

Propaedeutics for Comparatists



Spring Term 2020
Wednesdays 9:30-12:20pm
Weldon Library 107 [The Pride Library]

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i. Course Description

Having passed through the Gate of Hell, Dante abruptly recoils at the confused sound of “diverse tongues, horrible speeches, painful words, cries of rage, voices loud and faint” [diverse lingue, orribili favelle, / parole di dolore, accenti d’ira, / voci alte e fioche: *Inf.* 3.25-27]. Replace Dante with yourself at the start of your Comparative Literature MA program, and you’ll soon find serious grounds for empathizing with his state of polyglot panic. Having crossed over the threshold of graduate studies, you are bound to face an intimidating confusion of course requirements, research instructions, multilingual bibliographies, thesis statements, scholarship applications, theoretical jargons, clashing arguments, illogical conclusions, and voices loud and faint telling you what you need to accomplish en route to your degree. Where is Virgil when you need him? Fortunately a trustworthy guide is at hand, marching beside you in the form of this required course on research methodology, thesis writing, and academic professionalization. The course is divided into four units. The first unit covers Research

Methods appropriate for the discipline of Comparative Literature. You will learn how Comparatists have historically distinguished their discipline from other kinds of literary studies; why Comparatists are careful to formulate specific research questions within a broad topic and a broader field of inquiry; and what dialectical strategies contribute to the strength of a Comparative Literary argument. The second unit will consider the complex overlapping histories of the three main cultural institutions – the Library, the Archive, and the Internet – to which Comparatists routinely turn for sources in the search for answers to their research questions. The third unit focuses on the various academic genres which serve to shape the critical expectations of the educated readers for which Comparatists commonly write their works. And the fourth unit concentrates on the prospective form and organization of the first important work – the MA thesis – that a student of Comparative Literature is expected to produce after an intensive period of language training, background research, and methodological inquiry.



ii. Grading Method / Assignments

CL9503B is graded on a PASS / FAIL basis. If you submit the four brief written assignments by posting them on the course website in accordance with the submission schedule [see **section v** below], and if you attend class regularly and participate thoughtfully and constructively, then you will pass the course. There are two ways to fail the course: (1) don't attend class; and (2) don't submit completed assignments.

There will be one assignment for each of the four units: (1) formulation of a series of research questions within a defined research topic; (2) analytical précis of the argument of one chapter from any of the assigned books on Comparative Literature and its research institutions; (3) review of any thesis in Comparative Literature archived at the MLL departmental office; and (4) draft of your thesis prospectus for eventual submission to the Graduate Committee.

iii. Schedule of Topics and Readings

(1) UNIT ONE: Research Methods

WEEK ONE: January 8

Know Your Discipline: What is distinctive about research in Comparative Literature?

READ: *All the Difference in the World* by Natalie Melas

[Ideally you should have this book read by the first class: I suggest that you start on it over the holidays]

WEEK TWO: January 15

Formulate Your Question: What distinguishes a research question from a research topic?

READ: *The Craft of Research* (Third Edition) by Wayne C. Booth et al. [chapter 3]

WEEK THREE: January 22

Responding to the “So What?” query: What distinguishes a research question from a research problem?

READ: *The Craft of Research* --> Wayne C. Booth et al. [chapter 4-5]

WEEK FOUR: January 29

Construct Your Argument: What distinguishes strong from weak arguments in literary studies?

READ: *The Craft of Research* --> Wayne C. Booth et al. [chapter 7-10]

(2) UNIT TWO: Research Institutions

WEEK FIVE: February 5

The Library

READ: *History of Libraries in the Western World* by Michael H. Harris

WEEK SIX: February 12

The Archive and The Internet

READ: *Understanding Archives & Manuscripts*

WEEK SEVEN: February 19

Reading Week (no class)

(3) UNIT THREE: Academic Genres

WEEK EIGHT: February 26

small genres: statement of intent, conference abstract, conference presentation

READ: ONLINE TEXTS (t.b.a.)

WEEK NINE: March 4

medium-size genres: book review, literature review, scholarly article

READ: ONLINE TEXTS (t.b.a.)

WEEK TEN: March 11

large-scale genres: thesis, book (how are they different?)

READ: Any archived thesis in the MLL department office [see Sylvia]

(4) UNIT FOUR: Thesis Project

WEEK ELEVEN: March 18

How is a thesis prospectus different from a statement of intent?

READ: Any archived thesis in the MLL department office [see Sylvia]

WEEK TWELVE: March 25

How should a thesis be organized so that your research questions are logically sequenced and persuasively answered?

READ: Any archived thesis in the MLL department office [see Sylvia]

WEEK THIRTEEN: April 3

What to expect at your thesis defence?

NO ASSIGNED READINGS

v. Schedule of Submission for Unit Assignments

Assignment #1: formulation of a series of research questions within a defined research topic of your own choosing

→ Post on course website by Tuesday, January 29, 2020

Assignment #2: analytical précis of the argument of one chapter from Melas, *All the Difference in the World*

→ Post on course website by Tuesday, February 25, 2020

Assignment #3: review of any thesis in Comparative Literature archived at the MLL department office

→ Post on course website by Tuesday, March 31, 2020

Assignment #4: draft of your thesis prospectus for eventual submission to the Comp Lit Graduate Committee

→ Post on course website by Wednesday, April 15, 2020

iv. Book Orders for CL 9503B: Thesis Project and Writing

1. *The Craft of Research* (Third Edition) --> Wayne C. Booth et al.

Paperback: 336 pages

- **Publisher:** University Of Chicago Press; 3 edition (April 15 2008)
- **ISBN-10:** 0226065669
- **ISBN-13:** 978-0226065663

2. *All the Difference in the World* --> Natalie Melas

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Stanford University Press; 1 edition (Dec 8 2006)

- **ISBN-10:** 0804731985
- **ISBN-13:** 978-0804731980

3. *History of Libraries in the Western World* --> Michael H. Harris

Paperback: 312 pages

Publisher: Scarecrow Press; 4 edition (July 29 1999)

- **ISBN-10:** 0810837242
- **ISBN-13:** 978-0810837249

4. *Understanding Archives & Manuscripts*

Series: *Archival Fundamentals Series*

Paperback: 237 pages

- **Publisher:** Society of Amer Archivists (July 2006)
- **ISBN-10:** 1931666202
- **ISBN-13:** 978-1931666206