Fall 2021 Graduate Seminars for CompLit students
(in progress)

“World Literature and the Challenge of Translation”
16:195:515:01 Studies in Contemporary Literature
Prof. Richard Serrano, French and CompLit
Wednesday 1:00-4:00 pm. AB-4052

A translator attacks in print the author whose novel she has translated. Bilingual readers discover that a translator’s version of a novel includes thousands of words that don’t appear in the original. A translator decides to omit the final chapter of a novel without informing either the author or the publisher. A translator reorders the chapters of a novel in order to bring to the fore a political message the author had kept hidden in order to avoid censorship.

With an eye toward the burgeoning field of World Literature, this course asks what it means to read in translation, write about works in translation, and teach works in translation. This semester we will explore novels and short fiction whose translations range from scandalous to contentious, from incomplete to misleading. My task (as well as the task of those who can read any particular work in the original) is to give some sense of how the original differs from the translation and why. Together we will explore the gap between the original and the translation, analyzing its ramifications for reading, critical analysis, and teaching. Do we tell our students, for example, about the missing final chapter? Do we advise them to side with the translator or the author when a translation is disputed? Do we ask them to imagine removing thousands of words, mostly adjectives and adverbs, from a novel in order to make it confirm more strictly to the original text?

The final grade for this course will be based on a term paper and a final presentation before the class.

We will read the following works, with the original title preceding the translation.

- 채식주의자 The Vegetarian by Han Kang
- Girls of Riyadh by Rajaa Alsanea
- In Praise of Hatred by Khaled Khalifa
- 三体 The Three-Body Problem by Liu Cixin
- Selections from I confini dell’ombra
- The Confines of the Shadow by Alessandro Spina
- 77 by Guillermo Saccomanno
- 별을 스치는 바람 The Investigation by J.M. Lee
- 單車失竊記 The Stolen Bicycle by Wu Ming-yi
- Glennkill: Ein Schafskrimi
The works of Leonie Swann and Volker Kutscher:
- Three Bags Full by Leonie Swann
- Babylon Berlin by Volker Kutscher

“Theories for the Environmental Humanities”
16:195:609. CompLit and Other Fields
Prof. Jorge Marcone, Spanish and Portuguese, and CompLit
Thursdays, 5:00-8:00 pm. SPR-319

Introduction to a theoretical vocabulary for the analysis of the representation of nature—in literature, film, and art—without resorting to the binarisms culture/nature and subject/object. Instead of “nature,” we resort to notions of ecology in the humanities, political ecology, social-ecological systems, political ontologies, critical animal studies, and ethics of care. We talk about “culture” as human-nonhuman communication and interaction. In line with the aspirations of the EH, we consider how past or contemporary “cultural products” inform, or are informed by resilience, environmental justice, and the emergence of the world as a pluriverse. We place this “theory” in dialogue with literature, film, and art mostly in Spanish but available in English. Suggestions by the seminar participants are welcome. This list will include work on nation and nature, extractivism, indigenous and other forms of animism, multispecies identities and communities, and climate change.

Final paper (16-20 pages), or public humanities project (40%); oral presentations (20%); weekly short responses (25%); class participation (15%).

“The Literatures of the Americas”
16:350:594:01. 20th Century Literature and Culture
16:195:605:01. Major Authors
Prof. Jeffrey Lawrence, English and CompLit
Thursday 5:00-8:00 pm. Murray Hall 207

This course offers a comparative study of the literatures of the Americas from the early twentieth century to the present. We will read a range of novels, stories, essays and poems written in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean, a number of which were originally published in Spanish, Portuguese and French. The course will trace the development of major literary and cultural trends in the Americas, paying particular attention to how debates about modernity/ modernization, empire, indigeneity, and race are inflected in literary texts. We will also test the translatability of such critical terms as “modernism,” “magical realism,” and “neo-slave narrative” across linguistic and national traditions.

