CMLT-C 501 (16693) Intro to Contemporary Literary Studies: Comparative Literature and the Questioning of Borders: Rethinking the World, Universalism, and Multiplicity | E. Peretz | T 5:45 – 8:15 pm | 3 cr

One of the most pressing questions of our time is the need to rethink the concept of the world and of what it can mean for us today to live in a world, rather than exclusively within the borders of a specific nation, language, or religion. A major contribution of some of the most advanced theoretical developments of the last fifty years, this course will argue, is to allow us to develop such a rethinking of the concept of a world, thus, of that which is shared and communicated across humanity in excess of every delimiting border. This new thinking of a dimension of the world, communicating in excess of every border, should be distinguished, we will argue, from several previous models of thinking: It should be distinguished from the dream of a cosmopolitism, of a unification of humanity through the cancellation of the borders and languages separating it, as well as from the dream of finding the ultimate ideal of truth, value, and meaning in which all of humanity can share (enlightenment humanism). It should also be distinguished from the conception of the world as consisting of a relativistic plurality of separate and autonomous cultures, each having its own ideals and values which cannot be judged by another. If there is a dimension of humanity which communicates across borders, it will not mean the cancellation of borders but a new thinking of the logic of the border, a thinking which will also have to invent a new logic of the universal. If there is an essential thinking of multiplicity in this new logic, it will not be the thinking of a relativistic plurality of separate and complete entities, but of an essential multiplicity of fragmented and incomplete entities exposed to each other. It is the task of comparative literature, we will argue, to become the discipline activating this new thinking of the borders and of the discovery of a new notion of the world, and it will be the task of this class to elaborate this new way of thinking by creating a framework through which to think together several of the essential theoretical contributions of our time.

Comp Lit graduate students must also enroll in C502.

CMLT-C 502 (16694) Fields and Methods of Comparative Lit E. Peretz | R 7:00 – 7:50 pm | 1 cr

See above description

CMLT-C 537 (30087) The Twentieth Century | E. Julien | TR 4:00 – 5:15 pm | 4 cr

A survey of figures and currents in literature of the twentieth century via creative and critical texts from Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa. These are likely to include works by Anna Akhamatova, Guillaume Apollinaire, Antonin Artaud, Walter Benjamin, Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, Aimé Césaire, Franz Fanon, William Faulkner, Sigmund Freud, Franz Kafka, Lu Xun, Marcel Proust, Edward Said, Jean Paul Sartre, Wole Soyinka, Rabindranath Tagore, Virginia Woolf, Raymond Williams, William Butler Yeats. Close reading and discussion. Student presentations. Two papers. Please contact Professor Eileen Julien for more information: <ejulien>.

CMLT-C 580 (30090) History and Theory of Translation | P. Losensky | MW 11:15 am — 12:30 pm | 4 cr

This seminar will explore the burgeoning field of translation studies and the central role of translation in the field of comparative literature. We will first look at the history of translation, with an emphasis on the English tradition, and examine some representative translations from the Renaissance to the present. Close readings of influential, “pre-theoretical” statements on translation will provide a foundation for our study of the development of translation studies since the 1960s. Concepts such as translatability, equivalence, resistance, uncertainty, naturalization, and foreignization will be analyzed in terms of various models of language, social communication, and poetics. We will also consider how the field of translation studies engages other trends in contemporary criticism, such as structuralism, deconstruction, gender studies, and post-colonialism. Participants in this seminar are expected to play an active role in leading and participating in discussions of the readings and of their own research. They are also required to prepare written discussion questions for one or more of the readings, to write a formal proposal of a seminar project, and to present the final project orally to the class before submitting it in written form. A good knowledge of English and at least one other language is a prerequisite for this seminar.

CMLT-C 601 (30093) History of Theory and Criticism: Reading Poetry Across Cultures | K. Tsai | TR 2:30 pm – 3:45 pm | 4 cr

What is poetry, what does it do, and what makes a good poem? By examining key works of poetry and criticism, we will tackle these fundamental questions in literary traditions across the world and throughout history. From originating moments in antiquity to contemporary America, poetic practice and criticism have formed a dynamic relationship of mutual influence, bringing the aesthetic into a unique relationship with the social, the political, and the cultural. As such, poetry embodies the unique mode of cognition fundamental to literature. The other sense of “reading across” is the circulation of poetry far beyond its originating context. The problem here is (at least) twofold: the reception of one cultural and aesthetic system by another, and the real and subtle effect of translation. If both the Japanese and the Romans had to address the crisis of native literary identity in confronting the giants of the Chinese and the Greek tradition respectively, how did the different political relationship shape the reception? If, as Charles Simic said, modern American poetry is deeply indebted to classical Chinese poetry, how did the translation practices of Waley, Pound, and Rexroth fashion the operative image of Chinese poetry? Finally, though haiku is so widespread in the poetic experiments of world, why does so much of it outside the original cultural environment stink of failure? Students are encouraged to bring in authors and critics from any tradition for the class to explore. All readings will be in English translation.

