

**Comparative Literature 100: Writing about World Literature  
Queens College, Spring 2014**

Course number:  
Days and time:  
Location:

Professor:  
Office hours:  
e-mail:

Course Description:

This course fulfills the College Writing 2 requirement and builds on the work of English 110 (College Writing 1) in order to teach the conventions of writing in the discipline of Comparative Literature. You will be reading, researching and writing about literatures across the globe.

You can expect at least 20 pages of formal, graded writing. This includes scholarly essays, creative writing, and a research paper requiring multiple revisions. There will also be informal assignments, such as writing in your writer's notebook and oral presentations.

The aim of this course is to practice your academic writing, to learn to write with authority, and to use different rhetorical strategies to address your readers. As in English 110, you will increase your knowledge of the grammar and mechanics of Standard English; and you will expand your knowledge of how to conduct research and document your sources. Furthermore, you will be asked to develop and support your own, independent thesis about the literary texts we will be reading over the course of this semester.

The projected learning outcome for this course is that you will read critically and think analytically. You will be able to write more clearly in varied, academic formats, using Standard English as well as appropriate technology. You will acquire research skills to support your own original thesis with evidence; and you will learn how to construct a persuasive argument. Most importantly, you will be able to relate your own original ideas to the ideas of others by employing the conventions of ethical attribution and citations.

Required Readings:

1. Gustave Flaubert, "A Simple Heart," trans. from French
2. Franz Kafka, "Metamorphosis," trans. from German
3. Haruki Murakami, "TV People," trans. from Japanese

These can be found in: David Damrosch, ed., *Gateways to World Literature*, Volume 2 (Penguin, 2012), at the Queens College Bookstore.

4. Erich Auerbach, "On the Serious Imitation of the Everyday."

This can be found on the Queens College Library's e-reserve site. The instructor will provide you with the password.

Required Materials:

A writer's notebook to be used exclusively for this class. It will be collected at the end of the semester.

Course Policy:

You are expected to attend and participate at all times. More than three (3) unexcused absences will affect your overall grade. Papers must be typed, double-spaced, in 12-point font size, with 1.25 -inch margins. Late papers will be downgraded. Final grades consist of:

Participation: 15%

Response Paper (2-3 pages): 10 %

Midterm Paper (6-7 pages): 25%

Creative Writing (2-3 pages): 10%

Research Paper (10-12 pages, incl. bibliography): 40%

During the first part of the course, you are introduced to reading critically; and to writing about literature by citing primary and secondary sources. The aim is to familiarize you with the basic methods used by Comparative Literature: perform a detailed analysis of a literary text; place it in its cultural and historical context; and draw conclusions based on your engagement with a theoretical approach. This part includes a response paper, a creative writing exercise, and a midterm paper (see syllabus for specifics).

During the second part of the course, you begin to work on your culminating project, a research paper to be produced in stages. Based on the knowledge you have acquired, you now compare and contrast two texts by focusing on a single topic; you conduct your own research; and you create your own thesis. You learn how to revise your writing over a period of time (aided by your peers and instructor); and to develop your internal editorial voice. The goal is to learn how to write independently.

**A NOTE ON PLAGIARISM:**

Plagiarism means using someone else's words or ideas (published or unpublished, including information found on the internet) as your own, without giving the person(s) proper credit. Plagiarism is a serious violation of academic standards, which may result in a failing grade for a paper or a course, a notation on your permanent record, suspension, or expulsion from college.

**SYLLABUS**

Week 1: Intro to Class

*Writing Sample*

"Write an essay about a book you have read."

This sample helps the instructor to see how you write.

**19<sup>th</sup> Century Realism: Flaubert, "A Simple Heart":**

Informal Writing Assignment:

Take notes during the instructor's introductory lecture.

It will offer you an understanding of time and place.

Homework Assignment: Read Flaubert's story.

Week 2: **Flaubert, "A Simple Heart," ctd.:**

In-class Discussion:

Ask questions and explain your understanding of the story.

Homework Assignment:

Study questions will be posted on Blackboard:

Mark the text and take notes in response to those questions.

Bring in your notes to contribute to class discussion.

This should deepen your understanding of the story.

Response Paper Assignment (graded!):

"What interests you about this story and why?"

You must incorporate and analyze quotes from the text."

Week 3:

Response Paper due

Your response was based on your own reading. Now see how a professional literary critic respond to the same text:

**Auerbach, "On the Imitation of the Everyday":**

Homework Assignment:

Read Auerbach's essay. Mark passages you wish to discuss in class. Respond to study questions posted.

