Comparative Literature

Department Website: http://complit.uchicago.edu

The major in Comparative Literature leads to a BA degree and is designed to attract students who wish to pursue an interdisciplinary plan of course work focused on the study of literature as written in various languages and in various parts of the world.

One student might come to the University of Chicago with a strong background in languages other than English and want to work in two or more literatures (one of which can be English). Another student might have a strong interest in literary study and wish to address general, generic, and/or transnational questions that go beyond the boundaries of national literature offered in other literature departments. Or, a student might wish to pursue an in-depth study of the interrelationship of literature and culture, as well as issues that transcend the traditional demarcations of national literary history and area studies.

These descriptions of academic interest are not mutually exclusive. Each student will work with the Director of Undergraduate Studies to design a plan of course work that will suit his or her individual goals and that will take advantage of the rich offerings of the University.

Program Requirements

The requirements outlined below are in effect as of Autumn Quarter 2018 and will apply to all students in the Class of 2020 and beyond. Students in the Classes of 2018 and 2019 may request to switch to the new requirements if the updated program suits their interests and fits within their graduation plans.

Students interested in applying to the major in Comparative Literature should review the following guidelines and consult with the Director of Undergraduate Studies in Comparative Literature. These guidelines are to assist students in developing a balanced and cohesive interdisciplinary plan of study.

The major is comprised of seven literature courses selected in consultation with the Director of Undergraduate Studies, one foundational course in comparative literary theory and methodology, two courses in literary theory, methods, or special topics in Comparative Literature, and a BA project workshop that serves as a capstone to the major.

A student works with the Director of Undergraduate Studies to identify a primary field (four courses) and secondary field (three courses). A student wishing to work in two literatures might choose two literatures as the primary and secondary fields (note: the second literature can be English). The secondary field might be a particular national literature or a portion of such a literature (e.g., poetry, drama, novel); another discipline (e.g., mathematics, history, film, performance studies, music); or literary theory.

Study abroad offers an attractive means of fulfilling various aims of this program. More than half of the major requirements must be satisfied by courses bearing University of Chicago numbers.

Summary of Requirements

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<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Units</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three language courses in a single language at the intermediate level or above</td>
<td>300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Four courses in a literature other than English, one of which can be in a closely related field</td>
<td>400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three courses in a secondary field, which can be literature in another language (including English), another discipline (e.g., mathematics, performance studies, music), or literary theory</td>
<td>300</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMLT 20109 Comparative Methods in the Humanities</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two 20000-level courses in literary theory, methods, or special topics in Comparative Literature</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMLT 29801 BA Project and Workshop: Comparative Literature (See BA Project for details)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Units</td>
<td>1400</td>
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Foreign Language Requirement

The Comparative Literature major requires three language courses in a single language at the intermediate level or above. Students who come in with high proficiency in a language other than English may instead substitute three courses in a third language, at any level.

A student can provide proof of high proficiency in two ways:

1. A student may pass one of the College's Practical Language Proficiency Assessments in a foreign language, if available for the relevant language; for more information, see languageassessment.uchicago.edu/page/foreign-language-proficiency-certifications.

2. A student can demonstrate high proficiency on the basis of the student's formal schooling experience in a country outside the United States at the high school (secondary) level. Students should write a brief description of their schooling and submit it, along with a transcript showing at least two years of high school study in the relevant language, to the Director of Undergraduate Studies in Comparative Literature.

Though all majors must demonstrate proficiency in a single language through at least the second-year sequence in a foreign language (or by providing proof that they enter the program with high proficiency in either of the two ways...
noted above), they are encouraged to continue their language study beyond the minimum required for the major. The Department of Comparative Literature works closely with the University of Chicago Language Center and will help students achieve their individual goals in language acquisition by suggesting programs of study that will add to their language expertise as appropriate.

BA Project

The BA capstone project is to be completed in the student's last year of study. The project should be approved by the Director of Undergraduate Studies and is supervised by a faculty member of the student's choice in Comparative Literature. It may be co-advised by a faculty member from another department. Students must complete their formal application to the major by spring of third year and should identify a faculty advisor at that time.

