CP510 The Text

Approaches to Comparative Literature

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CONTENTS

1. Synopsis
2. Learning objectives
3. How the module will be taught
4. Assessment, deadlines, plagiarism, feedback
5. Academic support and Academic practice
   5.1 Academic support
   5.2 Academic practice
6. Learning resources
7. Personal development
8. Order of lectures and seminars
9. Bibliography
1. SYNOPSIS
This module is designed to cultivate modes of comparative critical reading. Topics for discussion include: the nature and function of the literary text; genre; narrative; poetic form; realism, romance, and the fantastic; and the avant-garde, modernist, and postmodern text. Among the ways of reading explored in this module are Russian formalism, structuralism, psychoanalytic criticism, and deconstruction. Students have the opportunity to study in a comparative manner short literary texts by a wide range of authors, including Antonin Artaud, Charles Baudelaire, Samuel Beckett, Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Dante, Nikolai Gogol, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Franz Kafka, Edgar Allan Poe, Marcel Proust, Laurence Sterne, and Emile Zola, together with a range of critical-theoretical writings.

2. LEARNING OBJECTIVES
- This is the core Stage 2 module in Comparative Literature and introduces students to various forms of comparative critical reading.
- It helps to develop students’ ability to analyse literary works through close reading, with particular attention to such matters as literary style and structure, and the ways in which themes including dreams, madness, love, and the supernatural have been treated in literature across the ages.
- The module introduces students to ways of analysing the relationship between literature and the other arts, including painting, photography, and film.
- It gives students an opportunity to consider what makes Comparative Literature distinct as a discipline, and what the implications might be of reading literary works in translation.

By the end of the module you will have:
- improved your oral communication skills through participation in seminars and through the delivery of one formal 30-minute seminar presentation;
- refined your written communication skills, including the structuring of an original argument, through the writing of three 2000-word essays;
- developed the ability to read closely and critically, and to apply a range of critical terms to literary texts;
- honed your ability to undertake the comparative analysis of literature;

3. HOW THE MODULE WILL BE TAUGHT
The teaching for this module takes the following form:
- A weekly one-hour lecture
- A weekly two-hour seminar
Lectures
You are strongly advised to attend the weekly lectures for this module, since these will contain essential information for understanding the various critical concepts and modes of reading upon which we focus in the seminars.

Seminars
All the primary reading for the seminars is available in a Textpack, which you may obtain from the SECL General Enquiries Office (CNW113). The primary reading is also available electronically on Moodle. IMPORTANT: You should bring a copy of each week’s reading to the seminar.

4. ASSESSMENT, DEADLINES, PLAGIARISM, FEEDBACK

Mode of Assessment
This module is assessed 100% on coursework. All students are required to deliver one 30-minute group seminar presentation, and to write three essays of 2000 words each. The assessment pattern for the module is as follows:

- 26.66%: First essay (2000 words)
- 26.66%: Second essay (2000 words)
- 26.66%: Third essay (2000 words)
- 20%: Seminar presentation (30 minutes)

Essays
The essay requirement for this module is three essays of 2000 words each. All three essays must be COMPARATIVE in nature (i.e. they must compare at least two texts by different authors from two different national literatures — English, French, German, Spanish, etc.). You may not write, for instance, on two works from the English literary tradition.

All three essays should include CLOSE CRITICAL ANALYSES of selected passages from a range of literary texts. These texts should be taken from the module Textpack (on Moodle), although you are also allowed to write on texts of your own choice as long as your essays include analyses of one or more texts from the Textpack as well.

The title of your first essay title should be chosen from Section A of the module Essay Questions (see section 3, Essay Questions, below). The title of your second essay should be chosen from Section B. The title of your third essay may be chosen from either Section A or Section B. Alternatively, you may also design your own essay question. If you decide to do so you must consult the seminar leader before you start writing.

PLEASE NOTE: You may NOT write more than once on the same text, and your essays may NOT be on the same texts as you choose for your seminar presentation. This is to ensure that you range sufficiently widely across the material being studied on this module.
Essay Deadlines

- First essay: FRIDAY OF WEEK 12 (last week of Autumn Term)
- Second essay: FRIDAY OF WEEK 24 (last week of Spring Term)
- Third essay: FRIDAY OF WEEK 25 (first week of Summer Term)

All essay deadlines must be strictly adhered to, and no extension can be granted without concessionary evidence. Essays handed in after the deadline without concessionary evidence will receive a mark of zero.