We will focus on the way he analyzes quotations; and how he develops his interpretation through close reading. This will serve as a model for your work from now on.

Informal In-class Writing Assignment:

"Choose a quote of no more than 6-8 lines from Flaubert's story and analyze it in detail. Focus on all the words it contains."

Week 4:

**Workshop: How to work with quotations:**

Practice analyzing the primary source by referring to images, sound patterns, narrative structures, rhetorical strategies, etc.

Practice engaging the secondary source by elaborating on or challenging them; or refer to them as sources of information.

(Your object of study is the primary source, but through secondary sources, you contribute to debates in the scholarly community.)

Week 5: **20<sup>th</sup> Century Modernism: Kafka, "Metamorphosis":**

Take notes on instructor's introductory lecture.

Study questions will be posted.

(Multitask: While still writing your midterm paper, think ahead about Kafka's story for your final paper!)

Midterm Paper Assignment:

"Discuss Flaubert's style and subject matter in terms of Auerbach's essay on 'realism.' What do you think works or doesn't work about 'realism' in writing?"

Week 6: **Kafka, "Metamorphosis" ctd.:**

Respond to the study questions posted.

Midterm Paper due

Informal in-class Writing:

Respond to Kafka's Story:

(Topic TBA based on results of discussion.)

Week 7: **Workshop: How to conduct Literary Research:**

Libraries, Databases, Online Sources

We will use this week to locate sources about Kafka, his life and work; and what scholars have written about "Metamorphosis".

**A trip to the library will be scheduled for this week.**

Creative Writing Assignment (graded!):

"Describe a dream you have had in Kafkaesque language, using the first person present tense (as if you were in it)."

This enables you to gain an understanding of his style.

Discuss in class what it means to take "poetic license."

Week 8: **Kafka, "Metamorphosis" concluded**

Creative Writing due

We'll discuss formal terms for Kafka's writing: unreliable narrator, the absence of conventional "framing" devices to differentiate dream and reality, shifting viewpoints and tenses, etc.

Informal in-class writing:

Topic TBA.

Week 9: **21<sup>st</sup> Century Postmodern: Murakami, "TV People":**

Take notes on instructor's introductory lecture.

Discussion of Cultural Differences:

Compare Kafka's Eastern European background with that of contemporary Japan: How do we avoid stereotypes?

Homework:

Begin to think about your final research paper & identify a topic, preferably in consultation with the instructor. The paper must compare and contrast both stories (Kafka & Murakami).

Week 10: **Murakami, "TV People" ctd:**

Respond to the study questions on Blackboard.

*Present your topic*

Everyone in class will get a chance to present his/her final paper topic: Identify an anticipated focus that fits with both stories (Kafka's and Murakami's). Explain what kind of research you are conducting. Propose a possible working thesis. Ask questions if you need help.

Homework:

Begin to write your rough draft (must be at least 5 pages long). See the memo attached to this syllabus: "NOTES ON HOW TO WRITE A COMPARATIVE PAPER"

Week 11: **Workshop: Comparing and Contrasting:**

How to write about two books in one paper: The instructor will explain the theoretical basis of de-centering one's point of view by focusing on more than one object of study.

Discussion of Comparative Literature as a discipline:

"Why do we need to compare and contrast?"

You are invited to ask questions and offer commentary.

Informal in-class writing:

"Comparing Kafka's Prague and Murakami's Tokyo."

Homework:

Complete your rough draft. Bring in two extra copies.

Week 12: **Murakami, "TV People" concluded**

*Rough draft due\**

Peer review of rough drafts in groups of 3-4:

Use the rubrics in back of this syllabus as a “checklist.”

You will also receive the instructor’s comments on your draft.

(Note: The longer your draft, the more helpful the feedback!)

**Week 13: Workshop: From rough to polished:**

How to edit your writing:

Incorporate the instructor’s and peers’ comments.

We will address the question of what to do when you disagree with a other people’s comment; and how to solve editorial problems (such as changing the overall structure of an essay).

**Week 14: Present your polished draft to the class** *Polished draft due\*\**

Incorporate or refute comments from others:

By this time, you will have become the author(ity) on your paper. Now you need to field questions, accept compliments, refute assumptions, etc.

The format is that of an academic conference – we will group students in panels of 3, with the others making up the “audience”.

The aim of these presentations is to empower you in your writing by speaking about it with authority.

