

EN942-20 Fundamentals of World Literature

21/22

Department

English and Comparative Literary Studies

Level

Research Postgraduate Level

Module leader

Paulo De Sousa Aguiar de Medeiros

Credit value

20

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

The familiar models of organizing literary studies by language groups, period, genre, nationality, and traits of aesthetic genius are in a perhaps terminal crisis of obsolescence. Thomas Kuhn argued that a discipline's paradigms of theoretical knowledge production broke apart when their conceptual frameworks could no longer coherently explain its evidence. Literary studies in the twenty-first century now face such a bifurcation, partly as a result of three interlinking trends. The legacy of post-war British cultural studies and "history from the bottom up" has dramatically expanded the social context and comparative evidentiary matter of literary studies beyond a highly selective tradition of canonical works, an event that undermines aesthetic-value based categories and helps the refusal to differentiate between the "literary" and sub- or para-literary. Digitalization has furthered this trend as the readily available archive has exponentially expanded far beyond the human capacity of individual researchers; information overload has hit the humanities. Finally, "postcolonialism" has critiqued the parameters of Anglophone and Comparative literary studies as complicit with Euro-American domination that implicitly rests on racializing distinctions. The traditional model of comparative literary studies involving Latin, Greek, and European languages is also suffering, on the one hand, from the increasing hegemony of English as a world language, due to the erosion of foreign language knowledge among contemporary students, and, on the other, questions about the exclusion of other tongues such as Farsi, Cantonese Chinese, Hindi,

and Swahili, to name but a few.

One of this module's working theses is that the dominant models of post-war literary studies are no longer tenable and that the "linguistic turn" of High Theory during the last quarter of the twentieth century was a compensatory gesture that delayed, but could not remove, the intrinsic crisis in (comparative) literary studies. An ensuing corollary is that we need to explore new models for literary studies, and this module will introduce one such attempt - the question of conceptualizing texts in a global frame (the world literature debate) and a turn to world-systems perspectives. As critics have moved away from the linguistic nation as a classificatory device for cultural production, there has been a desire to consider global relations and area studies (like "Atlanticism") as a better model. Yet this turn still operates mainly at the rhetorical level as it lacks a methodology and logic of ordering material. One solution is the world-systems approach that sees the rise of historical capitalism as a network of competing players trying to gain power through the control of international and domestic factions. Because this model originates from a loose collective of economic historians, political scientists, and large-structure sociologists, the exact relations between (literary) culture and the history of global formations has been under-theorized. The module's aims are firstly, to familiarize our future cultural researchers with the terminology, claims, and points of difference in the debate surrounding world-systems so that they can enter the ongoing debate about "world literature" as a new paradigm for twentieth-first century literary studies. Before literature scholars can deploy this new perspective, they must become familiar with a set of inter-disciplinary arguments and considerations. Secondly, the module aims to suggest ways in which the current disjunction between cultural studies, modern languages, and postcolonialism can be coherently bridged through comparative analyses of a society's incorporation into the capitalist world-economy.

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

To familiarize students with the basic methodological and theoretical debates, context, and concerns for the contemporary study of world literature, as a disciplinary field incorporating comparative literary, postcolonial, and area cultural studies. The module will form the core module for the proposed MA World Literature.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1: The Debates on World Literature (readings from *World Literature in Theory*. Ed. David Damrosch. Wiley-Blackwell, 2014. ISBN: 978-1118407691. Damrosch, "Introduction: World Literature in Theory and Practice"; Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature" and "More Conjectures"; Apter, "Against World Literature".

Week 2: The Emergence of Cultural Materialism: Raymond Williams, selections from *The Country and the City*; Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory"; and Terry Eagleton, "The Rise of English" (from *Literary Theory: An Introduction*).

Week 3: Messy Beginnings: Marx, "The Secret of So-Called Primitive Accumulation" from Capital Vol. 1 (pdf) and Stephen Shapiro, How To Read Marx's Capital.

Week 4: World-System of Historical Capitalism: Immanuel Wallerstein, World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction 2004 [purchase] Additionally, a small essay: I. Wallerstein. "World-Systems Analysis: The Second Phase", Review 13.2 (1990): 287-293. Additional reading if desired. Wilma A. Dunaway, "Incorporation as an Interactive Process: Cherokee Resistance to Expansion of the Capitalist World-System, 1560-1763.

Week 5: Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature (chapter 1 as pdf)

Week 6: Different Reading, Reading Differently: Christina Sharpe, In the Wake: On Blackness and Being. Duke UP, 2016.

Week 7: Global Reading 1: Caren Irr, Toward the Geopolitical Novel: U.S. Fiction in the Twenty-First Century. Columbia UP, 2014.

Week 8: Global Reading 2: Michael Allan. In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt. Princeton UP, 2016.