CMLT-C 603 (30097) Topics: The Renaissance Epic | S. Van der Laan | MW 2:30 pm – 3:45 pm | 4 cr

The Renaissance saw the last great flowering of the Western epic tradition. After centuries of relative neglect, the epic became once again the form of choice for poets intent on exploring nationhood, community, and the human spirit on a grand canvas. More than any other literary
genre, the epics of Christian Europe reached back to those of classical Greece and Rome for their poetic vocabulary of nationhood and the role of the individual in that nation. Why should the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, so “early modern” in many other respects, have been the last to turn to this ancient form for their national poems? How did the belatedness of this recovery shape these epics? How did the epic tradition change in response to the transformed cultural and religious context—or, to paraphrase a recent study of this problem, how does epic make the transition “from many gods to one”? In this course we will concentrate on four major Renaissance epics. The small northern Italian city-state of Ferrara, in the sixteenth century a cultural powerhouse to rival the Florence of a century before, provides half our syllabus: Ludovico Ariosto’s Orlando furioso (1532), the astonishing fusion of the medieval tales of Arthurian and Carolingian knights with the epic and contemporary concerns of nation-building and a clash of civilizations, and Torquato Tasso’s Gerusalemme liberata (1581), a narrative of the first Crusade composed at the height of the Counter-Reformation. Luiz Vaz de Camões’s Os Lusíades (1572) celebrates the Portuguese explorations of Africa and the Indian subcontinent; John Milton’s Paradise Lost (1667) responds to the fall of the English commonwealth and the restoration of the monarchy by looking back to a greater Fall and imagining a final, triumphant recovery. By studying these poems together, we will locate them in a European epic tradition stretching back to Homer, a tradition that reaches across linguistic and national boundaries. We will uncover the extraordinary intertextual and allusive richness of the epic tradition. At the same time, we will situate each poem in its contemporary literary and historical context in order to understand how the epic responds to and attempts to reshape its cultural and political environment. We will also examine both Renaissance and modern theories of epic. Assignments will include presentations and a research paper of approximately 25 pages. NB: Students who are not familiar with Vergil’s Aeneid should read that epic before the course begins.

CMLT-C 670 (27566) Topics in Cross-Cultural Studies: Biopolitics and Postcolonial Discourse | A. Adesokan | M 4:00 pm – 6:30 pm | 4 cr

As a discourse of identity, postcoloniality has brought institutional respectability and redress to important questions of difference—race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and the like. One criticism of postcolonial studies, however, is that the emphasis on these questions is often uneven and instrumentalist. This seminar proposes to pitch selected classics of postcolonial studies against the currents of critical theory such as transnationalism, micropolitics, and biopolitics in order to examine this criticism and others like it. We will do this by engaging several compelling postmodernist propositions (the exhaustion of difference, the fragmentation of political reason, the deterritorialized rule of empire) and equally compelling contemporary ideas about unequal exchange, actual human suffering, economic logic, and the politics of knowledge. Among the questions informing this seminar are: How do we make sense of the ubiquity of acts of impunity across different parts of the world at a time when legalism is perhaps at its strongest? What is the relationship between “disorder” and “inventiveness”? What does culture (as in “local culture” or “high culture”) mean today?

Comparative Literature
Graduate Courses
Fall 2012

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The comparative study of literature is concerned with the relationships between literature and other arts and fields of knowledge. Its emphasis has traditionally been on the systematic comparison of literary works from more than one culture. This comparison may be made in the framework of a literary genre, a period in literary history, or dominant themes and motifs; or it can be undertaken in the context of the mutual impact of two national cultures or entire civilizations. In recent years, comparative literature has been increasingly concerned with theoretical approaches to literature and with exploring relationships between literature and such areas as music, the visual arts, film, philosophy, religion, political thought, and the natural and social sciences. In essence, the mission of the Department of Comparative Literature at I.U. is to be on the cutting edge of international interdisciplinary studies in literature and related arts.