**Week 15: Presentations ctd:**

[Depending on how many students are in the class]

**Make final changes to your paper:**

Incorporate the responses to the presentation you gave.

Format your bibliography according to MLA guidelines.

Is your introductory paragraph (thesis) clear?

Have you reiterated your thesis often enough?

Be sure to proofread and add an original title!

Research Paper due

\* not graded, but instructor will provide feedback

\*\* must be different from final paper

NOTES ON HOW TO WRITE A COMPARATIVE PAPER:

1. To compare does not just mean to find similarities. In Comparative Literature, what we mean when we say “compare” is to compare and contrast. In fact, it is often more productive to emphasize differences than similarities (if two books were the same, why have two?). The purpose of a comparison is to bring out the uniqueness of each work by seeing them in contrast to one another. You should use phrases such as: “unlike”; “in contrast”; “compared to” etc. to differentiate.
2. Be sure to write about each text you are discussing separately. This means: do not jump back and forth - otherwise you will create an irritating “ping-pong effect” for the reader, who constantly has to readjust; and/or the feeling of a “laundry list.” Focus on one book first and then go to the next book. To avoid making it seem like two separate essays, you need to refer back to the first with phrases such as “unlike in the text discussed above” or “in contrast to the other book”.
3. To make your essay exciting to read, you should begin with the work that interests you less. Do not make the mistake to create a “let-down effect” in the reader, who may get excited about what you have to say in the first part of your essay only to be confronted with “now I’m getting to the other book, which really isn’t all that interesting...” The most successful essays build tension by starting out with less, then make it more (realtors always show their best properties last!).
4. Remember that you are asked to write about one topic. Some people get confused because they are discussing two books. However, since you are trying to address one particular question, be sure not to stray from your one topic. The purpose of a comparative analysis is to illuminate different aspects of this one question, in order to gain perspective and a deeper understanding of it.
5. As with all papers, make yourself an outline before you begin. You need to state your thesis in an intro paragraph that functions like a roadmap. Spell this out: “In this essay, I will demonstrate \_\_\_\_\_.” You then refer back to your thesis throughout. Conclude by referring back to the beginning, *not* by introducing a new topic! You might write your introduction *after* you’ve written your paper.
6. Remember that a thesis must be debatable: the more you think of the opposite point of view, the better you can refute it, e.g. “at first glance, it may seem... however”; “the reader is led to believe... but,” etc. Do not be afraid of contradictions. Be argumentative, based on your evidence (your quotations).
7. In order for you to write a focused paper, you were asked to perform an in-depth analysis of a few selected passages from the two texts. Your task is to focus on the words and sentences in those passages, *not* to the entire book. You have those passages in front of you, so don’t stray from them. Each part of a book is a “microcosm” of the whole. It will be obvious that you are familiar with the overall work, so you don’t need to summarize it (except briefly in your intro).

**RUBRICS FOR ASSESSMENT: COMPARATIVE LITERATURE**

<b>GOALS:</b>	Less Than Satisfactory (C or lower)	Good (B / B-)	Very Good (A/B+)
<b>Comprehension of primary texts (plot, themes, characters, style, etc.)</b>	Student has trouble understanding plot elements in fiction, or recognizing images in poetry	Student is able to discuss character development (in fiction), thematic issues, and (when applicable) poetic devices (metaphor, assonance, etc.)	Student is able to analyze complex narrative structures and stylistic features, and (when applicable) the inner workings of a poem
<b>Understanding contextual frameworks (historical, geographical, biographical, political, etc.)</b>	Student has difficulty seeing beyond his/her own immediate situation and context	Student can establish links to present time and place; and displays basic understanding of what translation involves	Student can situate primary texts within their specific historical periods and geographical areas
<b>Ability to compare primary texts by writing about a specific topic</b>	Student has trouble establishing and developing a topic that can encompass two or more texts	Emphasis on comparison generates the topic: common ground yields to differentiation	Consistent emphasis on differentiation and specificity; avoids being reductive
<b>Ability to create thesis statement and defend with supporting evidence</b>	Lacks a clearly stated point of view and development	Student posits a general thesis and develops it with supporting evidence	Student posits an original thesis and supports it with convincing evidence
<b>Ability to incorporate information from secondary (critical, theoretical) sources:, etc.</b>	Student has trouble integrating outside quotes into fabric of argument	Student is able to quote and integrate relevant information from secondary sources into an argument	Student is able to paraphrase and engage with an author's argument vis-à-vis his/her own interpretation