

Cognitive Approaches to World Literature

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Description

This seminar introduces students to key contemporary theories of world literature along with recently formulated ideas of human identity in neuro-cognitive sciences. It provides an opportunity to engage in detailed study of some of the more significant developments in contemporary discourse of mind/brain and to address the connections between the world literary archive and the human mind.

Students give one oral presentation and write a final paper. The seminar is taught in English and is open to qualified undergraduate students with instructors' approval.

The asterisked items will be made available on gauchospace. Please read the texts in the order that they are listed.

Week 1 (Jan 9): 'The Best That Has Been Thought and Said' (SP)

Focus: What is world literature? What is a classic?

Traditional definitions of 'world literature' are heavily based on the idea of universal cultural value. This seminar will consider some universalist definitions by examining influential ideas of 'classic' and 'world' and chart some of the main issues arising out of the various elaborations.

Reading

-From *World Literature: A Reader* eds., Theo D'haen, Cesar Dominguez, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (2013).

Introduction

Reading Paths

Chapters 2. Goethe, 'On World Literature'

Chapter 3. Marx and Engels, '*The Communist Manifesto*'

Chapter 9. Auerbach, 'Philology and *Weltliterature*'

-T S Eliot, 'What is a Classic?' (1944) in *On Poetry and Poets* (1957), pp. 53-71.*

-J M Coetzee, 'What is a Classic? A Lecture' (1991) in *Stranger Shores* (2002), pp. 1-19.*

Week 2 (Jan 16): *The 1001 Nights* as an exemplary World Literature text (DJ)

Focus: The making of a global masterpiece: Translation, adaptation, canonization, rewriting.

This session of the seminar looks at *The 1001 Nights* as a global phenomenon and a literary paradox: a book born in the East yet received, transformed and made famous in the West, a book without boundaries, identifiable author, or single text, consisting of an ever-growing number of dramatically different translations; a book that epitomized Western fantasies about the East yet decisively molded the West's politics, literature and culture.

Readings include stories from the *Nights* in various translations, as well as modern reworkings of the *Nights* (E.A. Poe, N. Mahfouz), and essays by J.L. Borges and R. Irwin.

Week 3 (Jan 23): Distant and Close reading (SP)

Focus: How do we read what we read?

The dynamic of 'centres' and 'peripheries'/'tributaries' will be brought to the foreground through a comparative reading of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and the *Memoir of a Korean Queen*.

Reading:

Memoirs of a Korean Queen, trans., Yang-hi Coe-Wall (1985).

OR

The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyong: The Autobiographical Writings of a Crown Princess of Eighteenth-Century Korea, trans., Ja-Hyun Kim Haboush (1996).

-Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*

(To take it further: read Margaret Drabble, *The Red Queen* (2004), a novel inspired by *Memoirs of a Korean Queen*)

-Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature' and 'More Conjectures'

-Shu-Mei Shih, 'Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition'

both in *World Literature: A Reader*, eds., Theo D'haen, Cesar Dominguez and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (Routledge, 2013).

Week 4 (Jan 30): Marcel Proust, Fiction, Cognition, Memory (DJ)

Focus: Mental states in literature: - Marcel Proust.

Proust's modernist novel is, among other things, a portrait of mental life both conscious and unconscious, as well as a study in creativity. We discuss links between fiction & cognition, memory and creativity, writing and the inner world of sleep & dreams. The text also offers an opportunity for reading the classics through a cognitive lens, by focusing on an archetype of creativity: the catabasis (underworld motif) & its modern reworking.

Reading: excerpts from *Remembrance of Things Past*, Homer's *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and essays by E. Ender, R. Epstein, J. Delacour, P. De Man.

Week 5 (Feb 6): Jorge Luis Borges and/as World Literature (DJ)

Focus: Borges and / as World Literature; encyclopaedias as fiction; Borges and the cognitive turn

We focus on "Global Borges": Borgesian cosmopolitanism; reverse influence theory; Borges and the universal text. Also, Borges's signature blending of fiction and non-fiction: the place of knowledge, speculation and encyclopedias in the Borgesian imaginary and the cognitive dimension of Borgesian stories.

