

introduction to comparative literature



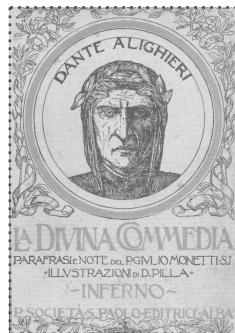
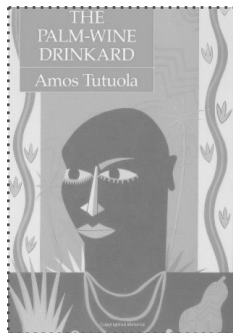
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COML 200 · Bryn Mawr College · Old Library 106

Office hours:

Wednesdays 2:00 - 4:00 & by appointment
<https://calendly.com/giammei/officehours>

This seminar explores a variety of approaches to the comparative or transnational study of literature through readings of several kinds: texts from different cultural traditions that raise questions about the nature and function of storytelling and literature; texts that comment on, respond to, and rewrite other texts from different historical periods and nations; translations; and readings in critical theory.



Assessment Components

Participation	30%
One Word Lecture	20%
Reading Journal	30%
Final Paper	20%

The main learning goals of this course are three. By the end of the semester, students will be able to: (1) Discuss and write critically about multiple primary sources from different traditions, languages, and genres at the same time. The incongruities and contradictions among sources will be an asset rather than an obstacle for interpretation and fabulation. (2) Autonomously explore unfamiliar literary cultures from a comparative perspective, aware of the risks of formal, national, historical, cultural, and monolingual approaches. (3) Read and put to use accessible theoretical scholarship with confidence and critical independence, interacting with global conversations on the interpretation and analysis of texts.

Whether you will attend it in a classroom or by connecting through zoom, **this class is designed as a collaborative seminar.** It includes short lectures by students, small-group activities, class-wide discussions, and interactive lecturing by the instructor. Its main goal is to develop foundational skills in a discipline that resists univocal definitions and the very concept of foundations.

This is not a normal semester and we should not pretend otherwise. I will do my best to be flexible and accommodate the needs generated by the evolving COVID emergency. However, I am not able to anticipate all the problems specific to each participant's situation. If my expectations or the resources that I provide are not compatible with what you are going through, please let me know.

OUR CLASS' COVENANT

This document, written and brainstormed online and in person, reflects the goals and aspirations of our learning community.

Students will always come to class prepared (i.e., they will read all the assigned readings each week and take some time to think about them and record their reactions and impressions in their journal). The instructor will always address the readings in class. When there is not enough time to address all the readings in a meeting, part of the following meeting will be devoted to what couldn't be discussed before.

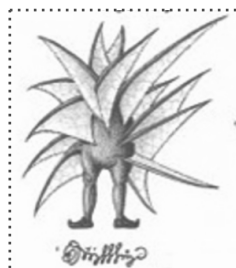
Comments and thoughts on any aspect or problem generated by the readings and by the conversation is welcome. However, we will collectively and consistently make an effort to exercise kindness in our interaction. We will intentionally assume that our interlocutors in class have good and constructive intentions.

Discussion, in this class, is not an adversary or competitive process through which we establish who is right. It is, instead, a way in which we build on each other's thoughts and intuition, working synergistically towards shared and multifaceted understanding of texts and discourses.

It is always okay to explore one's struggles and experiences of confusion when discussing texts and essays. However, all students in this class commit to be generous readers, willing to engage with difficult and strange objects of study.

The spontaneity of our class discussions is valuable. There is no expectation of originality and polished profundity: most comments will be imprecise and need help to be clarified, sometimes things will be repeated. The goal is not to perform but to understand, to think on our feet and together.

Participation looks different for everyone, whether it be speaking verbally, taking thoughtful notes, or listening to what others are saying. Participation will vary person to person, but meaningful participation is necessary to have a successful and valuable experience in the class.



Eating and drinking is always allowed during class, whether one is attending remotely or in person. However, it is important to eat/drink discreetly in order to respect those who are disturbed by food and beverages. It is also important to consider health safety when sharing the same space. Food and beverages will be consumed at a 12 feet distance from other people in normal conditions, and may be restricted to out-of-class in case the college raises the levels of alert.