One obvious choice for a BA project is a substantial essay in comparative literary study. This option should not, however, rule out other possibilities. Alternative examples are a translation from a foreign literature with accompanying commentary or a written project based on research done abroad in another language and culture relating to comparative interests. Students are urged to base their project on comparative concepts and to make use of the language proficiency that they will develop as they meet the program's requirements. Visit https://complit.uchicago.edu/undergraduate/undergraduate-program for more details on the BA project.

This program may accept a BA paper or project used to satisfy the same requirement in another major if certain conditions are met and with approval from both program chairs. Students should consult with the chairs by the earliest BA proposal deadline (or by the end of third year, when neither program publishes a deadline). A consent form, to be signed by both chairs, is available from the College adviser. It must be completed and returned to the College adviser by the end of Autumn Quarter of the student's year of graduation.

Participation in the Program

Students should express their interest in the major as early as possible. The first step is to meet with the Director of Undergraduate Studies to consult about a program of study. Applicants must submit an application form which consists of a list of completed courses and a list of courses in which they are currently registered. Special mention should be made of language courses or other language training that affirms a student's level of language proficiency. Each proposal will be evaluated on the basis of the interest of the student and his or her achievement in the languages needed to meet the goals of the intended course of study. Students will be notified by email of their acceptance to the program. Finally, students will need to formalize their declaration through my.uchicago.edu with the assistance of the College adviser.

Comparative Literature majors should demonstrate literary proficiency in a language (other than English) that is relevant to their proposed course of study (as indicated in requirement number one above). This requirement must be met at the time of application or shortly thereafter. Proficiency is measured by the completion of a second-year sequence (or above) in the language or by demonstration of an equivalent skill. Language ability is essential to work in comparative literature of whatever sort.

Grading

All courses to be used in the major must be taken for a quality grade of B– or higher, except for the BA Workshop course, CMLT 29801, which is graded on a Pass/Fail basis.

Honors

To be eligible for honors in Comparative Literature, students must earn an overall cumulative GPA of 3.25 or higher, and a GPA of 3.5 or higher in the major. They must also complete a BA essay or project that is judged exceptional in intellectual and/or creative merit by the first and second readers.

Advising

Students must consult on an ongoing basis with the Director of Undergraduate Studies for selection and approval of course work for the major. Students will need to regularly provide documentation of any approvals for the major to their College adviser for the necessary processing. Further advice and counseling will be available from the preceptor for the program and from the faculty member who supervises the student's BA project.

Comparative Literature Courses

CMLT 20109. Comparative Methods in the Humanities. 100 Units.

This course introduces models of comparative analysis across national literatures, genres, and media. The readings pair primary texts with theoretical texts, each pair addressing issues of interdisciplinary comparison. They include Orson Welles's "Citizen Kane" and Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan"; Benjamin's "The Storyteller," Kafka's "Josephine the Mouse Singer," Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, and Mario Vargas Llosa's The Storyteller; Victor Segalen's Stèles; Fenollosa and Pound's "The Chinese Character as a Medium of Poetry" and Eliot Weinberger's Nineteen Ways of Looking at Wang Wei; Mérimée, "Carmen," Bizet, Carmen, and the film adaptation U-Carmen e-Khayelitsha (South Africa, 2005); Gorky's and Kurosawa's The Lower Depths; Molière, Tartuffe, Dostoevsky, The Village Stepanchikovo and its Inhabitants, and Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel'; Gogol, The Overcoat, and Boris Eikhenbaum, "How Gogol's Overcoat Is Made."

Instructor(s): Olga Solovieva Terms Offered: Winter

Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 28918
CMLT 22351. The Sonic Image. 100 Units.

