

**EN/HUMA/TRAN 6157 3.0**  
**Comparative and World Literature Seminar: History and Practice**

Prof. Katarina O'Briain  
[kobriain@yorku.ca](mailto:kobriain@yorku.ca)

**Course Description**

This seminar introduces the study of comparative and world literature from a variety of angles relating to questions of history, theory, and practice. We will consider the nineteenth-century European origins of Comparative Literature, as well as several global histories of the study of world literature. Some recurring topics for investigation will include: the ethics and politics of translation; the relationship between postcolonial studies and world literature; histories of globalization and uneven distribution; world literature and the problem of scale; close reading and alternate methods of interpretation; peripheral and catastrophic realisms; global Indigenous literatures; and oceanic studies. An abiding question for our seminar will be about ways of decentring Western theory from the study of world literature and the kinds of global and regional theories, methods, and knowledges that world literature may open up. We will also think about the perils, limits, and possibilities of such a project. Theoretical and methodological essays will be read alongside brief selections from world literary texts; students will be encouraged to bring their own interests and examples to the seminar.

This is the required course for both the Humanities Graduate Diploma in Comparative Literature and the English Graduate Diploma in World Literature. Students who are not enrolled in either diploma are also welcome.

**Evaluation**

Active and Informed Participation:	20%
Two Seminar Presentation Papers:	35%
Final Research Paper (4000 words):	45%

**Readings may include:**

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Johann Peter Eckermann, "Conversations on World Literature" (1827)  
Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, Selections from *Comparative Literature* (1886)  
Georg Brandes, "World Literature" (1899)  
Rabindranath Tagore, "World Literature" (1907)  
Zheng Zhenduo, "A View on the Unification of Literature" (1922)  
Kobayashi Hideo, "Chaos in the Literary World" (1934)  
Erich Auerbach, "Philology and *Weltliteratur*" (1952)  
Octavio Paz, "Poetry, Society, State" (1956)  
Édouard Glissant, "Cross-Cultural Poetics: National Literatures" (1981)

Edward Said, Selections from *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983)

Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature” (2000); “More Conjectures” (2003)

Djelal Kadir, “To World, to Globalize — Comparative Literature’s Crossroads” (2004)

Pascale Casanova, “Literature as a World” (2005)

Jing Tsu, “Getting Ideas about World Literature in China” (2010)

Revathi Krishnaswamy, “Toward World Literary Knowledges: Theory in the Age of Globalization” (2010)

Gaurav Desai, “Oceans Connect: The Indian Ocean and African Identities” (2010)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and David Damrosch, “Comparative Literature/World Literature: A Discussion” (2011)

Jodi Byrd, selections from *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (2011)

Alice Te Punga Somerville, selections from *Once Were Pacific: Māori Connections to Oceania* (2012)

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, selections from *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986); selections from *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (2012)

Emily Apter, selections from *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (2013)

Lawrence Venuti, selections from *Translation Changes Everything: Theory and Practice* (2013)

Aamir R. Mufti, selections from *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures* (2016)

Pheng Cheah, selections from *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (2016)

Debjani Ganguly, selections from *This Thing Called the World: The Contemporary Novel as Global Form* (2016)

Simon Gikandi “Contested Grammars: Comparative Literature, Translation, and the Challenge of Locality” (2011); “*Song of Lawino*: Translation, Textuality, and the Making of an African Reading Public” (2021)

Supriya Chaudhuri, “Which world, whose literature?” (2021)

Wail S. Hassan, “Geopolitics of Comparison: World Literature *Avant la Lettre*” (2021)