No one will ever be pressured in any way to attend in person when classes are hybrid. The goal of hybrid classes is to integrate organically both remote and in-person students.

Don't be afraid to use Zoom reactions; they can really help the person speaking feel like they're being heard and understood if someone cannot respond/ doesn't feel comfortable to verbally respond to their comments.

The chat is an open space to contribute to class discussion, especially if one is attending remotely and has problems communicating orally. When something appears in the chat and the instructor doesn't notice, students who can contribute orally will intervene to bring the written message to everyone's attention.

A "jamboard" will help us retain ideas and comments that do not find space in class discussion, we will make an effort to keep an eye on it and let it inspire us when we are journaling, discussing in class, or elaborating papers.

It is advisable to keep phones on do not disturb during class time, so we stay more present and in the moment for discussion and activities. Lucid and focused presence is more conducive to learning but also a form of respect towards classmates and towards the material that we are studying.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENTS

1. Participation (an often misunderstood component)

Synchronous attendance is important for the success of this class. An important implicit goal of the class is to develop a familiarity with the environment of a discussion-based seminar on literature, rooted in extensive reading and an experimental attitude towards critical conversation. If you absolutely cannot attend a class meeting, please inform me in advance and let's figure out together how to make up for the missed class. Since this is a once-a-week, 3 hours seminar, it is absolutely crucial to **come to class prepared, and ready to contribute**. If serious reasons prevent you from completing the readings for a class, please be present anyway and inform me about such reasons. Not all readings require the same level of attention and investment, but you are expected to come to class with impressions and, ideally, questions about each of them. It is worth to note that it's always better, in this class, to spend more time with primary readings (i.e. works of literature and cinema), and to use the secondary readings (scholarship) to reflect on them.

Actively participating in discussions and activities during class time is the most obvious way to show your participation. You are always encouraged to be vocal, and to let me know how to make it easier for you to speak in class. However, there are **many other ways** to show that you are participating. You can, for instance, take good notes (which may include drawings, photos of marginalia on your copy of the readings, quotes from class discussion) in class and submit them, as a separate document, with your reading journal (see below). You can also connect to my office hours or schedule a zoom appointment just to have a conversation, one on one, about what we discussed in class, and show me that you were present and actively learning. In sum, I expect you to find your own way to make your participation visible, and I am always available to give you feedback and suggestions on this part of the assessment.

2. One Word Lecture (not your usual presentation)

Most classes will include this exercise, which is entirely led by a student or a small group of students. The task is to think of **one word** (accompanied, if you want, by **one image**) that has the potential of connecting the week's readings (the primary readings in particular) and defining the main topic(s) of the class. In no more than fifteen minutes, the lecturer will explain why they chose that specific word and/or image, and will open a general discussion on the readings and themes of the week by asking no more than three questions to the entire class. I will include a slide with the word and/or the image in my powerpoint, so please send it to me (along with the questions) in advance — no later than 9 am on the day you are lecturing, please! When more than one student is lecturing on the same day, they are encouraged to share their experience and collaborate but they are not expected to choose the same word and/or image. This portion of the grade is not determined by your performance, but by the generativeness of both the word (and image) that you chose and the way you offer the questions to the rest of the class. If you are uncomfortable speaking in public, you can provide me or another student with a written version of your lecture or a one-on-one oral explanation of the word and/or image: the designated speaker, on behalf of the lecturer, will read the text or report to the rest of the class about the conversation they had with the lecturer. The questions attached to your lecture should be clear, succinct, and, ideally, they should be 'real questions' (i.e. questions to which you don't have an answer yet). Time limits should be respected in order to leave room for discussion. You are welcome to share your word/image in advance with me to get some guidance or feedback.