Our readings will concentrate on literary works from the Americas whose imagined geographies move beyond the boundaries of nation and region, and may include texts by Mariano Azuela, Katherine Anne Porter, Nicolás Guillén, Langston Hughes, William Faulkner, Jean Rhys, Alejo Carpentier, Clarice Lispector, Franz Fanon,
Elena Garro, Leslie Marmon Silko, Gayl Jones, Víctor Montejo, and Roberto Bolaño. We will also consider important scholarly interventions in hemispheric/inter-American studies, asking what it means to think “hemispherically” and how the literary works we read lend themselves to and/or resist current critical paradigms.

Students will be expected to turn in one midterm paper of 7-8 pages and one final paper of 10-15 pages. The shorter paper will model a hemispheric analysis, using a comparative framework to analyze two texts from distinct linguistic/national traditions. The final paper will be on a topic of the students’ choosing. All readings will be available in English, though students will be encouraged to read non-English-language works in the original whenever possible.

“Love, Labor, Capital (Poetics of Poverty)"

16:470:670:01. Topics in German Literature I
16:195:516:01. Topics in Comparative Literature
Prof. Nicola Behrmann, German and CompLit
Friday 9:00 am-12:00 noon. SR

Online class with recorded lectures and biweekly meetings

Poverty, the result of exploitation, is not easy to measure. In its unhinged temporality and its resistance to productive discourse the poor text, a form of non-production and a failed oeuvre, emerges from the crisis of the signifier. As exhausted, exhilarated, or outspent the miser, the madman, the simpleton, the unconditional lover, or the social loser may appear: they resist and undercut capitalism’s demand of incessant productivity, enrichment, and the pursuit of happiness.

This course investigates the link between labor and poverty, the drives of accumulation and enjoyment, the logic of production and fantasy, unconscious investment and “negative private property” in literature and film. Drawing on theories of economic and libidinal self-expenditure (Marx, Freud, Lacan), we will take frequent recourse to psychoanalysis as the practice of working through: in dream work, fantasy production, and in various other appearances of non-productive work and unconscious labor.

READINGS INCLUDE Georg Büchner’s Woyzeck, Gustave Flaubert’s “A Simple Heart,” Franz Grillparzer’s “The Poor Musician,” Franz Kafka’s A Hunger Artist, Robert Walser’s The Robber, Andrei Platonov’s The Foundation Pit, and Hubert Fichte’s The Black City. Alexander Kluge’s documentary on Sergei Eisenstein’s failed attempt to film The Capital, early slapstick cinema by The Marx Brothers and Karl Valentin, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s TV miniseries Berlin Alexanderplatz will move our attention to film. Sustainable theories will be provided by Michel Foucault, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Simone Weil.

Taught in English. In Fall 2021, this course will meet online with synchronous and asynchronous components.
“The ... Unconscious”
16:470:671:01. Topics in German Literature II
16:195:608:01. Advanced Topics in Comparative Literature
Prof. Michael Levine, German and CompLit
Thursday 3:00-6:00 pm. SR

The ellipses in the title mark the wide range of texts that have expanded and revised the Freudian notion of the unconscious, taking it in surprising new directions. These include Walter Benjamin and Rosalind Krauss on the optical unconscious, Frederic Jameson on the political unconscious, Robert Ryder on the acoustic unconscious, Jason Groves on the geological unconscious, and Neil Lazarus on the postcolonial unconscious, to name but a few. Readings of psychoanalytic texts from Freud to Lacan and beyond will be combined with the study of Surrealist art and film, realist landscapes, modernist and postcolonial narratives.

“Dante Seminar”
16:560:605:01. Dante Seminar
Prof. Alessandro Vettori, Italian and CompLit

Why do we still read Dante? Is a poet like him still relevant for us 21st-century scholars? Is Dante still relevant for our students? Does a poem like the Comedy, all structured on punishment and reward in the afterlife, still make any sense for us? Is a system of thought heavily constructed on Christian doctrine still appealing to us living in a post-Christian world or even in a post-religious society? These are some of the questions and issues we will be dealing with in this course. A switch in perspective will reveal a fresh interpretation of the poeta sacro as a political activist who fights corruption, a rebellious author who chooses the vernacular (the language of the poor and the ignorant) over Latin (the language of intellectuals), a social dissident who condemns capitalism and the greedy culture of money and proposes poverty as a solution to social tensions.