Essay Submission (hard copy and electronic copy)

1. An electronic version of your essay MUST be submitted via the relevant Moodle page by 11.00 p.m. on the day of the deadline. Late submissions will result in a mark of zero.

2. A hard copy of the essay MUST be handed in to your seminar leader as soon as possible after the Moodle deadline. Your seminar leader will advise you about how to submit your hard copy.

THESE COPIES MUST BE IDENTICAL. THIS WILL BE CHECKED.

(Students can hand in hard copies before the deadline by arrangement with the seminar leader).

Seminar Presentation

Your seminar presentation should last for about 30 minutes. Your presentation should begin with a short general introduction to the topic under consideration: for instance, if you are speaking about romance, you should explain what you understand by this term and how it might be applied to literary texts. You should then go on to offer a CLOSE READING of two or more texts chosen from the appropriate part of the Textpack.

You should explore the ways in which the selected texts correspond to, or depart from, the kind of writing under consideration: for instance, if the topic is romance, in which respects do the selected texts exhibit traits of romance writing and in which respects, if any, do they depart from romance. You are also encouraged to try to situate the texts historically and culturally.

In your presentation, do NOT just rehearse well-known facts about authors’ biographies or general information downloaded from the internet. If you mention biographical or historical facts, these facts need to be directly relevant for your argument on the passages from the Textpack.

IMPORTANT: Your seminar presentation MUST be on a different topic and texts from those upon which you write your three essays.
For further, more general, information on delivering a seminar presentation, please see section 5 (Essay Writing and Seminar Presentations), below.

**Plagiarism**
Plagiarism is the reproduction in any work submitted for assessment or review of any material derived from work authored by another **without clearly acknowledging the source.**
This includes academic books, journals and websites, as well as work submitted by another student studying at Kent or at a different university/college, or work that a student has already submitted for assessment, either at this University or elsewhere.

Full details of the University of Kent’s Academic Discipline regulations can be found under Annex 10 of the Credit Framework for Taught Programmes: [http://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/creditinfoannex10.html](http://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/creditinfoannex10.html)

**Feedback**
All students will receive one-to-one feedback on their first essay in Week 13.

**NOTES ON ESSAY WRITING AND SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS**

**Essay Writing**
Essential information on essay writing and the referencing system (style guide) in use in Comparative Literature as, academic integrity and plagiarism is available in the Comparative Literature BASICS handbook. You MUST refer to the BASICS handbook and familiarize yourselves with these issues. An electronic version is available on Moodle: [https://moodle.kent.ac.uk/moodle/login/index.php](https://moodle.kent.ac.uk/moodle/login/index.php)

**Seminar Presentations**
In addition to the module-specific guidance on seminar presentations given above in section 1.3 (Assessment, Essays, Deadlines, Seminar Presentations, Plagiarism), please bear in mind the following general points as you plan your presentation:

- You should plan and prepare the seminar as a team (this is a very useful skill to master).
- Make sure that you have a clear plan for the seminar. It may be useful to distribute this in the form of a handout at the beginning of the seminar.
- Make sure you have enough material to get you through the seminar, but do not be too ambitious: you only have 30 minutes.
- Have an agreed approach – there is nothing worse than asking each other in the middle of the presentation what you are supposed to be doing next.
- Consider finishing the presentation with a question or questions to the seminar group.

Try to remember the following when giving your presentation:

- Speak clearly and slowly – people may want to take notes.
• Speak from notes, but try not to read from a prepared text (people lose track).
• You may find it helpful to use the whiteboard or other visual aids such as PowerPoint.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Section A

1. Write an essay comparing and contrasting different approaches to a single theme (e.g. dreaming, madness, love, war, death, a particular animal) in a range of literary texts.

2. Is it possible to distinguish those uses of language which could be called literary from those which cannot? You should include close analysis of the texts chosen as examples in this essay.

3. All literary texts contain non-literary elements, and all non-literary texts contain literary elements. Discuss this claim, using a range of examples.

4. Write an essay comparing and contrasting two or more translations of a given text, and relating these translations to a theory or theories of translation.

5. A translation is always a poor imitation of the original. Is this true?

6. Write an essay on the usefulness or otherwise of the concept of genre in the study of literature. (You should include a range of literary examples in your answer.)

7. Is it true that the novel is a genre without rules?

8. With a range of examples, give a critical account of how writers of fiction manage to persuade their readers to suspend disbelief and accept the reality of the world they have created.

9. Write an essay analysing one of the following in a range of prose narratives: narrative voice; perspective; narrative levels; the relation of story and plot.