3. Reading Journal

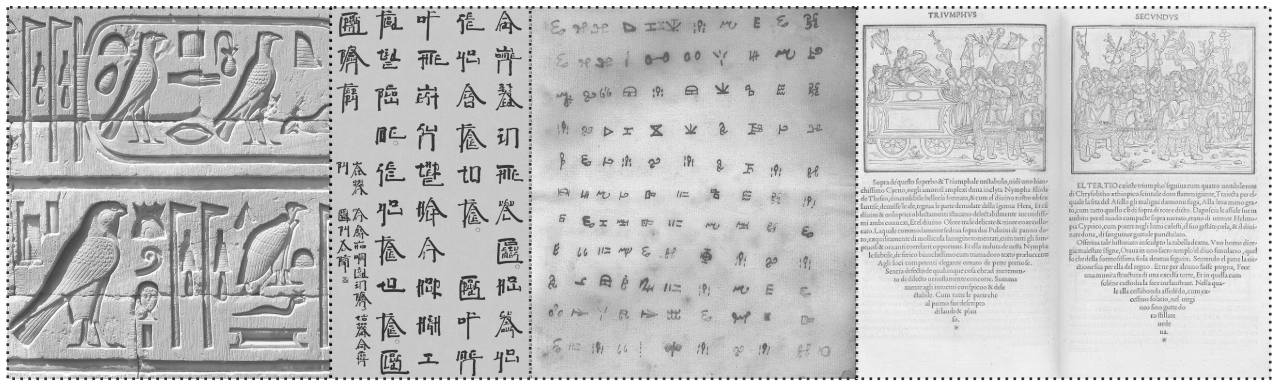
In addition to what you will do during class meetings, an important part of the course is based on the time you will spend with the material outside of class meetings. In the first eight weeks of the course you will work on a journal about your learning experience. The journal will be centered on your personal response to the assigned material (how it relates to what you already knew, what you learned from it, how it connects with the rest of the course). This journal can take many forms, depending on your specific skills, goals, and learning style: you can write, you can include images and other media, you can record your voice, you can translate, you can include texts that were not assigned and annotate or interpret them. I expect you to work on the equivalent of 1 double-spaced page of written text each week.

You will submit the first entry of this Journal at the end of week 2 (no later than Monday, September 21, by noon), for initial feedback. Then you will submit a comprehensive journal, including the first entry and the following 6, by the end of week 8 (no later than Monday, November 2, by noon). The resulting document (equivalent to 7 pages of written text cumulated throughout the first half of the semester) will be graded. After week 8, you will submit three additional entries of your learning journal based on the three Flexner Lectures given by Fred Moten on October 28, November 11, and November 18 at Bryn Mawr. We will prepare for these lectures in week 7.

If most of your journal is not a written text, you should put into it the same amount of time and energy that 10 one-page responses would require. The best way to approach this task is to work on the equivalent of a one-page response each week, and to revise and polish the cumulative document when wrapping up the submission. It is important that you work on this journal weekly, rather than concentrating the work in the days before submission: the journal should have an arc, and it is meant to document your engagement with the readings and your progress in the course. While submission of the first entry is required, I welcome informal submissions of journal entries any week: my feedback on them will not affect this portion of the grade, which is determined by the quality, breath, and honesty of your 2 official submissions (the first entry and the final journal). Students seeking Italian credit will write this journal in Italian, or will combine Italian and English in their entries. If any student wants to add portions of text in languages other than English or Italian, they should provide a translation. You are encouraged to attach to the journal any material that you produce while working for this class, including notes for the preparation of your one word lecture, brief reviews and impressions about material related to the course's themes that you encounter during the semester (film, tv, books, songs, webpages, etc.), reports of conversations and discussions with other students, ideas from other classes that connect with what we are doing in our seminar. Take ownership of this task and use it to show your participation, work, and interest.

4. Final Paper

Throughout the second part of the course (weeks 8-13) you will work towards a final paper. The paper must be an exercise of comparative literature, rooted in the material that we worked on but tailored to your specific interests and curiosity. We will spend a little time each week on this task, and we will devote the entirety of the last week of the course to a workshop on final papers. We will collectively write a rubric for the evaluation of the final paper, and establish a deadline based on the Bryn Mawr's academic calendar. The goal of this final task is for you to work independently, putting what we learned throughout the semester to use and producing your first work of scholarship in the field of comparative literature.



USEFUL INFORMATION
on e-mails and office hours

Take advantage of my office hours. If you absolutely can't connect on zoom during my office hours, we can schedule an appointment. It is always okay to ask about your performance in class and to give suggestions about how to make class better (more clear, more comfortable and inclusive, more focused, more effective). As explained above, I will gladly give you in-advance feedback on portions of your journal, and we can discuss it during office hours. Office hours should also be a safe space to admit that you are lost and go over material that you did not understand. Come to office hours with a specific goal in mind and please, help me understand how I can help you with it.

