

LIT410 Comparative Literature

1st and 2nd quarters, Senior

Instructor Nicolangelo Becce, Ph.D.

Style of Class Lecture

Number of Credits 2

Day and Period To be advised

Course Description

One subject that is most “global” in a global world is comparative literature, or the study of literary works and cultural expressions from a transnational and intercultural perspective. Through an introduction to the diversity of literary forms and genres, the course will concentrate on the history of the discipline, as well as the main interpretive approaches in terms of critical reading and theoretical analysis of literary works.

Thanks to this course in comparative literature, students will have the opportunity to focus on the literary representation of self and the other across time, space, and culture, and will learn how to communicate better with people from other backgrounds.

Course Objectives

Students will:

- 1) analyze literary works from a transnational and intercultural perspective;
- 2) reflect on the relationship between literature and the historical, political, ideological and economic forces that influence its understanding and appreciation;
- 3) experience how literary and cultural texts can transform one’s perception and understanding of self, other and communities;
- 4) become familiar with the act of interpreting literary texts through appropriate theoretical and methodological tools, acknowledging alternative interpretations and developing critical thinking.

Prerequisites

None

Class Materials

Reading and study materials will be distributed in class.

Course Methods

The teaching method used in this course will follow a seminar style. Students will be encouraged to contribute, with personal observations, to in-class discussion based on the reading assignments. The instructor will start from the in-class discussion to develop brief and informal lectures based on the assigned readings and the students’ questions and observations.

Evaluation/Assessment

Students will write response papers to either one of the readings or a combination of readings. While not formal pieces of academic writing, these response papers will describe the readings’ main arguments, the student’s personal current thinking (including confusion) and will offer at least one question for class discussion. At the end of the course, students will write a final paper in which they can analyze any aspect of comparative literature in general and of the texts discussed in class. Each student will present her/his paper to the class at the end of the course.

Grading

30%	Participation and In-class Discussions
30%	Weekly Response Papers

30%	Final Paper
10%	Final Paper Presentation

Course Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Course

Week 2: What is Comparative Literature?

In-class discussion on the main purposes of the discipline, its methodological parameters and its relationships with other disciplines in the field of humanities.

Week 3: The Origins and Development of the Discipline

In-class discussion on the origins of comparative literature in the nineteenth century as a variation of literary history, and its development into a philosophy of literary criticism.

Week 4: Interliterary Theory: Genetic Contacts

In-class discussion on the study of the relationships among literary works within literary communities, national literatures, and world literature, that are based on historically documented contacts.

Week 5: Interliterary Theory: Typological Affinities

In-class discussion on the study of the relationships among literary works that share literary similarities in terms of structure and typology, but are totally independent from a historical point of view.

Week 6: Globalization and Transnationalism

In-class discussion on the role of globalization in the diffusion of literary works and the idea of world literature.

Week 7: Is a World Literary Canon Possible?

In-class discussion on the political and ideological issues related to the creation of a literary canon, and on the possibility to develop a literary canon that can encompass all the literary works on a global scale.

Week 8: Thematology and Imagology (End of Quarter 1)

In-class discussion on the study of themes and images in literature from a comparative perspective and in a variety of different cultural traditions and literary contexts.

Week 9: Comparative Literature and Translation Studies

In-class discussion on the centrality of the practice of translation within the field of comparative literature, included the concepts of visibility of the translator and of translation as an act of creative writing.

Week 10: The Narrative Dimensions of Literary History

In-class discussion on literary histories as fictional narrations that describe the growth and development of national literatures and reveal historical, political, ideological and economic instances at work behind the appreciation and study of literature.

Week 11: Comparative Literature and Postcolonial Studies

In-class discussion on the ways in which the two disciplines of comparative literature and postcolonial studies influence each other in surpassing and overcoming cultural imperialism.

Weeks 12-13: Comparative Literature and Other Disciplines and Arts

In-class discussion on the possibilities opened by the study of literature in comparison with visual arts, music, dance, theater, film and television studies, etc.

Weeks 14-15: Class Presentations of Final Papers

Week 16: Conclusions (End of Quarter 2)

Course / instructor evaluation

Preparation and Follow-up

- Preparation: Read the relevant portions of the reference materials (about one hour)
- Follow-up: Review the content of the lecture and note any points you are not sure of (about one hour)