Department of Comparative Literature

Chair
  • Mark Payne

Director of Graduate Studies
  • TBD

Director of Undergraduate Studies
  • Olga Solovieva

Professors
  • Frederick de Armas
  • Loren A. Kruger
  • Françoise Meltzer
  • Thomas Pavel
  • Mark Payne
  • Haun Saussy
  • Joshua Scodel

Associate Professors
  • Sascha Ebeling
  • Rachel Galvin
  • Na’ama Rokem
  • Lawrence Rothfield
  • David Wray

Assistant Professors
  • Hoda El Shakry
  • Leah Feldman
  • Olga Solovieva
  • Anna Elena Torres
  • Kris Trujillo

Visiting Professors
  • Françoise Lionnet

Department Administrator
  • Ingrid Sagor

The Department of Comparative Literature promotes the multidisciplinary, historically self-reflective and cross-cultural study of texts, traditions, and discourses. The department offers students the opportunity to grapple in a rigorous way with the most pressing issues in literary studies today, such as the questioning of national and cultural boundaries and identities; the struggle over literature’s epistemological, ethical, or social authority; the debate about what counts as literature, and why; and the interaction between literature and other cultural or intellectual practices. To that end, the department works with every student individually to arrange a course of studies fitted to their background and scholarly interests. Students may choose from courses offered by the department, as well as those offered by other departments in the Division of the Humanities and in some cases those offered by other divisions. Since we place particular emphasis on reading texts in their original language, all students are expected to develop the highest possible competence in the languages they work with. Students generally use their first years (the time period leading to the Master’s degree) to explore areas of interest and to strengthen their language competence.

The Degree of Master of Arts

The objective of the program is the Ph.D. degree. Doctoral students in the program are eligible for an M.A. degree after completing the following requirements: a program of eight graduate level courses (one full academic year), all of which must be taken for a letter grade; the required two-quarter Introduction to Comparative
Literature sequence; and demonstrated competence (high proficiency in a graduate literature course or high pass in a University examination) in two foreign languages, one of which must be either French or German. The remaining six quarter courses are normally divided among two literatures, although a student may, with the Department's permission, place greater emphasis on one literature or on some special disciplinary interest. Satisfactory completion of the M.A. requirements will be based on a student's grade record and performance in the required two-quarter sequence.

**The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

In their first year of study, students are required to submit a qualifying paper on a subject agreed upon with a core faculty member of the Department of Comparative Literature. This paper should demonstrate the student's ability to write scholarly prose, to formulate a clear research argument, and to situate it within the context of secondary literature relevant to the topic. It must be submitted during the third week of the Spring Quarter of the first year. The length of this paper must be 8,000 to 10,000 words, including footnotes and references (12 pt font, double-spaced, with 1 inch margins). There are two readers for this qualifying paper: The first is the faculty member who has worked with the student on the paper; the second reader is another core faculty member of the Department appointed by the Department Chair. The two faculty members consult with each other to determine the grade for the paper, either “No Pass” or “Pass”. The student will receive comments from each reader. In the case of a “No Pass”, the student will receive an explanation of why the paper did not pass and advice on revision(s) from both readers. The student can then revise the paper over the summer and has to resubmit it in the first week of the Fall Quarter of Year 2.

Please note that all required courses in the PhD must be taken for a quality letter grade (not pass/fail).

Before the student is recommended for admission to candidacy for the doctor's degree, he or she must pass satisfactorily a take-home examination and oral examination by their committee, only after completion of the PhD coursework (16 courses).

**Language Requirements**

For admission to candidacy the same language requirements hold for both Track I and Track II.