The Sonic Image offers a unique opportunity to work with three senior researchers exploring the bridge-making and sense delimiting articulations of sound & sight together. We will examine the potency of sound in a world largely understood through its visualization as a world picture. Readings in sound studies, visual studies & media studies explore sound, sounds that evoke pictures, the forensics of sound, sound art, & films including The Conversation, Blow Out & Amour. Each faculty collaborator brings distinct interests to the course. WJT Mitchell's renowned theorization of images naturally extends to his theorizing the possibility of the sonic image. Artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan's commitment to the value of earwitnessing asks the listener to extend forensic knowledge to the very core of what it means to be a human being in the world. For the course, Hamdan will develop a workshop comprising a series of practical exercises that experiment with the conditions of testimony or claim making, enabling an exploration of how the law come to its truths and how can we use sonic imagination to trouble & contest established modes of enacting justice. Performance scholar, Hannah B Higgins, examines how musical notation, performance & sound bear on the relationships between sound & vision in recent art practices. An intervention from composer Janice Misurrell-Mitchell will add a dimension of musical testimony to our investigation.

Instructor(s): W.J.T. Mitchell, Hannah Higgins, Lawrence Abu Hamdan Terms Offered: Autumn

Prerequisite(s): Open to all levels with consent of the instructors. All interested students should please email the instructor (wjtm@uchicago.edu) a one page statement of interest, explaining why they want to take the course, and what they will bring to it.

Equivalent Course(s): MAAD 12351, ARTH 22351, ARTV 20351, ARTV 40351, TAPS 32351, CMLT 42351, TAPS 22351, ARTH 32351, ENGL 42351, ENGL 22351

CMLT 23705. Secrecy and Exemplarity: On Parables and Their Interpretation, from the Bible to Walter Benjamin. 100 Units.

A parable - usually defined as "a short narrative told for an ulterior purpose" - should be easy to understand, given its apparent simplicity and didacticism. So why does it turn out to be so difficult, in practice, to interpret parables? From Jesus's parables and Plato's famous parable of the cave onward, parables have led readers after reader to the disturbing realization that it might in fact be the parables which read their interpreters, and not the other way around! In this course, we'll ask how it is that this particular literary form so deftly articulates the relations between text and reader, narrative and interpretation, literature and religion, secrecy and power, sign and meaning, concealment and revelation, fiction and truth. The course serves as both an introduction to the history of the many ways interpreters have engaged the parabolic form in religious, literary, and philosophical contexts, on the one hand, and a chance to develop the intensity and rigor of our own close-reading practices, on the other. Besides biblical and rabbinic parables, we will read parables in works by Plato, Maimonides, La Fontaine, Pascal, G.E. Lessing, Kant, Andersen, Hawthorne, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Kafka, W. Benjamin, and O. Welles.

Instructor(s): Sam Catlin Terms Offered: Winter

CMLT 24104. Representing Revolutions. 100 Units.

TBD

Instructor(s): Larry Rothfield Terms Offered: Spring

Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 24114, ENGL 34114, CMLT 34104

CMLT 24111. The Soviet Empire. 100 Units.

What kind of empire was the Soviet Union? Focusing on the central idea of Eurasia, we will explore how discourses of gender, sexuality and ethnicity operated under the multinational empire. How did communism shape the state's regulation of the bodies of its citizens? How did genres from the realist novel to experimental film challenge a cohesive patriarchal, Russophone vision of Soviet Eurasia? We will examine how writers and filmmakers in the Caucasus and Central Asia answered Soviet Orientalist imaginaries, working through an interdisciplinary archive drawing literature and film from the Soviet colonial 'periphery' in the Caucasus and Central Asia as well as writings about the hybrid conception of Eurasia across linguistics, anthropology, and geography.

Instructor(s): Leah Feldman Terms Offered: Autumn

Equivalent Course(s): CRES 34111, CRES 24111, NEHC 34110, REES 34110, REES 24110, CMLT 34111, NEHC 24110

CMLT 24189. Hymnic Mythologies: Greek, Latin, Hittite, Sanskrit, and Avestan. 100 Units.