I'll do my best to respond to emails in a timely fashion. However, I receive an average of seventy-five messages a day, and on most days I only read emails twice a day between 9am and 5pm. Please be patient if I am not able to respond on the same day.

on access

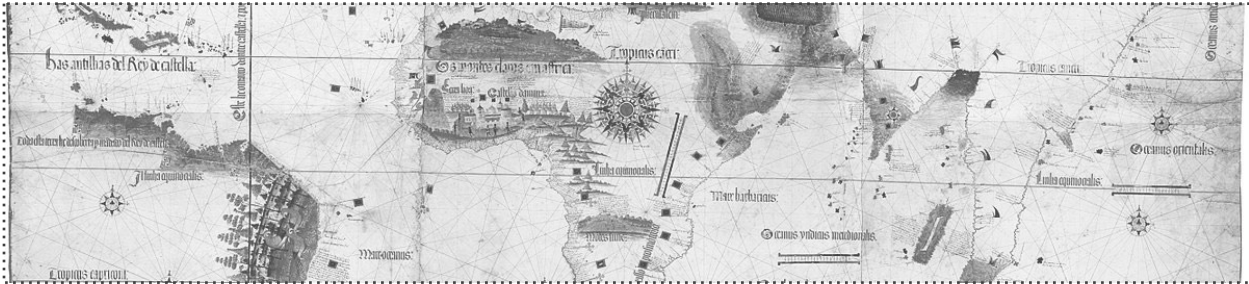
Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing equal access to students with a documented disability. Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Access Services. Students can call 610-526-7516 to make an appointment with the Access Services Director, Deb Alder, or email her at dalder@brynmawr.edu to begin this confidential process. Once registered, students should schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible to share the verification form and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement. More information can be obtained at the Access Services website. (<http://www.brynmawr.edu/access-services/>). Any student who has a disability-related need to tape record this class first must speak with the Access Services Director and to me. Class members need to be aware that this class may be recorded.

on the honor code

In completing all your assignments for this course, you are expected to abide by the Bryn Mawr College Honor Code. See sga.blogs.brynmawr.edu/honor-board/honor-code/ for more information. Note in particular that using someone else's ideas or words without quotation marks and/or bibliographic references is not acceptable in writing texts for Humanities classes. Use of google translator and similar automatic translators is also not acceptable for Italian concentrators. When in doubt about what to do with a source (and within reason), ask me.

CALENDAR

To connect to our zoom virtual room, please use the zoom links available on our moodle page.



September 8

Week 1

Covenant

This week we will establish our covenant and get to know each other. We will think about what Comparative Literature has been and may be.

Short reading

- Mary Louise Pratt, *Comparative Literature as a Cultural Practice*

September 15

Week 2

Forms

What is language? What's the difference between words and things? This week we will read nonsensical texts and reflect on some ideas proposed, in literary theory, by linguists, philosophers of language, structuralists, post-structuralists, and semioticians.

Primary Texts

- Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* (excerpt from novel with poems)
- Giulia Niccolai, *Humpty Dumpty; Greenwich; and Fac-Simile* (concrete poems)
- Xu Bing, *Humpty Dumpty; A Book from the Sky; A Book from the Ground* (excerpts from artist's books)
- Luigi Serafini, *Codex Seraphinianus* (encyclopedia)

Scholarship

- Hans Bertens, *Reading for Form I-II*
- Bill Brown, *Thing Theory*
- Tom Nicolas, *Semiotics: WTF? Introduction to Saussure, the Signifier and Signified*
<https://youtu.be/0Jtju9HdQVM>

Devices

- ANTANACLASIS
- ANAPHORA
- ALLITERATION

Storytelling

What do stories do, exactly? Is literature an evasion from reality or a way to enter reality more deeply? This week we will read stories about telling stories and reflect on the functions, limits, and power of literature as a technology.

