

Propaedeutics for Comparatists



Winter Term 2021
Wednesdays 9:30-12:20pm
on Zoom

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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 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 online or at the MLL departmental office; and (4) prospectus for the Major Research Paper, including bibliography.

iii. Schedule of Topics and Readings

(1) UNIT ONE: Research Methods

WEEK ONE: January 13

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 20

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 27

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: February 3

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 10

The Library

READ: *History of Libraries in the Western World* by Michael H. Harris [SCAN: Selected excerpts]

WEEK SIX: February 17

Reading Week (no class)

(3) UNIT THREE: Academic Genres

WEEK SEVEN: February 24

The Archive and The Internet

READ: *Understanding Archives & Manuscripts* [SCAN: selected excerpts]

WEEK EIGHT: March 3

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

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

WEEK NINE: March 10

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

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

WEEK TEN: March 17

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

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

(4) UNIT FOUR: Major Research Paper

WEEK ELEVEN: March 24

How is a prospectus different from a statement of intent?

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

WEEK TWELVE: March 31

How should a major research paper or 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 7

No class → individual consultation sessions via Zoom [sign up in advance for 30 minute slots]

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 January 29, 2021

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

→ Post on course website by February 26, 2021

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

→ Post on course website by March 31, 2021 [before class]

Assignment #4: draft of prospectus for Major Research Paper

→ Post on course website by April 14, 2020

iv. Readings

Students are expected to order their own copies of the following two books:

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

Scanned Excerpts from the following two books will be provided on OWL:

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