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

Three foreign language courses at the intermediate level or above (See Foreign Language Requirement for details) 300
Four courses in a literature other than English, one of which can be in a closely related field 400
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 300
CMLT 20109 Comparative Methods in the Humanities 100
Two 20000-level courses in literary theory, methods, or special topics in Comparative Literature 200
CMLT 29801 B.A. Project and Workshop: Comparative Literature (See BA Project for details) 100
Total Units 1400

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 advanced proficiency in a language other than English may instead substitute three courses in a third language, at any level. Though students must demonstrate proficiency through at least the second-year sequence in a foreign language, 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 complit.uchicago.edu/undergraduate 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. 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.

Grading

All courses to be used in the major must be taken for a quality grade of B– or higher, except for 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 by focusing on poetry in different languages and cultures and in relation to other discursive and artistic forms. We will examine a wide variety of poetic and critical texts in order to explore such topics as the specificity of poetry and of poetic kinds; orality and folk, art, and popular song; poetry's relation to prose (from philosophy to autobiography to journalism); transnational imitation and translation; poetry and globalization; ekphrasis and poetry's relations to visual arts; and poetry and film. Readings will likely include poems by Sappho, Horace, Dante, Li Bai, Du Fu, Ronsard, Shakespeare, Milton, Basho, Goethe, Wordsworth, Robert Browning, and Dylan; and critical writings by Longinus, Plutarch, Montaigne, Li Zhi, Wordsworth, Auerbach, Jakobson, Adorno, Pasolini, Zumthor, Culler, and Damrosch.

Instructor(s): Joshua Scodel Terms Offered: Spring

Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 28918

CMLT 23112. Trans Performativity. 100 Units.

In this course we will explore how these dialogues and conflicts between gender studies, queer theory, and trans studies have developed and transformed our understandings of categories like ’gender,’ ’sex’ and ’trans.’ Some guiding questions will be: how do we, and should we, conceive the materiality of the body? How do assumptions about ’nature’ and the ’natural’ determine how we view categories of identity, and what are the political ramifications of these determinations? Why, within certain discourses, has the fluidity of gender been promoted, while the fluidity of race remains controversial and generally unsupported? How do we account for these different receptions, and what kind of opportunities do they make available for politically engaged communities? How can we simultaneously value performative theories of gender, while also maintaining a certain stability of identity as developed within trans criticism, even when these two discourses seem in direct conflict?

Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 23112, GNSE 23112
CMLT 23212. Art, Ekphrasis, and Myth in Early Modern Spanish Theater. 100 Units.

In the early modern age, the verbal had a strong visual component. Poets and playwrights utilized the sense of sight since it was the highest of the Platonic senses and a mnemonic key to lead spectators to remember vividly what they had read or heard, long before spectacle plays were in fashion. One important technique for visualization was ekphrasis, the description of an art work within a text. Often, to perform was to imitate the affects, sentiments and poses of a painting. For this purpose, playwrights such as Cervantes, Lope de Vega and Calderón often turned to the mythological canvases of the Italian Renaissance along with the portraits of great rulers and images of battle. The class will examine the uses of art onstage: mnemonic, mimetic, political, religious comic, tragic, lyric and licentious. It will also delve into different forms of ekphrasis from the notional to the dramatic and from the fragmented to the reversed. Although the course will focus on Spanish plays of the early modern period, it will also include ancient treatises by Cicero, and Pliny as well as Renaissance mnemonic treatises by Della Porta. The course will be in English. Reading knowledge of Spanish is required since plays will be read in the original. Those taking the class for credit in Spanish must write their final paper in Spanish.

Instructor(s): Frederick de Armas Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): SPAN 33201, CMLT 33212, SPAN 23201

CMLT 24105. Letters to Zion. 100 Units.

This seminar centers the question: what do we mean when we describe Jewish authors and thinkers from the past as Zionist, anti-Zionist, or non-Zionist? We will approach this question by reading three correspondences: Kafka's letters to Felice Bauer, and the correspondences between Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt and between Paul Celan and Ilana Shmueli. In each case, the question of Zionism and of Israel looms in the background of the exchange in some way. Our key question is: can we definitively determine the position of each of these letter-writers on the question of Zionism? And do we want to? Or does the form of the correspondence rather open a possibility for a more flexible, complex account of their positions, allowing us to think of them as changing and evolving, indeed as dialogic? In addition to the letters themselves, we will read other texts by these authors and about them, as well as background reading on the letter as genre and as historical document. We will also take note of the fact that these are all exchanges that cross the gender divide and ask how the question of Zionist ideology intersects with issues of gender in Jewish history.