How do hymns make use of myth in its various guises to develop their religious and literary programs? What is the functional difference between embedded narrative and indirect allusion? How do ideologies give shape to literary forms in different context of religious performance? These are some of the questions that will animate this course, which provides an introduction to the comparative skills useful in the study of poetics, myth, and religion in ancient literatures. Taking as our focus several of the major branches of the Indo-European language family, we will address the political and academic limitations and implications of the genealogical method (that is historically favored in the relevant scholarship) before moving onto newer methods, such as those of descriptive typology, that are both more ethical and more translatable to the study of literature more broadly. Students will be taught how to work intuitively with unfamiliar primary sources by relying on close-readings, discovering comparanda in unusual places, and generally learning to propose fresh interpretive solutions to ancient questions.

Instructor(s): Claudio Sansone Terms Offered: Winter
CMLT 24272. The Ancestral. 100 Units.
Recent work in history and anthropology has stressed the need for deeper models of origins and relations, perhaps even dispensing with "prehistory" as an alternative to more familiar forms of historical self-understanding. This class will look at how the ancestral in literature imagines such deep forms of historical belonging, staging modes of revenance whose cryptic vitalism challenges the phenomenological basis of new materialism. Readings will include Martin Heidegger, Ronald Hutton, Ethan Kleinberg, Quentin Meillassoux, Hans Ruin, and Anna Tsing, poetry by Li He and Ospî Mandelstam, weird fiction by H. P. Lovecraft, Arthur Machen and Algernon Blackwood, and futurology by Cicely Hamilton, Jean Hegland, Sarah Moss, and Will Self.
Instructor(s): Mark Payne Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): CMLT 34272, SCTH 34272

CMLT 25020. Culture and Zionism. 100 Units.
This seminar will examine the intersection of culture and Zionism. We will begin by considering the historical formation referred to as "cultural Zionism" and examining its ideological underpinnings. Other topics include: Hebrew revival, the role of culture in the Zionist revolution, Israeli culture as Zionist culture. Readings include: Ahad Haam, Haim Nahman Bialik, S.Y. Agnon, Orly Kastel-Blum, Edward Suid, Benjamin Harshav.
Instructor(s): Na'ama Rokem Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): JWSC 25020, HIJD 35020, NEHC 35020, CMLT 35020, NEHC 25020

CMLT 25105. In the Beginning*: Origin, Style, and Transformation in the King James Version Matrix. 100 Units.
The 400th anniversary of the King James Bible (KJV) set off a series of events and texts dedicated to the great influence of this literary classic—a vernacular English Bible from 1611. What is it about the KJV that has so obsessed readers and writers? How has it become part of and affected our literary landscape? Are there competing ways of conceiving the biblical text in English literature? In this course, we will trace some of the KJV's thematic and stylistic influences in English literature; sometimes we will deal with direct allusion and rewriting, and other times we will study the possibilities of more tenuous links. In parallel to this work, we will problematize the KJV's astounding centrality by: examining some pre-KJV literature and alternative early-modern and 20th century translations (particularly as these intersect with Jewish tradition); attending to subversive and postcolonial literary uses of the translation; and close-reading the political and ideological motivations behind certain forms of critical adulation. Texts examined may include works by authors such as George Peele, William Shakespeare, Herman Melville, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison, Cynthia Ozick, Zora Neale Hurston, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka.
Instructor(s): Chloe Blackshear Terms Offered: Spring

CMLT 26311. Global Speculative Fiction. 100 Units.
This course examines literary and cinematic works of speculative fiction in a comparative context. An expansive genre that encompasses science fiction, fantasy, magic realism, horror, as well as utopian and dystopian literature, speculative fiction envisions alternate, parallel, possible, or imagined worlds. These worlds often exhibit characteristics such as: scientific and technological advancements; profound social, environmental, or political transformations; time or space travel; life on other planets; artificial intelligence; and evolved, hybrid, or new species. The course reflects on how these texts and films reimagine the past and the present in order to offer radical visions of desirable or undesirable futures. To that end, we will consider how this genre interrogates existential questions about what it means to be human, the nature of consciousness, the relationship between mind/body, thinking/being, and self/other, as well as planetary concerns confronting our species. Literary and cinematic works will be paired with theoretical readings that critically frame speculative and science fiction in relation to questions of gender, race, class, colonialism, bio-politics, human rights, as well as environmental and social justice. In addition to exploring speculative fiction as a way of reading and interpreting the universe, we will examine its generic and aesthetic qualities across a variety of subgenres (Afrofuturism, cyberpunk, steampunk, climate fiction).
Instructor(s): Hoda El Shakry Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): CMLT 36311