The minimal requirements:

- **High proficiency in French or German.** This is demonstrated by passing a graduate literature course in the language (and approval by the faculty of record via form) or a high pass (P+) on the Graduate Reading Exam ([https://languageassessment.uchicago.edu/arca/](https://languageassessment.uchicago.edu/arca/)) proctored by the Chicago Language Center. ([https://languages.uchicago.edu/](https://languages.uchicago.edu/))

  and

- **High proficiency in a second language other than English.** This is demonstrated by passing a graduate literature course in the language (and approval by the faculty via CMLT department form ([https://humanities-web.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/complit/staging/2018-12/LANGUAGE_PROFICIENCY_FORM__copy.pdf](https://humanities-web.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/complit/staging/2018-12/LANGUAGE_PROFICIENCY_FORM__copy.pdf)) or a high pass (P+) on the Graduate Reading Exam ([https://languageassessment.uchicago.edu/arca/](https://languageassessment.uchicago.edu/arca/)) proctored by the Chicago Language Center. ([https://languages.uchicago.edu/](https://languages.uchicago.edu/))

All graduate students who wish to fulfill the language requirement through graduate course work must pick up a form in the departmental office to be filled out by the instructor after the course work has been completed. No student will receive credit for the language requirement by course work without the instructor's completion of such a form. The form will rate the student's general knowledge of the language with emphasis on reading skills.

Students should also be working towards native fluency in the language of their major literature, first by coursework on our campus and, once they have exhausted the University's offerings, by applying to study abroad. Funding for language study depends on the language and on the student's immigration status; for information, please review the websites of the Division ([http://humanities.uchicago.edu/students/financial-aid/fellowships/](http://humanities.uchicago.edu/students/financial-aid/fellowships/)) and UChicagoGrad ([https://grad.uchicago.edu/admissions/](https://grad.uchicago.edu/admissions/)). Further information on the registration for the language exam (for which a High Pass is required) can be found at the Office of Language Assessment. ([http://languageassessment.uchicago.edu/page/academic-reading-comprehension-assessment/](http://languageassessment.uchicago.edu/page/academic-reading-comprehension-assessment/))

**Dissertation**

Before entering candidacy, students will be asked to present and discuss their dissertation proposals at a proposal hearing attended by their dissertation committee and other interested faculty. After entering candidacy, students will participate in a colloquium, normally in the fifth quarter after their admission to candidacy, in which they will discuss with their dissertation committee the current state of the dissertation and outline their plans and schedule for further progress. Students are strongly urged to join appropriate workshops and present dissertation chapters on a regular basis to such workshops. After satisfying the above requirements, the candidate is expected to pursue independent research under the direction of a member of the faculty culminating
in the writing of a doctoral dissertation. Candidates conclude their studies by successfully defending their dissertation in a final oral examination.

For additional information about the Comparative Literature Graduate Program, please visit https://complit.uchicago.edu/graduate/program.

APPLICATION

The department requires a writing sample of no more than 25 pages, usually a critical essay written during the student’s college years.

The application process for admission and financial aid for all graduate programs in Humanities is administered through the divisional Office of the Dean of Students. The Application for Admission and Financial Aid, with instructions, deadlines and department specific information is available online at: http://humanities.uchicago.edu/students/admissions (http://humanities.uchicago.edu/students/admissions/)

Questions pertaining to admissions and aid should be directed to humanitiesadmissions@uchicago.edu or (773) 702-1552. Our application process is entirely online. Please do not send any materials in hard copy. All materials should be submitted through the online application (http://humanities.uchicago.edu/students/admissions/apply-now (http://humanities.uchicago.edu/students/admissions/apply-now/)).

International students must provide evidence of English proficiency by submitting scores from either the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). (Current minimum scores, etc., are provided with the application.) For more information, please see the Office of International Affairs website at https://internationalaffairs.uchicago.edu/, or call them at (773) 702-7752.