Instructor(s): Na'ama Rokem Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): JWSC 24105, CMLT 34105

CMLT 26210. Oedipus in Zion: The Oedipal Figure in Modern Hebrew Literature. 100 Units.

Historians often refer to the emergence of Zionism as an "Oedipal Revolution. Hence, the secular son's rebellion against his orthodox father is understood as the thrust that triggered the modern Jewish revolution. Alan Mintz aptly described the inter-generational rift between fathers and sons at the turn of the 20th century as a tragic yet inevitable consequence of modernity, underscoring the psychological difficulties and political dilemmas that haunted the sons who were "banished form their father's table. This seminar will focus on the (highly androcentric) oedipal figure in literary theory and explore its prominence in modern Hebrew literature. Freud's preoccupation with the Oedipus complex at the turn of the century coincided with the emergence of a powerful oedipal narrative in modern Hebrew culture. This confluence provides a fascinating backdrop to the "invention" of the Oedipus complex. We will read a variety of literary texts which rework the oedipal figure from the late 19th century to the 1980s and beyond.

Instructor(s): Michael Gluzman
Equivalent Course(s): CMLT 36210, JWSC 26210

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: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): REES 26660, SIGN 26050, CRES 36660, ENGL 26660, CMLT 36660, CRES 26660

CMLT 26912. 20th Century Russian & South East European Emigre Literature. 100 Units.

Being alienated from myself, as painful as that may be, provides me with that exquisite distance within which perverse pleasure begins, as well as the possibility of my imagining and thinking,” writes Julia Kristeva in “Strangers to Ourselves,” the book from which this course takes its title. The authors whose works we are going to examine often alternate between nostalgia and the exhilaration of being set free into the breathless possibilities of new lives. Leaving home does not simply mean movement in space. Separated from the sensory boundaries that defined their old selves, immigrants inhabit a warped, fragmented, disjointed time. Immigrant writers struggle for breath-speech, language, voice, the very stuff of their craft resounds somewhere else. Join us as we explore the pain, the struggle, the failure, and the triumph of emigration and exile.

Instructor(s): Angelina Ilieva Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): REES 39010, REES 29010, CMLT 3912

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Instructor(s): Angelina Ilieva Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): REES 39010, REES 29010, CMLT 3912
CMLT 28110. Queer Jewish Literature. 100 Units.
Spanning medieval Hebrew to contemporary Yiddish, this course will explore the intersections of Jewish literature and queer theory, homophobia and antisemitism. While centered on literary studies, the syllabus will also include film, visual art, and music. Literary authors will include Bashevis Singer, Qalonymus ben Qalonymus, Irena Klepfisz, and others. Theorists will include Eve Sedgwick, Zohar Weiman-Kelman, Sander Gilman, and others. Readings will be in English translation.
Instructor(s): Anna Elena Torres
Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): CMLT 38110, GNSE 28110, GNSE 38110, CRES 28110, JWSC 28110

CMLT 29023. Returning the Gaze: The West and the Rest. 100 Units.
Aware of being observed. And judged. Inferior... Abject... Angry... Proud... This course provides insight into identity dynamics between the "West," as the center of economic power and self-proclaimed normative humanity, and the "Rest," as the poor, backward, volatile periphery. We investigate the relationship between South East European self-representations and the imagined Western gaze. Inherent in the act of looking at oneself through the eyes of another is the privileging of that other's standard. We will contemplate the responses to this existential position of identifying symbolically with a normative site outside of oneself-self-consciousness, defiance, arrogance, self-exoticization—and consider how these responses have been incorporated in the texture of the national, gender, and social identities in the region. Orhan Pamuk, Ivo Andrić, Nikos Kazantzakis, Aleko Konstantinov, Emir Kusturica, Milcho Manchevski.
Instructor(s): Angelina Ilieva
Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): HIST 33609, REES 39023, CMLT 39023, NEHC 29023, REES 29023, HIST 23609, NEHC 39023
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.