Proseminar Description
Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas recently (re)defined Comparative Literature as an “inter-disciplinary, cross-cultural, and trans-national endeavor.” (Behdad-Thomas 1) What does it mean to read and study literatures and cultures from comparative perspectives, across geographical and linguistic boundaries, through historical periods/layers, along other print or visual media? In this pro-seminar in Comparative Literature, we will pursue this multi-pronged question and address comparative literature as an evolving discipline (or indiscipline), from the early nineteenth century to the present.

Using The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature (henceforth PSCL) and The Routledge Companion to World Literature (henceforth RCWL), we will read essays and theoretical works that have shaped and are currently reshaping “comparative literature” and “world literature” from Western as well as non-Western vantage points. Essays in contemporary critical theory will help us frame our discussions on the tools and goals of comparative literary studies. In addition we will read reports on the state of the discipline from the American Comparative Literature Association and will examine issues pertaining to world literatures and to the material conditions and interpretive practices of literary inquiries in the age of globalization.

Guest lecturers from various humanistic departments on campus will attend the seminar and assign readings pertaining to their work and/or to Comparative Literature.

Proseminar Objectives
This seminar will allow graduate students to examine and assess the key concepts, themes, and debates that have shaped the evolving fields of Comparative Literature and the literary humanities. It will also provide opportunities for professional training in the form of writing, formal presentations, revision of written work, and scholarly dialogues.

Bibliography

Required purchase
- A short reader will be made available at Associated Students and is also a mandatory purchase.

Short Bibliography (Recent titles only):

**Requirements**

In this proseminar your work will be appraised based upon scholarly activities designed to help your professional training as future contributors to your fields of expertise in Comparative Literature and other literary disciplines. You will thus be responsible for preparing presentations on assigned readings and writing commentary papers on assigned readings. You will also write a short final “reflection piece” in which you will explain how the readings of this seminar have shaped or reshaped the ways in which you think about your own present and future contribution to the fields of Comparative Literature and other disciplines in the humanities.

**Summary of Requirements**

1. Attendance in all seminars and careful participation are **mandatory**. You are to engage in active and informed discussions. The quality of this graduate seminar will depend on your sustained preparation for and engagement in all our discussions. Careful preparations will support strong intellectual conversations and informed participation.
2. You will write 2 commentary papers on assigned reading(s) in the form of a one-page reaction paper on the readings and 2 well-focused, engaging questions on each reading.
3. Each of you will do 2 15-mn presentations on the assigned readings, and 1 5mn-response.
4. A final reflection (and short) paper will synthesize some of the issues dealt with in the seminar. You will discuss methodologies that pertain to your field of interest and expertise as well as other topics and methodologies. See more precisions below.

**Grading**

200 points **Active and focused participation in proseminar discussions**
200 points **2 short presentations** (each 15mn, worth 100 points)
100 points **1 short 5-mn response** to a commentary paper in which you identify where you agree or disagree with the ideas presented in the analysis; ask questions; start a debate. You can, but **need not**, write the response ahead of time.
200 points **2 short writing assignments** as described above and below (each will amount to 750 words, double spaced, with 2 to questions for each reading assigned at the end). The document will be typed, and will be handed in for grading the day of the seminar. You will also circulate it via email (or Gauchospace) to the whole class on Tuesday at noon, at the latest, preceding the seminar.
300 points **A final reflection essay** of 1,200 words in length, due December 8, 2014 at noon.
Schedule of Readings

The (Mythical) “Origins” of Comp. Lit: Major and Minor Literatures in Tension

The (Mythical) “Origins” of Comp. Lit; Major and Minor Literatures in Tension, cont.
10/1  W, 2:00-4:50pm. PSCL: Meltzl, Gayley, and Posnett & RCWL: essay 2, “Hugo Meltz and ‘the Principle of Polyglottism’” & Introduction to Natalie Melas’s All the Difference in the World, “Grounds for Comparison.”

Reshaping the Discipline: Comparative Literature and Politics
10/8  PSCL: discussions of chapters from Part II: The Years of Crisis (essays by Lukács, Bakhtin, Auerbach, Paz, Wellek) & RWLC: essay 8, Aamir R. Mufti, “Erich Auerbach and the Death and Life of World Literature”.

The “Theory” Years: From Semiotics to Literary Theories and Ethics

10/17: Workshop with Marzia Milazzo, 11:00am. Prepare yourselves for the job market!

Comparative Identities in the PostColonial World

Comparative Identities in the PostColonial World
10/29  PSCL: Part III: The Theory Years (essay by Glissant).
& RCWL: essay 22, Robert C. Young: “World Literature and Postcolonialism”.
& Natalie Melas, “Empire’s Loose Ends: Dissimilated Readings.”
Guest speaker: Michael Grafals on Glissant’s “Poetics of Relation.”

The Global and the Local: Crossing Borders
11/5  PSCL: discussions, Part IV: Contemporary Explorations (essays by Even-Zohar, Casanova, Moretti) & RCWL: essays 14 (on Casanova) and 15 (on Moretti)

From Comparative Literature to Translation Studies: Beyond Eurocentrism
The Global and the Local: Crossing Borders, cont.

**Comparative Disciplines: Patterns of Readings and Scholarly Approaches since the 1970s**

**The Ethical Turn and Comparative/World Literature**

**Comparative Literature and the New Media**
12/8  **M, 2:00-3:25pm.** Todd Presner, “Comparative Literature in the Age of Digital Humanities: On Possible Futures for a Discipline” (reader); *RCWL*: essay 30, Thomas O. Beebee: “World Literature and the Internet”; essay 34, Jan Baetens: “World Literature and Popular Literature.”  **Guest speaker**: Jeffrey Bellomi.

**Precisions on Writing Assignments**
(Thanks to Professor Terence Keel for some of the precisions below)

1.  **Commentary Papers**
This assignment will be around 750 words in length and will be distributed to the class via email, and before our meeting on Tuesday by noon at the latest (the Tuesday preceding our seminar).

Your paper will provide a summary and brief analysis of the major arguments of the readings assigned for the meeting. The summary must cite 2 major passages from the works and direct us to 2 key passages that are relevant to the overall architecture of the writers’ arguments. Please be clear, concise, and accurate.

Refer to a source often cited by the author. Identifying whom an author cites most frequently provides insight into his/her intellectual or theoretical framework, assumptions, as well as the scholarly arguments that take place in the margins of the essay. Alternatively, you can also identify one work that has used (or challenged) the insights of the works you have analyzed. In all cases identify the source(s) and very briefly (two-three sentences) explain their arguments.

Raise at least one critical insight or question regarding the shortcomings of the essay(s) assigned, and list one question pertaining to the strength of the essay. The insights and questions you will raise will guide the class discussion for which you will be responsible.

2.  **Final Reflection Essay or Book Review Essay**
You will write a final reflection piece, totaling 1,200 words, in which you will explain the ways in which the readings from the proseminar, guest visits, and discussions have shaped or reshaped your views on Comparative Literature or other fields of the literary or textual humanities. Your overarching goal will be to address the following question: in what ways has the proseminar been helpful to what you see as your own intellectual project?

The alternate format for the piece may also come as a long book review essay on *RCWL* or any other books providing a critical approach to comparative literature and/or world literature as a discipline.