CMLT 26660. The Rise of the Global New Right. 100 Units.
This course traces the intellectual genealogies of the rise of a Global New Right in relation to the contexts of late capitalist neoliberalism, the fall of the Soviet Union, as well as the rise of social media. The course will explore the intertwining political and intellectual histories of the Russian Eurasianist movement, Hungarian Jobbik, the American Traditional Workers Party, the French GRECE, Greek Golden Dawn, and others through their published essays, blogs, vlogs and social media. Perhaps most importantly, the course asks: can we use f-word (fascism) to describe this problem? In order to pose this question we will explore the aesthetic concerns of the New Right in relation to postmodern theory, and the affective politics of nationalism. This course thus frames the rise of a global new right interdisciplinary and comparatively as a historical, geopolitical and aesthetic problem.
Instructor(s): Leah Feldman Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): CRES 36660, ENGL 36661, ENGL 26660, REES 36661, CRES 26660, CMLT 36660, SIGN 26050, REES 26660
CMLT 27512. Dream of the Red Chamber: Forgetting About the Author. 100 Units.
The great Chinese-Manchu novel, _Honglou men_ (ca. 1750) has been assigned one major author, Cao Xueqin, whose life has been the subject of much investigation. But before 1922 little was known about Cao, and interpreters of the novel were forced to make headway solely on the basis of textual clues. The so-called "Three Commentators" edition (_Sanjia ping Shitou ji_) shows these readers at their creative, polemical, and far-fetched best. We will be reading the first 80 chapters of the novel and discussing its reception in the first 130 years of its published existence (1792-1922), with special attention to hermeneutical strategies and claims of authorial purpose. Familiarity with classical Chinese required.
Instructor(s): Haun Saussy Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): SCTR 37512, CMLT 37512, FNDL 27512, EALC 37512, EALC 27512

CMLT 27703. Noting New Under the Sun? "Adapting" in Twentieth-Century Jewish Literature. 100 Units.
How do works as disparate as Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster's first Superman comics, Joseph Roth's moving _Job_ (1930), or Cynthia Ozick's golem novel _The Puttermesser Papers_ (1997) treat the histories, genres, and texts they (arguably) refashion? In this course, we will take on and close-read a variety of fictions, treating these both as stand-alone works of art in their own right as well as participants in a kind of literary lineage (and sometimes a very non-linear one!). With the help of Linda Hutcheon's _Theory of Adaptation_ and other theorists, we will engage with different kinds of transfer (Bible to Novel, Fiction to Film/Television; Archive to Drama; Original to Translation, etc.). We will explore different ways of understanding "adaptation" as a concept across linguistic, temporal, and geographic axes, and we will also consider texts and stories which push against and challenge definitions of adaptation. Ultimately, we will ask: What counts as adaptation, and why adapt? Does the art of adaptation and remix take on particular resonances for Jewish diasporic and immigrant writers in the twentieth century? How do these authors and creators pull "original" works, stories and history into new contexts? How do they draw readers and audiences in to alternate, unfamiliar forms? How do popular genres deal with the weight of tradition? How do these fictions negotiate between the familiar and the strange, and to what ends?
Instructor(s): Chloe Blackshear Terms Offered: Winter

