the current repertory of the Comédie française; we will read one play (Les serpents) and one novel (Trois femmes puissantes) revolving around decisions that haunt. Again, the works produce their own phantoms, no need to visit past literature.

*Provisional course* work: oral report; research paper (14-16 M.A. candidates, 18-20 for Ph.D. candidates); final exam