

HL4031

Instructor: Celia Xu

Office hours: TBA

Comparative Literature

What is comparison? Why and how shall we compare? This course addresses these questions through five themes central to the discipline of comparative literature: world literature, the study of influence, cross-genre and cross-media adaptation, translation, and the field's self-identity as being "in crisis." Alongside classic theoretical readings, we will investigate a few transcultural phenomena, reflecting on how a comparative perspective can help us interpret and evaluate the role of literature within different historical and cultural contexts.

Learning Objectives:

1. Students will develop theoretical vocabularies and analytic skills essential to literary analyses, examining how the study of specific texts and the study of broader cultural issues inform each other.
2. By reading and discussing theories from various literary schools, students will gain an understanding of the tradition, scope, and problems of comparative literature as a discipline.
3. By applying these theories to transcultural and transmedia case studies, students will practice their skills in close reading, argumentative writing, and translation.

Course Content:

This module introduces you to:

1. The history and current situation of comparative literature as a discipline.
2. Classic theories in comparative literature.
3. Concrete case studies that can be fruitfully studied through a comparative mindset.

Assessments:

5% Class Participation

15% Group Presentation

50% Essay Assignments, 25% each (Please choose two essay assignments from the four options across the semester; Essays are due in class one week after they are assigned)

30% Final Exam

Policy on Generative AI:

Any use of generative AI is strictly forbidden for all the reading and writing assignments in this course.

Weekly Schedule: Readings are subject to change.

Weltliteratur

Week 1: Beyond National Literatures

Course introduction; Raymond Williams, "Literature"; Jean-Marie Carré, *La Littérature comparée*, "Preface"

J. W. von Goethe and J. P. Eckermann, "Conversations on World Literature"; Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, ch1

Week 2: Philological and Genealogical Comparison

Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, ch1

Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"

Week 3: First Case Study—Encounters in Modern Cities

Charles Baudelaire, "To a Passer-by"; Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro"; Carl Sandburg, "Passers-By"; Hagiwara Sakutarō, "Sickly Face at the Bottom of the Ground"; Dai Wangshu, "Rainy Alley"

Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, ch2

Assignment Option 1: A four-page comparative close reading of any two poems from this week

Influence

Week 4: The Anxiety of Influence

T. S. Eliot "Tradition and Individual Talent"; Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author"

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship"

Week 5: Decolonization

Edward Said, *Orientalism*, "Introduction"

Walter D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought, and De-Colonial Freedom"; Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: an american grammar book"

Week 6: Second Case Study—Controversies of *The Waste Land*

T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (Compare the published version with the manuscript with Ezra Pound's annotations)

T. S. Eliot, "Gerontion"; "Sweeney Among the Nightingales"; Ronald Schuchard, David Bromwich, Anthony Julius, and Marjorie Perloff on Eliot's anti-Semitism (in *Modernism/modernity*, Vol.10, n.1, 2003)

Assignment Option 2: A four-page argumentative essay on comparative methods. Possible themes include: why are texts/authors/cultures comparable or incomparable? How do we perform a cogent comparative analysis? What are some of the political/ethical implications of comparison?

Genres and Media

Week 7: The Taxonomy of Literature

Aristotle, excerpt from *Poetics*

Northrop Frye, "The Archetypes of Literature"

Week 8: Flexible Genres

Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, "Epic and Novel" (recommend: Georg Lukács, "The Epic and the Novel")

Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre"

Week 9: Third Case Study—An International, Transmedia House

Film-screening: *Sara*, directed by Dariush Mehrjui, 1992 [film]

Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House* [play]; Rabindranath Tagore, "House Number One" [short story]; Na Hyesök, "A Doll's Song" [poem]; Lu Xun, "What Happens After Nora Leaves Home" [speech]

(recommend: Tian Han, *The Night a Tiger was Captured* [play]; Ueda Kuniyoshi, Mori Mitsuya, and Tsumura Reijirō, *Double Nora* [modern Noh play]; *A Doll's House*, directed by Wu Xiaojiang, 1998 [experimental theater])

Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, two prefaces and ch1

Assignment Option 3: A four-page analysis of a cultural object that embodies some adaptations across languages, genres, or media

Translation

Week 10: Translation as Comparison

Walter Benjamin. "The task of the translator"; Lawrence Venuti, "Translation, Community, Utopia"

Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Thick Translation"; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind*, "The Language of African Literature"

(recommend: Abdelfattah Kilito, *Thou Shalt Not Speak my language*, ch1&7)

Week 11: Nothing Translatable vs. Everything Translatable

Eliot Weinberger, *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei*

Emily Apter, *The Translation Zone*, "Part Four: Technologies of Translation"

Assignment Option 4: A three-page translation (across forms, languages, or media) and a two-page reflection

The Rhetoric of Crisis

Week 12: Beyond Theories and Texts

Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory"; Jonathan Culler, "Whither Comparative Literature?"

Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation"

Week 13: New Directions

René Wellek, "The Crisis of Comparative Literature"

Bruce Lincoln, *Apples and Oranges*, "Part One: General Observations"; Course conclusion

Exam Week: Final Exam (5 questions on key concepts and 2 short response questions)