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
Prerequisite(s): Completed Humanities, or Civilization Core requirement. The course is designed for the second-year students and above.
Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 28918

CMLT 22501. Vico's New Science. 100 Units.
This course offers a close reading of Giambattista Vico's masterpiece, New Science (1744)-a work that sets out to refute 'all opinions hitherto held about the principles of humanity.' Vico, who is acknowledged as the most resolute scourge of any form of rationalism, breathed new life into rhetoric, imagination, poetry, metaphor, history, and philology in order to promote in his readers that originary 'wonder' and 'pathos' which sets human beings on the search for truth. However, Vico argues, the truths that are most available and interesting to us are the ones humanity 'authored' by means of its culture and history-creating activities. For this reason the study of myth and folklore as well as archeology, anthropology, and ethnology must all play a role in the rediscovery of man. The New Science builds an 'alternative philosophy' for a new age and reads like a 'novel of formation' recounting the (hi)story of the entire human race and our divine ancestors. In Vico, a prophetic spirit, one recognizes the fulfillment of the Renaissance, the spokesperson of a particular Enlightenment, the precursor of the Kantian revolution, and the forefather of the philosophy of history (Herder, Hegel, and Marx). The New Science remained a strong source of inspiration in the twentieth century (Cassirer, Gadamer, Berlin, Joyce, Beckett, etc.) and may prove relevant in disclosing our own responsibilities in postmodernity.
Instructor(s): R. Rubini Terms Offered: Autumn
Note(s): Taught in English.
Equivalent Course(s): CMLT 32501, FNDL 21408, ITAL 32900, ITAL 22900

CMLT 23301. Balkan Folklore. 100 Units.
Vampires, fire-breathing dragons, vengeful mountain nymphs, 7/8 and other uneven dance beats, heart-rendering laments, and a living epic tradition. This course is an overview of Balkan folklore from historical, political, and anthropological perspectives. We seek to understand folk tradition as a dynamic process and consider the function of different folklore genres in the imagining and maintenance of community and the socialization of the individual. We also experience this living tradition firsthand through visits of a Chicago-based folk dance ensemble, 'Balkan Dance.'
Instructor(s): A. Ilieva Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): ANTH 25908, ANTH 35908, REES 29009, REES 39009, CMLT 33301, NEHC 30568, NEHC 20568
CMLT 23401. The Burden of History: The Nation and Its Lost Paradise. 100 Units.
What makes it possible for the imagined communities called nations to command the emotional attachments that they do? This course considers some possible answers to Benedict Anderson’s question on the basis of material from the Balkans. We will examine the transformation of the scenario of paradise, loss, and redemption into a template for a national identity narrative through which South East European nations retell their Ottoman past. With the help of Žižek’s theory of the subject as constituted by trauma and Kant’s notion of the sublime, we will contemplate the national fixation on the trauma of loss and the dynamic between victimhood and sublimity.
Instructor(s): A. Ilieva Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): NEHC 20573, HIST 24005, CMLT 33401, NEHC 30573, REES 29013, HIST 34005, REES 39013

CMLT 24202. Philosophy and Literature in India. 100 Units.
Is philosophy literature? Is literature philosophy? What constitutes either of these seemingly disparate enterprises, formally and thematically, and what kinds of conjunctions can we imagine between them (philosophy in/of/as literature)? Can one translate these terms across cultures? Are they the sole prerogative of leisure elites, or can they harbor and cultivate voices of dissent? Above all, what does it mean to reflect on these categories outside the parochial context of the Western world? This course explores these questions by introducing some of the literary cultures, philosophical traditions, religious poetry, and aesthetic theories of the South Asian subcontinent. Students will encounter a variety of genres including scriptural commentary, drama and courtly poetry, and the autobiography. Readings, all in translation, will range from Sanskrit literature to Sufi romances and more.
Instructor(s): Anand Venkatkrishnan Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): SALC 20903, RLST 24200, SIGN 26073