10. ‘Poetic language organizes, tightens, the resources of everyday language, and sometimes even does violence to them, in an effort to force us into awareness and attention’ (Wellek and Warren). Write and essay on the nature and function of poetic language.

11. Write an essay comparing and contrasting a range of poetic texts that rely upon the same form (e.g. sonnet, terza rima, ode, hymn).

12. According to G. H. Lewes, romance is simply ‘falsism’. Can a case be made in defence of romance?

13. Write an essay analysing one of the following in a range of Romantic texts: characterization, plot, setting, the quest, morality, representations of gender.
14. Is the fantastic a genre the function of which can be limited to the entertainment of its readers?

15. ‘The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event’ (Todorov). Discuss in relation to a range of literary examples.

16. ‘While it is true that the conventions of realism change from one period to the next, this does not necessarily justify the conclusion that “realism” is a purely relative term’ (Wallace Martin). Discuss.

17. Using a range of examples, write an essay comparing and contrasting realism and romance.

18. ‘The design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a literary work of art’ (Wimsatt and Beardsley). Consider the advantages and disadvantages of the claim that all knowledge of the author is irrelevant to the appreciation of a literary text.

19. ‘A literary work is not, as many people assume, an imitation in words of some pre-existing reality but, on the contrary, it is the creation or discovery of a new, supplementary world, a metaworld, a hyper-reality’ (J. Hillis Miller). Discuss using a range of literary examples.

Section B

20. Does it make sense to say that the reader participates in the construction of a text?

21. What purposes might be served by the kind of textual experimentation carried out by one or more avant-garde movement in the early decades of the twentieth century?

22. Can texts be deemed successful if we fail to make total sense of them?

23. To what extent does modernism mark a break from, and/or continuation of, realism?

24. Write an essay analysing one of the following in two or more modernist texts: characterization, plot, interior monologue, myth, representations of gender.

25. Is it possible to establish a clear distinction between modernism and postmodernism?

26. Write an essay on the function of self-referentiality in literature; that is, on texts that appear to refer to themselves and their own construction rather than to a world outside the text.
27. Postmodern literature is mere game-playing without any serious purpose. Is this true?

28. ‘All writing is rewriting.’ Discuss this view of intertextuality.

29. With a range of examples, write an essay on the importance of an awareness of intertextuality to the appreciation of literary texts.

30. Can the relation of image to text be described as a purely illustrative one?

31. Discuss the relationship between text and image in any two writers of your choice.

32. Write an essay on the advantages and disadvantages of a formalist approach to the literary text.

33. The literariness of a text lies in its form rather than its content. Discuss with a range of literary examples.

34. What are the advantages and disadvantages of applying psychoanalysis to a literary text?

35. What do you understand by the ‘uncanny’, and what is its relation to the literary?

36. ‘There are no fixed texts, but only interpretative strategies making them’ (Stanley Fish). Discuss.

37. Literary texts are always self-deconstructive. Discuss.

38. Write an essay on the importance of one of the following in a range of literary texts: ambiguity, linguistic play, difficulty, self-reflexivity, structure.

39. ‘To read is to compare’ (George Steiner). Using a range of literary texts, write an essay on the advantages of a comparative approach to literature.

40. Comparative literature questions the legitimacy of various kinds of border. Discuss.
5. ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC PRACTICE

5.1 Academic support

- Please contact your Seminar Leader or Module Convenor if you have any feedback, questions or academic concerns about module content or management.
- Each student will be allocated a member of the SECL academic staff as their personal Academic Adviser. Your Adviser will be available to answer your academic queries or listen to any concerns.
- The SECL Student Support team provides pastoral support for students who are experiencing long- or short-term personal or medical difficulties. Pastoral matters concern management of attendance and deadlines.
- Students should contact the SECL Student Support team at seclstusup@kent.ac.uk if they need to request an extension to a deadline, or a concession for impaired performance (e.g. due to illness). Further information about extensions and concessions can be found on the SECL Student Support Moodle page at https://moodle.kent.ac.uk/2013/course/view.php?id=2831

5.2 Academic practice

- Please see the SECL Undergraduate Moodle page for essay-writing guidelines and more: https://moodle.kent.ac.uk/2013/course/view.php?id=2781

1.5 LEARNING RESOURCES

- All primary texts for this module are included in the Textpack, which is available in hard copy from the General Enquires office in SECL and in electronic form on Moodle
- Lecture notes will be posted on Moodle after each lecture
- Seminar notes will be posted on Moodle as appropriate

See also:

- Library homepage: http://www.kent.ac.uk/library/
- Student essentials: http://www.kent.ac.uk/library/students/index.html
- Subject guides: http://www.kent.ac.uk/library/subjects/index.html
7. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

By the end of the module you will have:

- developed your teamwork skills by collaborating with fellow students;
- gained more confidence in initiating and participating in group discussion;
- enhanced your ability to undertake independent research.