Week 9: Global Reading 3: B. Venkat Mani. Recoding World Literature: Libraries, Print Culture, and Germany's Pact with Books. Fordham UP, 2016.

Week 10: Another World, Another Literature: Reading in the Present: The Invisible Committee. Now. Semiotext(e), 2017.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- To provide a foundational overview of World Literary Studies and enable students to interpret, evaluate and critique the key debates and major theoretical concepts in the field, both in its historical development and at the forefront of current work.
- To develop a comprehensive and advanced understanding of a variety of literary texts from a range of periods and genres, and to be able to analyse these using a variety of theoretical tools and perspectives
- Demonstrate an ability to understand the complex contextual frames (historical, social, cultural) within which World Literature has been and continues to be read, translated, interpreted, received, and understood.
- To confidently and autonomously apply advanced conceptual ideas to the interpretation of World Literature
- To work independently to devise advanced hypotheses regarding the current state of World Literature and World Literary studies

Indicative reading list

World Literature in Theory. Ed. David Damrosch. Wiley-Blackwell, 2014.

Damrosch, "Introduction: World Literature in Theory and Practice"

Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature" and "More Conjectures"

Emily Apter, "Against World Literature".

Raymond Williams, selections from The Country and the City

Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory"

Terry Eagleton, "The Rise of English" (from *Literary Theory: An Introduction*)

Marx, "The Secret of So-Called Primitive Accumulation" from *Capital* Vol. 1

Stephen Shapiro, *How To Read Marx's Capital*

Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* 2004

Wallerstein. "World-Systems Analysis: The Second Phase", *Review* 13.2 (1990): 287-293.

Wilma A. Dunaway, "Incorporation as an Interactive Process: Cherokee Resistance to Expansion of the Capitalist World-System, 1560-1763."

WReC, *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Duke UP, 2016.

Caren Irr, *Toward the Geopolitical Novel: U.S. Fiction in the Twenty-First Century*. Columbia UP, 2014.

Michael Allan. *In the Shadow of World Literature: Sites of Reading in Colonial Egypt*. Princeton UP, 2016.

B. Venkat Mani. *Recoding World Literature: Libraries, Print Culture, and Germany's Pact with Books*. Fordham UP, 2016.

Research element

All students are required to propose a research question and discuss it with module convenor. Essays must reflect some independent research.

International

Authors of texts read in the module are from diverse areas and engage with a variety of national and transnational perspectives including Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas, occasionally from Australia as well. Furthermore, the concepts debated are intrinsically international.

Subject specific skills

- To interpret, evaluate and critique the key debates and major theoretical concepts in World Literary studies, both in its historical development and at the forefront of current work in the field.
- Demonstrate an ability to understand the complex contextual frames (historical, social, cultural) within which World Literature has been and continues to be read, translated, interpreted, received, and understood.
- To confidently and autonomously apply advanced conceptual ideas to the interpretation of World Literature
- To develop independent research skills that enable a self-directed research project in the field
- To develop a comprehensive and specialized insight into a particular topic relating to the field of World Literature
- To work independently to devise advanced hypotheses regarding the current state of World Literature and World Literary studies
- Demonstrate an ability to prepare and execute an extended research project that evaluates, critiques and advances the field of literary studies, especially as related to World Literature
- Advanced understanding of the circuits of publication, translation, and literary 'value' in a

globalised cultural sphere

- Targeted intervention, through cultural commentary or writing for diverse audiences, on topics related to the study of World Literature (eg. immigration and asylum, multiculturalism, forms of racial and ethnic representation in popular media, translation and cultural capital, world-systems theory and neoliberalism).

Transferable skills

- To develop a comprehensive and advanced understanding of a variety of literary texts from a range of periods and genres.
 - To develop independent research skills that enable a self-directed research project in the field
 - Demonstrate an ability to prepare and execute an extended research project that evaluates, critiques and advances the field of literary studies.
 - Bridging cultural and linguistic diversity through a more mature and developed understanding of local, regional, and global interrelationships
 - Systematic abstraction of complex valences
 - Critical reflection and informed opinion on the formations of power
 - Evidence of being able to conduct advanced-level and extended independent research projects in culturally complex topics
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Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	10 sessions of 2 hours (10%)
Other activity	56 hours (28%)
Private study	124 hours (62%)
Total	200 hours

Private study description

Research & reading

Other activity description

Students must prepare extensive list of readings for discussion at each week's seminar. Students must develop and present a research question and a proposal for a final essay. Students must carry out some independent research linked to their chosen topic. Students must write a final essay.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A1

	Weighting	Study time
5,000 word essay	100%	

Feedback on assessment

Oral comments in seminars; oral comments on optional presentation. Detailed written comments on final essay.

Availability

There is currently no information about the courses for which this module is core or optional.