CMLT 24410. Kurosawa and His Sources. 100 Units.
This interdisciplinary graduate course focuses on ten films of Akira Kurosawa which were based on literary sources, ranging from Ryunosuke Akutagawa, Jules Dassin, Georges Simenon, and Shakespeare to Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Gorky, and Arseniev. The course will not only introduce to some theoretical and intermedial problems of adaptation of literature to film but also address cultural and political implications of Kurosawa’s adaptation of classic and foreign sources. We will study how Kurosawa’s turn to literary adaptation provided a vehicle for circumventing social taboos of his time and offered a screen for addressing politically sensitive and sometimes censored topics of Japan’s militarist past, war crimes, defeat in the Second World War, and ideological conflicts of reconstruction. The course will combine film analysis with close reading of relevant literary sources, contextualized by current work of political, economic, and cultural historians of postwar Japan. The course is meant to provide a hands-on training in the interdisciplinary methodology of Comparative Literature. Undergraduate students can be admitted only with the permission of the instructor.
Instructor(s): Olga Solovieva Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): EALC 34410, SIGN 24410, EALC 24410

CMLT 26912. Strangers to Ourselves: Emigre Literature and Film from Russia and Southeast Europe. 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, fragmentary, 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. Vladimir Nabokov, Joseph Brodsky, Marina Tsvetaeva, Nina Berberova, Julia Kristeva, Alexander Hemon, Dubravka Ugrešić, Norman Manea, Miroslav Penkov, Ilija Trojanow, Tea Obreht.
Instructor(s): A. Ilieva Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): CMLT 36912, REES 39010, REES 29010

CMLT 27701. Imaginary Worlds: The Fantastic and Magic Realism in Russia and Southeastern Europe. 100 Units.
In this course, we will ask what constitutes the fantastic and magic realism as literary genres while reading some of the most interesting writings to have come out of Russia and Southeastern Europe. While considering the stylistic and narrative specificities of this narrative mode, we also think about its political functions—from subversive to escapist, to supportive of a nationalist imaginary—in different contexts and at different historic moments in the two regions.
Instructor(s): Angelina Ilieva Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): CMLT 37701, REES 39018, REES 29018
CMLT 29024. States of Surveillance. 100 Units.
What does it feel to be watched and listened to all the time? Literary and cinematic works give us a glimpse into the experience of living under surveillance and explore the human effects of surveillance - the fraying of intimacy, fracturing sense of self, testing the limits of what it means to be human. Works from the former Soviet Union (Solzhenitsyn, Abram Tertz, Andrey Zvyagintsev), former Yugoslavia (Ivo Andrić, Danilo Kiš, Dušan Kovačević), Romania (Norman Manea, Cristian Mungiu), Bulgaria (Valeri Petrov), and Albania (Ismail Kadare).
Instructor(s): Angelina Ilieva Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): REES 39024, CMLT 39024, REES 29024

FREN 29100. Pascal and Simone Weil. 100 Units.
Blaise Pascal in the seventeenth century and Simone Weil in the twentieth formulated a compelling vision of the human condition, torn between greatness and misery. They showed how human imperfection coexists with the noblest callings, how attention struggles with distraction and how individuals can be rescued from their usual reliance on public opinion and customary beliefs. Both thinkers point to the religious dimension of human experience and suggest unorthodox ways of approaching it. We will also study an important text by Gabriel Marcel emphasizing human coexistence and cooperation.
Instructor(s): T. Pavel Terms Offered: Spring
Prerequisite(s): Undergraduates must be in their third or fourth year.
Note(s): Taught in English. For French undergraduates and graduates, there will be a bi-weekly one-hour meeting to study the original French texts.
Equivalent Course(s): SCTH 38201, CMLT 39101, FREN 39100, FNDL 21812, CMLT 29101

