

Comparative Literature 502: Cross-Cultural Comparison
Spring 2006
Michael Palencia-Roth
Tuesdays, 3 – 5 p.m.

Office hours: Mondays 2:30 – 4:30 p.m. and by appointment
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This course introduces the student to major issues underlying literary comparison across widely different cultures and civilizations. What happens when such cultures come into contact with one another? How is the Other viewed by the One, and how are both changed by the encounter and continued contact? How does literature in general reflect and sometimes even create alterity, what Michel de Certeau called the heterological? And the authors themselves: how do they both reflect and shape cross-cultural experience?

This semester, Comparative Literature 502 is divided into two phases. The first and longest draws its examples from historical exchanges between the Greeks and Romans and their respective barbarians, between the European West and the East (primarily China and India, real and imagined), and between the European West and the New World. This phase asks how, using the language of cultural alterity, one culture may impose its terms on another or seek to create analogies where none existed. The second phase explores issues of perception, cross-cultural understanding, and cultural and personal identity through the prism of four authors: Italo Calvino, whose *Invisible Cities* asks us to imagine a series of dialogues between Marco Polo and the Great Khan; Shusaku Endo (or Endo, Shusaku) whose *The Samurai* explores questions of religious, personal and cultural identity arising out of the incursions of Catholicism in 17th-century Japan; V. S. Naipaul, whose *Half a Life* tells the story of an Indian who, in order to find himself, leaves India for England, and then leaves England for Africa; and Mario Vargas Llosa, whose *The Storyteller* explores the conflict between a European text-based modernity in Peru and a native American traditionalism and orality. The members of the seminar will team-teach these four novels. I will choose the teams for the novels.

Week 1: 1/17/2006

Overview of the course

Comments on hermeneutics, dialogics, and interpretive perspectives

Week 2: 1/24/2006 (The example of Greece)

Homer, *Odyssey*, Books 9 & 10

Herodotus, *The History*, Book 4 (selections)

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Week 3: 1/31/2006 (The example of Rome and early Christianity)

Julius Caesar, *Gallic War* (brief excerpts)

Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book 1

St. Augustine, *The City of God* (brief excerpts)

Week 4: 2/07/2006 (The High Middle Ages)

“The Letter of Prester John”

Marco Polo, *The Travels* (selections)

John Mandeville, *The Travels* (selections)

Week 5: 2/14/2006 (The New World to the West)

Christopher Columbus, “The Letter to Sánchez”

Amerigo Vespucci, “The *Mundus Novus* Letter”

Donald Lach, “The Renaissance Before the Great Discoveries”

Week 6: 2/21/2006 (The Old New World to the East)

Vasco da Gama, *First Voyage* (selections)

Luis Vaz de Camoens, *The Lusiads* (selections)

David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire* (first half)

Week 7: 2/27/2006 (Initial European/Aztec Encounters)

Hernán Cortés, *The Second Dispatch* (Oct-1520/March 1521)

The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico

David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire* (second half)

Week 8: 3/07/2006 (Theorizing the Primitive)

Michel de Montaigne, “Of Cannibals” & “Of Coaches”

Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies*, Chapter 5

Week 9: 3/10/2006 (England into India)

Sir William Jones, “The Preliminary Discourse” (1784), “The Second Anniversary Discourse” (1785), “The Third Anniversary Discourse” (1786)

Thomas Babington Macaulay, “Minute on Indian Education” (1835)

Palencia-Roth, “Contrastive Literature”

SPRING BREAK

Week 10: 3/28/2006

Team-teaching: Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies*, Chapter 15

Book review due Friday, March 31st.

Week 11: 4/04/2006

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Team-teaching: Shusaku Endo, *The Samurai*
Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies*, Chapter 6

Week 12: 4/11/2006

Team-teaching: V.S. Naipaul, *Half a Lifel*
Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies*, Chapter 2

Week 13: 4/18/2006

Team-teaching: Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Storyteller*
Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies*, Chapter 16

Week 14: 4/25/2006

Student presentations. Let's decide during the semester what would be most beneficial. It is likely that, given the size of the seminar, the discussions will extend beyond the normal class-times and meetings.

Week 15: 5/02/2006

Student presentations, continued.

My goals for the course: As we do the above work, I shall be trying to prepare you for your professional life. First, I invite each of you to enter into a semester-long dialogue with me on your intellectual journey these fifteen weeks. Part of this dialogue will be in the form of a journal which you will submit to me every two weeks for my comments and reactions. Second, I will help you build the syllabus for a course that you would like to teach, either here or elsewhere. This course is to be a single-author course, centering on an important author with clear cross-cultural dimensions to his work. The author should come from one of your major or minor literatures. We will construct the syllabus together, bit by bit. Third, you will write a comparative paper (3,500 to 4,000 words) on your author and then in the fall semester, if you're interested, we will try to place that paper, either in a conference or in a journal. Fourth, you will write a book-review (1,000 words) of a recent book about your author (or in which your author figures significantly), and this review, if you're interested, we will also try to place.

Requirements and grading policies:

Journals, due every two weeks: 15%

Attendance & participation: 15%

Syllabus project: 20%

Research paper: 20%

Team-teaching: 15%

Book-review: 15%