Comparative Literature

A short guide by students for students
“Comparative Literature is the laboratory or workshop of literary studies, and through them, of the humanities. Comparative Literature compares literatures, not only as accumulations of primary works, but as the languages, cultures, histories, traditions, theories, and practices with which those works come.” Roland Greene, “Their Generation,” Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism (1995).
“The field of Comparative Literature creates a flexible framework which allows me to draw links and connections across national borders and between different genres. This composite artwork by Maud Sulter embodies the kind of bricolage spirit that inspires me. Cutting and pasting images of Jeanne Duval (Baudelaire’s mistress and muse) and a photo of the artist herself in Paris over Manet’s 1865 painting Olympia allows Sulter to reposition Black women at the centre of the European cultural stage whilst creating meaning through juxtaposition in a new, playful way.” Dr Emma Bond, Department of Italian
“Doing an MA Dissertation in Comparative Literature allowed me to develop a transnational approach and to think about the interaction between writing practices and cultural environments. In the past few years, my teaching on Comparative Literature has included a session on various versions of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’, an introduction to the journal and paintings of Frida Kahlo, a lecture on Amélie Nothomb and a screening of Lost in Translation. This variety of material and perspectives makes Comparative Literature, in my mind, a truly engaging and enriching discipline.” Dr Elise Hugueny-Léger, Department of French

“Comparative Literature is, to me, best explained by Lawrence Venuti, who contends that ‘world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works, but rather a mode of circulation and of reading.’ It is the manner in which we choose to read that defines the act of reading itself. To read comparatively is to grasp an ‘ungraspable canon of works;’ to learn through contrast and to embrace multiplicity.” Devon Schindler, MA Hon in Comparative Literature and Social Anthropology (Class of 2017)


“Comp Lit is a recipe for constant discovery. This way of learning is such a joy: challenging yourself to build meaning and connections in completely new places. You suddenly have the power to blur the borders between genres, languages, cultures, and mediums that have seemed solid up to this point.” Ali Candlin, MA Hon in Comparative Literature and English (Class of 2015).
“For me comparative literature, and particularly reading translations, is ‘like peering through a keyhole into a locked garden of astonishing blooms.’ It’s a quote from this Financial Times article.” Felicity Martin-Daly, MA Hon in Comparative Literature and French (Class of 2017).

“George Steiner is the one who really can make you fall in love with literature, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPK3Mv6_Aps.” Darya Tsymbalyuk, MLitt in Crossways in Cultural Narratives (Erasmus Mundus 2016).
“In Comp Lit, we get to explore other areas like translation studies and digital humanities, and we study every kind of genre from poetry to non-fiction writing – with so many possible areas of study beneath the Comp Lit umbrella, you’ll always find something that interests you.” Vikky Walsh, MA Hon in Comparative Literature and English (Class of 2017).

“The age of Internet creativity, data mining, and virtual reality has not only stimulated contemporary academics to challenge prevalent methodologies in the study of culture, but also to identify the fluid nature of the humanities. Comparative Literature allows me to adopt this new transmedia approach to art production and meaning-making and use my knowledge and skills in ostensibly unrelated fields – for example during my internship at a software development company.” Tomasz Hollanek, MA Hon in Comparative Literature and Film Studies (Class of 2017).
“I’m attaching here one of the Valois Tapestries by Lucas de Heere, after a drawing by Antoine Caron (c. 1575), now in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence. The tapestry depicts a ball organised for the reception of an extraordinary Polish embassy in 1573. In my PhD thesis, I focus on how French court festivals in the late 16th and early 17th-centuries were received by European ambassadors. In my view, this tapestry reflects several layers of reception, which are also important for my research: 1) the Polish ambassadors who’re gaping at the spectacle; 2) French courtiers in the back; 3) Catherine de’ Medici (in black), who commissioned the spectacle; 4) the (European) audience for which the tapestry is intended (people who couldn’t attend the spectacle in person).”

Bram van Leuveren, PhD candidate.
“I was able to bring so many aspects of Comp Lit into my other subject (International Relations) to really mold my Joint Honours degree into exactly what I wanted it to be. Our cohort and staff members formed this amazing little community for which I will always be so incredibly grateful. Apart from the world-class academic experience, I also gained some lifelong friends.” Sophie Merrow, MA Hon in Comparative Literature and International Relations (Class of 2015).

“Comparative Literature means the chance to study literature from all eras, all places in the most creative and innovative way possible. Comparative Literature at St Andrews specifically means working with your professors, where student feedback has the value and power to change the department in a way that best fits the needs of the students.” Maggie Sadler, MA Hon in Comparative Literature and English (Class of 2016).
“Studying Comp Lit has definitely made me more critical and interrogative of the texts we read, as we are always encouraged in seminars to engage with the difficult and contradictory aspects of literature. It has also introduced me to a much wider range of literature than I would have come across on my own, and given me the opportunity to study countries, languages and parts of history that I hadn't touched on before.” Rachel Gillespie, MA Hon in Comparative Literature and English (Class of 2017).

Subhonours Programme

The programme’s starting point at Subhonours (1st and 2nd year) level is to raise awareness of different genres and themes as they appear in a range of literatures (including Arabic, French, German, Italian, Latin American, Russian, Persian, Spanish, UK, USA) and to address the issue of how to study literature comparatively. All lectures will be given by subject experts who will also be responsible for establishing seminar discussion topics.

CO1001 The Nineteenth-Century Novel
CO1002 Drama in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries
CO2001 Good and Evil
CO2002 Journeys

Find out more: http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/modlangs/comparativeliteraturedepartment/firstyearmodules/

*Please note the list is tentative and subject to change*
Honours Programme

In third year, each semester students study one compulsory module (15 credits) and one optional module (15 credits). In fourth year, students can choose two optional modules per semester, and can replace one or two of the optional modules with a dissertation (15 or 30 credits).

Compulsory Honours Modules (Third Year):

CO3001 Issues in Comparative Literature
CO3002 Found in Translation

Optional Honours Modules may include:

CO3020 Cultural Memory and Literature
CO3021 Crossing the Mediterranean
CO4002 The Literary Canon
CO4003 Issues in Cultural Studies
CO4027 Folk and Fairytales
CO4022 Illness and Literature
CO4024 Performing Early-Modern Sexualities
CO4026 Classicism in European Literature
CO4028 Great Works and their Adaptations: Proust
CO4098 Short Dissertation
CO4099 Long Dissertation or ML4794 Joint Dissertation (30cr)

Find out more: http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/modlangs/comparativeliteraturedepartment/honoursmodules/

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People

School Officials:

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Links

Departmental Facebook group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/856236714399999/

School of Modern Languages website: http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/modlangs/