

Comparative Literature 201:

Comparative Literary Studies I

Tuesday / Thursday 12-1:20

1032 FLB

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What is comparative literature? There are, in fact, a number of different definitions, but all of them seem to involve crossing some kind of boundary—for instances: (1) Many comparatists study problems that cross national and linguistic boundaries, such as the development of the novel. Eric Auerbach's book *Mimesis* is the most famous example: it looks at how Western literature has tried to represent reality (called *mimesis*) starting with Homer and ending with Virginia Woolf, in seven different languages. (2) These kinds of large issues (how does Western culture represent reality?) have often pushed comparatists outside of the space of "pure literature" to ask larger theoretical questions (what is literature? how is the psychoanalytic subject shaped by literature?)—as a result, many scholars tend to think of comparatists as 'naturally' theoretical. (3) More recently, comparative literature has shown an interest in crossing its own definitional boundaries, exploring not only literary texts, but also films, works of art and architecture, music and so on.

This semester we will be looking at a sample problem that will allow us to make use of all of these different approaches: the problem of so-called "meta-literature" (novels that are about writers, or reading, or about other novels; plays in which the characters on stage are staging another play; movies that seem to be about looking...). Such texts are hardly confined to one nation or linguistic tradition (*Don Quixote* in Spanish, *Madame Bovary* in French, *If on a winter's night a traveler* in Italian, or *Possession* in English); they insist on asking larger theoretical questions (what is literature? how should a reader read? what do films tell us about watching and being watched?); and they appear in almost every artistic medium (we'll be looking at novels, short stories, films and a play).

There will be three papers, each 5-7 pp in length. Grades are based on attendance and participation (25%), and the three papers (25% each).

The class is divided into three different sections:

text as poison:

Don Quixote (selections), *Madame Bovary*, *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*

text as illusion:

Labyrinths, *Pale Fire*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Singin' In The Rain*, *All About Eve*, *The Matrix*

text as romance:

Rear Window, short stories by Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveler*, *Possession*

date	text	paper
8/29	introduction	
	text as poison	
9/3	<i>Don Quixote</i> (Book I: author's preface, ch. 1-9, 16-17, 20-21)	
9/5	<i>Don Quixote</i> (Book I: ch. 25-26, 29, 47-52)	
9/10	<i>Don Quixote</i> (Book II: author's preface, ch. 1-4, 7, 10-15, 22-23)	
9/12	<i>Don Quixote</i> (Book II: ch. 25-26, 30, 59, 62, 64, 72-74)	
9/17	<i>Madame Bovary</i> (pp. 1-118)	
9/19	<i>Madame Bovary</i> (pp. 119-215)	
9/24	<i>Madame Bovary</i> (pp. 216-255)	
9/26	<i>Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead</i> *	
10/1	review	#1
	text as illusion	
10/3	Borges: "Tlön," "Pierre Menard," "The Circular Ruins" "The Library of Babel" "The God's Script" "The Mirror of Enigmas"*	
10/8	<i>Pale Fire</i> (pp. 1-107)	
10/10	<i>Pale Fire</i> (pp. 107-215)	
10/15	<i>Pale Fire</i> (pp. 215-315)	
10/17	<i>The Wizard of Oz</i> (+ Van Den Abbeele: "Travel As Metaphor")*	
10/22	<i>All About Eve</i> (+ Benjamin: "Work of Art... Mechanical Reproduction")*	
10/24	<i>Singin' In The Rain</i> (+ Silverman: "The Acoustic Mirror")*	
10/29	<i>The Matrix</i> (+ Lacan: "The Mirror Stage")*	
10/31	review	#2
	text as romance	
11/5	<i>Rear Window</i> (+ Mulvey: "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema")*	
11/7	Calvino: "Adventure of a Reader" "Origin of the Birds" "Jaguar Sun"*	
11/12	<i>If on a winter's night a traveler</i> (pp. 1-90)	
11/14	<i>If on a winter's night a traveler</i> (pp. 91-168)	
11/19	<i>If on a winter's night a traveler</i> (pp. 169-260)	
11/21	<i>Possession</i> (pp. 1-124)	
11/26	— Thanksgiving —	
11/28	— Thanksgiving —	
12/3	<i>Possession</i> (pp. 125-284)	
12/5	<i>Possession</i> (pp. 285-413)	
12/10	<i>Possession</i> (pp. 414-555)	
12/12	conclusions	
12/17	—	#3

* indicates material from the course reader, available at Notes & Quotes (502 E. John St. near campus; 344-4433). All other texts can be found at the usual bookstores.