

[NEMLA 2021: Resurgences of the Past, Fears of the Future: Time\(s\) in Popular French Fiction](#)

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Conference

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March 11, 2021 to March 14, 2021

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Pennsylvania, United States

Subject Fields:

Literature

Literature in France has always had the potential to become a form of popular entertainment. However, what delighted families in *La Bibliothèque Bleue* has been forgotten or classified as literary “classics.” But popular literature, or “genre literature,” is more recent. Born in 19th-century newspapers when writers like Méry, Balzac, or Sue published their novels in serial form, its most emblematic writer is Alexandre Dumas. Unlike conventional works, where historical characters are magnified (epic tales) or relegated to the background (*La Princesse de Clèves*), Dumas’ novels staged characters who marked the history of France. He gave them a personality, invented events, and rewrote the past, to create a genre that is still pleasing to the readers of today.

French genre literature is thus linked to a play with time, whether about the future in science fiction like *La Planète des singes* by Pierre Boule, about the past in novels of historical inspiration like the Egyptian cycles of Christian Jacq, or about the investigation of a recent event in detective novels like *Le mystère de la chambre jaune* by Gaston Leroux.

This panel asks the following questions: How does popular fiction reflect a nostalgic yearning for a bygone era, or the haunting resurgence of a traumatic, violent past? How do representations of technology-dominated dystopian worlds mirror our present anxieties or ideology? From skulls and skeletons, to crypts, catacombs, and buried bones, hidden traces of the yesteryear ceaselessly haunt the narratives of detective fiction that seek to explain the past. Yet representations of hyper-modern, interplanetary, cybernetic connections that shape futuristic urban landscapes dominate descriptions of the future, as in cyber-noir novels.

This session welcomes papers that explore and challenge such depictions of past and future in French and Francophone popular fiction.

Please submit abstracts through NeMLA's platform. Deadline: October 19 2020.

Contact Info:

Zvezdana Ostojic and Julia Jacob

Contact Email:

zostoji1@jh.edu

URL:

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