Primary Texts

- Djibril Tamsir Niane, *Sundiata* (excerpts from epic poem)
- *One Thousand and One Nights* (introduction to collection of stories)
- Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron* (introduction to collection of stories)
- Jhumpa Lahiri, *A Temporary Matter* (short story)
- Brit Marling and Zal Batmanglij, *The OA*, season 1 episode 1 (optional, on Netflix)

Scholarship

- Terry Eagleton, "What is Literature?" in *Literary Theory*
- David Damrosch, "What is Literature?" in *How to Read World Literature*
- Joseph Hillis Miller, "Narrative," in *Critical Terms for Literary Studies*

Devices

No devices this week

Looking

Do readers affect texts? And how do texts inflict violence, heal, or transform readers? How do the points of view of authors, readers, and characters interplay? This week we will watch films and read texts that help addressing these questions.

Primary Texts

- *Illusions*, directed by Julie Dash
- *Blaxploitation*, directed by Fred Kwornu
- *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (one episode, sorted in class)

Scholarship

- Laura Mulvey, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*
- bell hooks, *The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectatorship*
- Stanley Fish, *Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics*

Devices

- LITOTES
- HYPERBOLE
- PLEONASM

Nations? (coming in)

What are the boundaries between nations made of? How much does it cost to cross them? This week we will reflect on the trans-national project inherent to comparative literature by reading texts that put the mythologies of nationhood (authenticity, bureaucracy, rootedness) into question.

Primary Texts	Scholarship	Devices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Jhumpa Lahiri, <i>Rice</i> (personal essay) · Igiaba Scego, <i>Sausages</i> (short story) · Lesley Nneka Arimah, <i>Wild and Light</i> (short stories) · Dan-El Padilla Peralta, <i>Undocumented</i> (memoir) · Homer, <i>Odyssey</i> (epic poem) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Franco Moretti, <i>Conjectures on World Literature</i> · W.E.B. DuBois, <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> · Frantz Fanon, <i>The So-Called Dependency Complex of Colonized People</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · SYLLEPSIS · ZEUGMA · CHIASMUS

Nations? (going out)

What happens when texts are designed to explore otherness from the point of view of the enchanted foreigner, the tourist, the colonizer? This week we will keep on reflecting on the act of crossing boundaries, on the risks of appropriation, fetishization, colonialism, and orientalism.

Primary Texts	Scholarship	Devices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Italo Calvino, <i>Invisible Cities</i> (novel) · Marco Polo, <i>Book of the Marvels of the World</i> (travelogue) · Elizabeth Gilbert, <i>Eat, Pray, Love</i> (memoir) · <i>The Last Emperor</i> directed by Bernardo Bertolucci 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Edward Said, <i>Orientalism</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · METONYMY · SYNECDOCHE

October 20

Week 7

Undercommons

This week we will pause and immerse ourselves in the work of Fred Moten, a poet and thinker who is going to give the Flexner Lectures at Bryn Mawr this year. Moten's work helps understanding how feeble are the boundaries between creative and critical writing, and how

Primary Texts

- Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons*
- Fred Moten, *Black and Blur*

Devices

- EPISTROPHE
- ANTANAGOGE

October 27

Week 8

November 3

Week 9

Inferno

For two weeks we will focus on Dante's *Inferno*. We will read it in its entirety, with the help of essays by Gary Cestaro, Jorge Luis Borges, C.S. Adoyo, and Erich Auerbach about the queer, structural, narrative, and figural aspects of the *Divine Comedy*.

Device: SIMILE

November 10

Week 10

November 17

Week 11

The Palm Wine Drinkard

For two weeks we will focus on Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard*. We will read it in its entirety, with the help of essays by Dylan Thomas, Achille Mbembe, John Murra, and Omolara Leslie about the controversy that the novel generated among Nigerian and Anglo-American critics and about its role in post-colonial thought and critical race theory.

Device: METAPHOR

Thanksgiving Break

December 1

Week 12

Spirited Away

We conclude this last section of our course with a third narrative of crossing boundaries and self-discovery, an animated film that we will interpret with the help of comparative essays by Julian Knox, Weeraya Donsomsakulkij, Noriko T. Reider, and Susan Napier.

Device: SYNESTHESIA

December 8

Week 13

Workshop on Final Papers