CMLT 28881. Secrecy and Exemplarity: On Parables and Their Interpretation, from the Bible to Walter Benjamin. 100 Units.
A parable - usually defined as "a short narrative told for an ulterior purpose" - should be easy to understand, given its apparent simplicity and didacticism. So why does it turn out to be so difficult, in practice, to interpret parables? From Jesus's parables and Plato's famous parable of the cave onward, parables have led reader after reader to the disturbing realization that it might in fact be the parables which read their interpreters, and not the other way around! In this course, we'll ask how it is that this particular literary form so deftly articulates the relations between text and reader, narrative and interpretation, literature and religion, secrecy and power, sign and meaning, concealment and revelation, fiction and truth. The course serves as both an introduction to the history of the many ways interpreters have engaged the parabolic form in religious, literary, and philosophical contexts, on the one hand, and a chance to develop the intensity and rigor of our own close-reading practices, on the other. Besides biblical and rabbinic parables, we will read parables in works by Plato, Maimonides, La Fontaine, Pascal, G.E. Lessing, Kant, Andersen, Hawthorne, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Kafka, W. Benjamin, and O. Welles.
Instructor(s): Sam Catlin Terms Offered: Winter

CMLT 29120. Renaissance Christian Epic: Tasso, Vida, Milton. 100 Units.
This course will focus upon the two most important Renaissance Christian epics, Torquato Tasso's _La Gerusalemme liberata_ (first pub. 1581) and John Milton's _Paradise Lost_ (first pub. 1667), and two brief Biblical epics, Marco Girolamo Vida's _Christiad_ (1535) and Milton's _Paradise Regained_ (1671). We will examine these four Renaissance epics as ambitious efforts to revive an ancient and pagan form in order to depict Christian and self-consciously modern visions. We will consider how Renaissance epic poets imitate and emulate both their classical models (primarily Homer's _Iliad_ and _Odyssey_, Virgil's _Aeneid_, and Ovid's _Metamorphoses_) and Judeo-Christian sources (primarily the _Bible_); seek to forge an elevated and appropriate language for epic in Latin, Italian, and English; espouse new visions of the human, the heroic, and gender relations; and adumbrate distinctively modern national, imperial, and global ambitions. All non-English texts will be read in translation, but students who can read Latin or Italian will be encouraged to read the originals.
Instructor(s): Joshua Scodile Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 29120, CMLT 39120, ENGL 39120

CMLT 29710. Russian Anarchists, Revolutionary Samurai: Introduction to Russian-Japanese Intellectual Relations. 000 Units.
Equivalent Course(s): CMLT 39710

CMLT 29714. North Africa in Literature and Film. 100 Units.
TBD
Instructor(s): Hoda El Shakry Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): CMLT 39714
CMLT 29801. BA Project and Workshop: Comparative Literature. 100 Units.
This workshop begins in Autumn Quarter and continues through the middle of Spring Quarter. While the BA workshop meets in all three quarters, it counts as a one-quarter course credit. Students may register for the course in any of the three quarters of their fourth year. A grade for the course is assigned in the Spring Quarter, based partly on participation in the workshop and partly on the quality of the BA paper. Attendance at each class section required.
Instructor(s): Claudio Sansone
Terms Offered: Autumn Spring Winter
Note(s): Required of fourth-year students who are majoring in CMLT. Students should register for this course in the term where it best fits in their schedule.

CMLT 29914. Jewish Diasporas: The Exilic Condition and the Parable of Longing. 100 Units.
This course examines the representations of the home across national literatures in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. More specifically, we will explore how the concept of home-real or imagined-is treated in instances of exile and migration that result in cultural hybridity. To explore the ambiguous relationship between home and homeland, students will engage with texts written by Jewish authors of different nationalities. We will focus on the European and Israeli context, exploring how the notion of home or homelessness, as well as historical changes, compel us to rethink the making of a Jewish home. We will also consider how the representation of homes and a homesickness/homeness dialectics shift across cultures and languages, paying particular attention to figures like the European Jew, the Wandering Jew, the Zionist Jew, the Hebrew Jew, and the Israeli Jew. We will trace the Jewish sense of displacement through the interplay between language and place, as we consider the literary representations of the Eastern European Shtetl, Vienna, Berlin, and Jerusalem. We will also consider the choice of language, and space of language as home.
Instructor(s): Michal Peles Almagor
Terms Offered: Spring
Font Notice

This document should contain certain fonts with restrictive licenses. For this draft, substitutions were made using less legally restrictive fonts. Specifically:

- Times was used instead of Trajan.
- Times was used instead of Palatino.

The editor may contact Leepfrog for a draft with the correct fonts in place.