By the end of the module you will have achieved a higher level of literacy and familiarized yourself with the following key skills:

- Information technology (in particular word processing and data searches)
- Communication and team building (through presentations, given either individually or in groups)
- Problem solving (by undertaking independent research in the University library and on the internet)
- Creative critical thinking (by approaching literary texts and essay questions in an original and innovative way)

In the course of this module, you will improve your oral communication skills through participation in seminar discussions and through the delivery of seminar presentations, as well as refine your written communication skills through the writing of essays. Furthermore, you will hone your ability to think critically, sharpen your analytical skills and improve your attention to textual detail. All of these skills are essential in the current job market, and will enhance your chances of finding suitable employment after having obtained your degree.

Employability

For SECL Employability information, see:
http://www.kent.ac.uk/secl/employability/index.html

For Employability information specific to Comparative Literature, see:
http://www.kent.ac.uk/secl/complit/employability.html

Kent’s Career and Employability Service: for help with career choice, planning and decision-making: http://www.kent.ac.uk/ces/
## 8. ORDER OF LECTURES AND SEMINARS

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<tr>
<th>Wk</th>
<th>Lecture Topic</th>
<th>Seminar Texts (on Moodle; * = extract)</th>
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</table>
| 1  | Introduction                   | Coleridge, ‘Kubla Khan’ (1816)  
Baudelaire, ‘The Double Room’ (1862)  
Proust, *Combray* (1913)*          |
| 2  | Defining the Literary Text     | Gadamer: ‘Language as the Medium of Hermeneutic Experience’ (1960) *  
Kafka, ‘Before the Law’ (1919)     |
| 3  | The Text in Translation        | Baudelaire, ‘The Blind’ (1857)  
Maupassant, ‘Boule de Suif’ (1880)*  
Schleiermacher, ‘On Translating’ (1813) |
| 4  | Literary Genres                | Euripides, *Hippolytus* (428 BC)*  
Racine, *Phaedra* (1677)*  
Kane, *Phaedra’s Love* (1996)*  
| 5  |                                | READING WEEK                                                                                           |
| 6  | Reading Narrative              | Culler: ‘Narrative’ (1997) *  
Poe, ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ (1843)  
Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wall-Paper* (1892) |
| 7  | The Poetic Text                | Eagleton, ‘The Functions of Criticism’ (2007)*  
Shakespeare, ‘Sonnet 55’ (late 16th century)  
Mandelstam, ‘The Stalin Epigram’ (1933)  
Plath, ‘Full Fathom Five’ (1958) |
| 8  | From Romance to Romanticism    | *The Quest of the Holy Grail* (13th century)*  
Keats, ‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’ (1819)  
Pushkin, ‘The Queen of Spades’ (1833) |
| 9  |                                | READING WEEK                                                                                           |
| 10 | The Fantastic                  | Gogol, ‘The Nose’ (1836)  
Potocki, *The Manuscript found in Saragossa* (1914)  
| 11 | From Realism to Naturalism    | Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (1605)*  
Zola, *Thérèse Raquin* (1867)*  
Barthes: ‘The Reality Effect’ (1968) |
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Essay Submission</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CHRISTMAS VACATION</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Essay Feedback</td>
<td>One-on-one feedback to students on their first essay</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>READING WEEK</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>READING WEEK</td>
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<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Psychoanalysing the Text</td>
<td>Hoffmann, ‘The Sandman’ (1817) Freud, ‘The Uncanny’ (1919)*</td>
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<td>24</td>
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9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Please see Library Reading Lists: http://resourcelists.kent.ac.uk/index.html
- There is also a direct link to the module reading list in Moodle.

PRIMARY READING (IN TEXTPACK AND ON MOODLE)

**Week 1**

**Week 2**

**Week 3**
Charles Baudelaire, five English translations of the poem ‘Les Aveugles’:
Week 4
Sarah Kane, extract from *Phaedra’s Love*, in *Complete Plays* (London: Methuen Drama, 2001), pp. 64–85

Week 6

Week 7

Week 8

Week 10
Week 11

Week 14

Week 15

Week 16

Week 18
Week 19

Week 20

Week 22

Week 23