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): Alia Breitwieser 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 31600. Marxism and Modern Culture. 100 Units.
Designed for graduate students in the humanities, this course begins with fundamental texts on ideology and the critique of capitalist culture by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Gramsci, Althusser, Wilhelm Reich and Raymond Williams, before moving to Marxist aesthetics, from the orthodox Lukács to the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Benjamin) to the heterodox (Brecht), and concludes with contemporary debates around Marxism and imperialism (Lenin, Fanon, and others), and Marxism and media, including the internet. This course will have a particular focus on guiding students through the conventions of academic writing in the Humanities.
Instructor(s): Loren Kruger Terms Offered: Winter
Prerequisite(s): Humanities graduate students and equivalent (eg DIV school; not suitable for MAPSS or Social Science PhDs
Equivalent Course(s): MAPH 31600, ENGL 32300

CMLT 34240. Readings in Exile. 100 Units.
This course will read across 'subaltern' autobiographical and literary narratives of exile in order to interrogate the condition of exile in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. How is the exile discursively distinguished from the refugee, the migrant, the immigrant? How do the various origins and forms of exile - emergent from colonialism, war, racism, xenophobia, political dissidence, and dispossession - inform our understanding of these broader global machinations? Readings will include works by Edward Said, Kathleen Neal Cleaver, Stuart Hall, and Mahmoud Darwish, among others. (20th/21st)
Instructor(s): Sophia Azeb Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 34240

CMLT 36856. Queer Theory: Futures. 100 Units.
TBD
Instructor(s): Kris Trujillo Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): CMLT 26856, ENGL 26856, RLVC 36856, RLST 26856, GNSE 26856, ENGL 36856, CRES 26856, GNSE 36856

CMLT 39416. Freud. 100 Units.
TBD
Instructor(s): Françoise Meltzer Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): DVPR 39416, ENGL 29416, CMLT 29416, RLST 29416, ENGL 39416

CMLT 38775. Racial Melancholia. 100 Units.
TBD
Instructor(s): Kris Trujillo Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 28775, RLVC 38775, GNSE 28775, RLST 28775, ENGL 38775, GNSE 38775, CMLT 28775, CRES 38775
CMLT 40101. Research Themes in South Asian Studies: Textual Transformations - From Manuscript to Print. 100 Units.
This graduate course offers an introduction to the theory and practice of book history and print culture studies, a relatively recent and vibrant field of inquiry within South Asian Studies. The course will explore some of the main theoretical approaches, themes, and methodologies of the history of the book in comparative perspective, and discuss the specific conditions and challenges facing scholars of South Asian book history. Topics include orality and literacy, technologies of scribal and print production, the sociology of texts, authorship and authority, the print ‘revolution’ and knowledge formation under British colonial rule, the legal existence of books, the economy of the book trade, popular print, readership and consumption. We will also engage with the text as material artifact and look at the changing contexts, techniques, and practices of book production in the transition from manuscript to print.
Instructor(s): T. Williams Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): SALC 40100, HIST 61802

CMLT 50430. Breathing Matters: Poetics and Politics of Air. 100 Units.
This seminar will re-examine the notion of ‘inspiration’ in its aesthetic and historical senses, revisiting textual and arts practices based on tropes of channeling, revelation, and possession as well as those based on embodied, performatrice and eco-conscious notions of circulation, interconnection, transformation, and receptivity. We will delve into the workings of air as an animating element that bridges and binds individuals to both internal and external forces. We will explore the long history of engagement with this element as it has been used to signify and enhance the circulation and interception of signs, dreams, and voices in literature, performance, audiovisual and electronic media, sculptural and architectural sites. We will examine the modern and contemporary politicization of air as a commons, and apply ourselves to the analysis and critique of industrial and post-industrial landscapes. A wide range of readings and viewings will include work by Hesiod, Coleridge, John Ruskin, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Frank O’Hara, Charles Olson, Ant Farm, Meredith Monk, Adriana Cavarero, Mladen Dolar, Nathaniel Mackey, Jorge Otero-Pailos, Latasha N. Nevada-Diggs, and many others. (20th/21st)
Instructor(s): Jennifer Scappettone Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 50430