



ENGL 2401 / COML 2401: Literature and Theory **Theories of World Literature**

Professor Max Cavitch
spring 2024
TR 12:00-1:30PM

description and contents

Over the past three decades especially, “World Literature” has moved to the center of literary studies, asking teachers and students to re-examine fundamental concepts, categories, and practices, including periodization, nationalism, specialization and expertise, canonicity, translation, monolingualism and the rise of “global English,” comparativism, area studies, postmodernism and postcoloniality, literacy, access, and digitalization. In this advanced seminar, we’ll start by looking at the nineteenth-century origins of this phenomenon in Goethe’s influential concept of *Weltliteratur* and the invention of the field of Comparative Literature. We’ll then quickly review the twentieth-century history of literary studies, including the rise of “theory,” before concentrating our full attention on the rapid twenty-first-century escalation of interest in the meanings, values, and conditions of “world literature.” Because the course is taught in English, we’ll be particularly concerned with the meanings and consequences of “global English.” And we’ll explore the broader effects on literary studies of twenty-first-century phenomena such as digitalization, new media, identitarianism, neo-liberalism, multinational corporate hegemony, and the crisis of higher education. Fundamental questions of limit, scale, and boundary will help coordinate our evaluation of diverse works by some of the most influential theorists of “world literature,” including Emily Apter, David Damrosch, Jacques Derrida, Theo D’haen, David Gramling, Franco Moretti, Aamir Mufti, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Yasmin Yildiz. Requirements will include a few short response papers, an in-class presentation, and a research-based, idea-driven final essay.

course structure

seminar: discussion-based with occasional lectures/presentations

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required readings

books for purchase: both print and e-copies acceptable

critical/theoretical essays: made freely available for downloading/printing

assignments and requirements

attendance and in-class participation: required

pop quizzes: to assess and reward timely completion of reading assignments

in-class presentations and group work: to hone research and speaking skills

several very short essays and response-papers: to hone research and writing skills

mid-term exam: to assess retention and understanding of course readings and lectures

final exam: to assess retention and understanding of course readings and lectures

weekly workload

required reading: moderate-to-heavy (approx. 100-200 pages per week)

required writing: light-to-moderate (averaging roughly two pages per week)

requirements filled by this course

English Major: Sector 1: Theory and Poetics (AETP); Sector 6: 20th & 21st Centuries (AE20)

English Concentration Attribute: 20th-21st Century Concentration ([AE21](#)); Theory & Cultural Studies Concentration (AETC)