Department of Comparative Literature

Chair

• Sascha Ebeling

Director of Graduate Studies

• TBD

Director of Undergraduate Studies

• Olga Solovieva

Professors

• Arnold Davidson
• Frederick de Armas
• Loren A. Kruger
• Françoise Meltzer
• Thomas Pavel
• Mark Payne
• Haun Saussy
• Michael Sells
• Joshua Scodel

Associate Professors

• Sascha Ebeling
• Na’ama Rokem
• Lawrence Rothfield
• David Wray

Assistant Professors

• Leah Feldman
• Olga Solovieva
• Anna Elena Torres

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. Students pursue the Ph.D. in one of two tracks of learning and training:

1. National literatures
2. Literature and other disciplines

Track I is a program of studies of one national literature (the major) in its historical entirety and of a second national literature (the minor) in a specified area. Track II consists of the study of a literature or some part of that literature and its relationship to another discipline such as sociology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, or religion. It is assumed that whichever option the student chooses, a comprehensive, international perspective on the relevant problem will be sought and maintained. Students will be provided with individual counseling to help them formulate programs of study that will answer to their needs and interests. There are no formal boundaries to the extent and nature of these interests, although the department will require that programs be coherently conceived and responsibly carried out.

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 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

Students are required to take six graduate level courses in their second year of Ph.D. study and two in their third year. Students are also required to write a minimum of one substantial paper in the first year and two substantial papers in the second year. Substantial papers should be 20-25 pages, not including bibliography with standard formatting and 12 point font. Copies of these papers must be submitted to the Director of Graduate Studies with the evaluation form.

In the two years of post-M.A. courses, students may take no more than one of the required courses per year for a Pass/Fail grade (i.e., one of the six required graduate level courses for the first year of post-M.A. doctoral level study, and one of the two required graduate level courses in the second year of doctoral level study).

Before the student is recommended for admission to candidacy for the doctor’s degree, he or she must pass satisfactorily an oral examination after completion of eight Ph.D. level courses. This examination will be based on one of the following two options:

Track I requires The National Literature Oral. This is an examination based on no fewer than 60 titles in the major literature and no fewer than 30 titles in the minor literature. The list for the major literature will cover all periods and genres. The list for minor literature will cover the major texts of the approved period or genre.

Track II requires The Field Oral. This is an oral examination on a representative list of approximately 70-90 titles in a given comparative field, such as literature and anthropology, literature and art, literature and film, literature and history, literature and linguistics, literature and music, literature and psychology, literature and sociology, literature and religion, literature and science. Texts chosen for this exam are to be distributed evenly between the two disciplines.

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 (demonstrated by passing a graduate literature course in the language or a high pass (P+) on the Graduate Reading Exam (http://languageassessment.uchicago.edu/page/academic-reading-comprehension-assessment))

- High proficiency in a second language other than English (demonstrated by passing a graduate literature course in the language or a high pass (P+) on the Graduate Reading Exam (http://languageassessment.uchicago.edu/page/academic-reading-comprehension-assessment))

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) and UChicagoGrad (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)

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 program, please see http://complit.uchicago.edu/.
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

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).

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 34272. 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 Osip 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 24272, SCTH 34272

CMLT 35025. Gender and Translation. 100 Units.
The course will consider translation -- both theory and practice -- in relation to queer studies and gender and women’s studies. Authors will include Naomi Seidman, Monique Balbuena, Yevgeniy Fiks, Raquel Salas Rivera, Kate Briggs, and others. For the final essay, students may write a research paper or translation project.
Instructor(s): Anna Elena Torres Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): REES 35025, REES 25025, GNE 25025, GNE 35025, CMLT 25025

CMLT 37512. Dream of the Red Chamber: Forgetting About the Author. 100 Units.
The great Chinese-Manchu novel _Honglou meng_ (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
Prerequisite(s): Familiarity with classical Chinese required.
Equivalent Course(s): CMLT 27512, EALC 37512, EALC 27512, SCTH 37512, FNDL 27512

CMLT 39120. 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/ Jerusalem Delivered (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 Scodel Terms Offered: Spring
Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 39120, CMLT 29120, ENGL 29120

CMLT 50107. Literary Theory: Auerbach’s Mimesis. 100 Units.
The focus of this seminar will be Erich Auerbach’s Mimesis, a book often held up as foundational and paradigmatic for the discipline of comparative literature. Close reading of its twenty chapters together with excerpts from its objects of study (from Homer to Virginia Woolf) will be framed by readings and discussion on the contexts of its production, the history of its reception, the limitations that have been imputed to its presuppositions and biases, and the generative potentials and significances it might continue to make available to the current and future practice of literary comparison.
Terms Offered: Autumn
CMLT 50205. Contemporary Critical Theory 1920-Present. 100 Units.
This course (the second half of the required Comparative Literature introductory sequence) roams the cultural landscape transformed by Freud, Saussure, Shklovsky, the First World War, and the Russian Revolution. Readings from psychoanalytic, formalist and Marxist criticism, from the corresponding heresies, and their successors. The aim throughout is to locate theoretical texts in the polemical situations to which they originally were addressed, and others in which they subsequently were invoked.
Instructor(s): Haun Saussy
Terms Offered: Winter
Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 50205

CMLT 50201. Seminar on Contemporary Critical Theory: How to think about Literature. 100 Units.
This course will examine some of the salient texts of postmodernism. Part of the question of the course will be the status and meaning of "post"-modern, post-structuralist. The course requires active and informed participation.
Instructor(s): Thomas Pavel
Terms Offered: Winter
Note(s): Comp Lit core course. 2nd part of sequence.
Equivalent Course(s): RLLT 50201, DVPR 50201

CMLT 50300. Catharsis, Tedium, and other Aesthetic Responses. 100 Units.
This seminar examines the ramifications of catharsis, tedium and other forms of aesthetic response, in other words the relationship between effect and affect in and in response to performance, live, mediated and in reading. Beginning with Aristotle and present day responses to catharsis, we will investigate the kinds of aesthetic response invoked by theories of tragedy (esp Hegel), realism (authority, attachment and estrangement in Lukacs, Adorno, Brecht, Benjamin), as well as theories of pleasure (Barthes, Derrida, Cixous) and tedium (Heidegger). We will also explore tedium through text and audio of The Hunchback Variations by local playwright Mickle Maher. We will conclude with, the potential and limitations of catharsis as an appropriate response to testimonial narrative in text and film during and after the dictatorship in Chile. An essential part of the discussion will be the problem of translating key theoretical terms, not only from one language to another but also from one theoretical discourse to another.
Instructor(s): Loren Kruger
Terms Offered: Autumn
Equivalent Course(s): ENGL 50301, TAPS 50300
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.