Reading: stories and essays by Borges, R. Nethersole, J. Alazraki, E. Kristal, B. Sarlo, M. Siskind.

Week 6 (Feb 13): Language, Script and Translation (SP)

Focus: The relationship between language, nation and world will be interrogated through the prism of script.

Issues of translation form an inevitable part of any discussion on world literature. This seminar will discuss linguistic and cultural translations, discrete 'scriptworlds' and the emergence of translatability into a European language as a literary criterion of value.

Reading:

-Stanislas Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain: The New Science of How We Read* (2009), especially the Introduction, chapters 1, 3, 4.

-David Damrosch, 'What is World Literature?' in *World Literature: A Reader* eds., Theo D'haen, Cesar Dominguez, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (2013).

-Robert Young, 'That Which Is Casually Called a Language' in *PMLA*, Volume 131, Number 5, October 2016, pp. 1207–1221 (15)

-Sowon S Park, 'Scriptworlds' in *The Cambridge Companion to World Literature* (CUP forthcoming 2018).

Week 7 (Feb 20) Emotion (SP)

Focus: What does neuroscience of emotion bring to literary criticism?

A radical transformation in how the brain is understood occurred about forty years ago as a result of technical advances in brain imaging and cell labelling technique, in conjunction with human lesion studies and comparative animal neurology. This class will introduce the latest in the neuroscience of emotion and explore their implications for literary studies.

Reading:

-Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (2005).

-Joseph Ledoux. 'Feelings: what are they and how does the brain make them?' in *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* (2015).*

-Mariano Siskind, 'The Globalization of the Novel and the Novelization of the Global' in *World Literature: A Reader*, eds., Theo D'haen, Cesar Dominguez and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (2013).

Week 8 (Feb 27): A Cognitive Approach to the Fantastic (DJ)

Focus: Fantastic stories and cognitive estrangement.

The 19th century post-Enlightenment genre of fantastic literature can be understood as a reaction to loss of faith, crisis of rationalism, lack of spiritual certainties, as well as urban upheaval, technological innovations and disruptions of perception that characterize Western modernity. Key concepts of Uncanny (*Unheimlich*) and Modalization are discussed in a cognitive perspective.

Reading: classic 19th century fantastic stories (Hoffmann, Poe, Mérimée, Gautier, Maupassant) alongside essays by Freud, Jentsch, Todorov, Cixous, Warner, Mori, Brooke-Rose, Suvin.

Week 9 (March 6): World Literature and the Human Mind (SP)

Focus: What does world literary history bring to neurobiological models of the mind?

This seminar will situate world literature within an evolutionary neurobiological perspective. It will address the following questions: what are the opportunities that cognitivism brings to 'traditional', historicist and poststructuralist inquiry?; is there a middle ground between a non-intentionalist, phylogenetic, cognitive evolutionary history and a literary history driven by human agency and subjectivity? how might cognitive universals benefit from sociohistorical particulars?

-Yuval Harari, *Homo Deus* (2016), especially 1, 2, 3, 4.

-Peter Richerson, 'Culture-led gene-culture coevolution'

<https://carta.anthropogeny.org/events/sessions/culture-led-gene-culture-coevolution>

-David Lodge, 'Consciousness and the Novel' in *Consciousness and the Novel* (2004).

-Pascal Casanova, 'Literature as a World' in *World Literature: A Reader* eds., Theo D'haen, Cesar Dominguez, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (2013).

Week 10 (March 13): Worlding Writers: the case of "Global Poe" (DJ)

Focus: Translation and globalization across national boundaries.

The case of Poe will serve to test Damrosch's definition of World Literature as a mode of circulation, and writing that gains in translation. Poe's legacy in Latin America both directly and through French translations (in particular Baudelaire); Edogawa Ranpo and the Japanese afterlife of Poe. Poe's place in the creation of the prototypical World Literature genre, (analytic) detective fiction.

Reading: stories by Poe, Baudelaire, E. Ranpo, P. Auster, Borges, Cortázar; essays by Damrosch, Esplin, Welge, Irwin.