



THE POLITICS OF WORLD LITERATURE

Entangled Histories of Comparative Studies

Spring 2024/2025

instructor: [Tamás Scheibner](#)

codes: BA-ERA-IHLCS-S-10 / MA-ERA-IHLCS-S-10

credit: 6

room: A/321

Tuesday, 16:00 – 17:30

This course offers an interdisciplinary exploration of comparative studies and comparative literature, placing special emphasis on the profound influence of Cold War ideologies, politics, and institutions on global literary and cultural developments. Through a close reading of foundational texts and key case studies, the course investigates the dynamic interplay between cultural production, political ideologies, and intellectual frameworks in the 20th century.

Course Themes and Objectives

- **Foundations of Comparative Studies**
Explore the historical and methodological origins of comparative approaches in the humanities. Analyze key contributions from linguistics, history, and anthropology, with an emphasis on Eastern and Central Europe as a locus of intellectual and cultural entanglement. This theme provides the groundwork for understanding how comparison operates as a scholarly and political tool.
- **Comparative and World Literature**
Trace the emergence of world literature as a concept and discipline, from early formulations by Herder and Goethe to its institutionalization in the modern era. Discussions will explore how global literary exchanges were shaped by and responded to political ideologies, setting the stage for Cold War transformations.
- **Cold War Cultures and World Literature**
Investigate the Cold War as a critical period for global literary production and cultural diplomacy. Topics include: *Soviet Approaches to World Literature*: Examine how the Soviet Union leveraged literature as a medium of socialist internationalism and ideological outreach. *Cold War Cultural Diplomacy*: Assess the strategic use of literature and intellectual networks by both the U.S. and the Soviet Union in their ideological battles. *Cultural Politics and Intellectual Critiques*: Engage with critiques of Cold War ideologies and their impact on anthropology, history, and comparative studies.
- **Forging Cold War Solidarities**
Explore the role of institutions like UNESCO and the ICLA in fostering literary and intellectual solidarities across political divides. Topics include censorship practices, cross-border collaborations, and the lasting influence of Cold War frameworks on contemporary literary studies.

Learning Outcomes

Knowledge:

- Gain a nuanced understanding of the historical and methodological foundations of comparative and cultural studies.
- Understand the intersections of global literature and Cold War ideologies, with emphasis on cultural, political, and institutional dynamics.
- Acquire familiarity with key texts and debates in comparative literature and world literature studies.
- Critically engage with key texts and debates in comparative literature and world literature studies; situate foundational texts in comparative studies within broader political and cultural contexts.
- Reflect on the legacy of Cold War cultural politics and its implications for contemporary global literary exchange.

Skills:

- Develop the ability to critically analyze and interpret historical and analytical essays.
- Learn to compare and contrast diverse works within a given tradition or context, identifying both unique contributions and shared themes.
- Enhance critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and effective communication through textual analysis and discussion.

Attitude:

- Cultivate openness to working across diverse cultural and intellectual contexts.
- Develop a nuanced appreciation for historical contexts and key literary concepts, fostering intellectual curiosity.

Autonomy and Responsibility:

- Build the capacity to synthesize complex ideas from diverse sources independently.
- Take responsibility for producing and presenting well-supported, original interpretations of course material.

This course is particularly suited for students of literature, cultural studies, and history who are interested in exploring the intersections of culture, politics, and ideology during one of the most influential periods of the 20th century. Active engagement with the readings and class discussions is essential.

Literature (key source collections)

Damrosch, David, Natalie Melas, and Mbongiseni Buthelezi, eds. *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

D'Haen, Theo, César Domínguez, and Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, eds. *World Literature: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 2013.