

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Open Educational Resources

Queens College

2023

CMLIT 100: Writing about World Literature (Philosophical Literature)

Victoria Tomasulo

CUNY Graduate Center, vtomasulo46@gmail.com

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/qc_oers/65

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

Comparative Literature 100: Writing about World Literature
Queens College, Fall 2023

Comparative Literature 100-02
Dr. Victoria Tomasulo
Office hours: by appointment on Zoom
professortomasulo@gmail.com

TOPIC: Philosophical Literature

The German poet Novalis once wrote, “Philosophy is proper home-sickness; the wish to be everywhere at home.” In other words, philosophy emerges from our desire to know the unknowable: Do our lives have meaning in and of themselves? Does everything happen for a reason, or are events we consider life-changing arbitrary; do we invest them with significance to give our existence a sense of purpose it lacks? Is lightness (our existential aloneness and freedom to choose) more of a burden than the day-to-day responsibilities and situations that weigh us down? Can it be empowering to accept absurdity? In this course we will reflect on these questions through the essays and fictions of writers from different cultures: Albert Camus, Italo Calvino, Milan Kundera, and Mieko Kawakami. You will learn to write with more insight and clarity, developing your ideas about the literary and philosophical concepts through the lens of literature and your own life experiences.

This course is structured to feature Open Educational Resources and Open Pedagogy. Our work will culminate in the creation of a collaborative, open-access resource for students and instructors interested in the teaching and practice of interdisciplinary writing. This pedagogical and practical handbook will be accessible to all on CUNY Academics Works.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

Italo Calvino, *The Baron in the Trees* and “Lightness” from *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*
Albert Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus”
Mieko Kawakami, *Heaven*
Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*
Frederick Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* & excerpts from *Beyond Good and Evil*

Textbook Information

As a Zero-Cost or Open Educational Resource (OER) course, all materials will be provided digitally or electronically via hyperlinks or pdf. In Course Materials, you’ll find the citation and hyperlink to each assigned material.

COURSE REQUIREMENT:

This course fulfills the College Writing 2 requirement under the new Pathways General Education curriculum. Designed as a sequence to freshman composition (English 110), it will introduce you to the discipline of Comparative Literature. You will be reading, researching, and writing about literatures from different parts of the world. You can expect at least 20 pages of formal graded writing. This includes scholarly essays and a research paper requiring multiple

revisions. There will also be informal discussion board assignments and oral presentations. The aim of this course is to learn how to practice your academic writing, to learn to write with authority, and to use different rhetorical strategies to address your readers. As in English 110, you will increase your knowledge of the grammar and mechanics of standard English; and you will expand your knowledge of how to conduct research and document your own sources. Furthermore, you will be asked to develop and support your own independent thesis about the literary texts we will be reading over the course of this semester. The projected learning outcome for this course is that you will read critically and think analytically. You will be able to write more clearly in varied academic formats, using Standard English as well as appropriate technology. You will acquire research skills to support your original thesis with evidence; and you will learn how to construct a persuasive argument. Most importantly, you will be able to relate your own original ideas to others by employing the conventions of ethical attribution and citations.

Below is a comparative literature research guide at the Queens College library website which you might find helpful for the research component of this course:

<https://qc-cuny.libguides.com/comparative-lit>

ABOUT OUR COURSE: This is an online asynchronous course; we will not be holding Zoom sessions. Instead, you will follow the instructions in each week's module, which will be available every Friday on Blackboard in Week by week. Click on the appropriate weekly module, and on the top of the page, you will see the reading assignment for the week, the learning objectives, and the weekly assignments, which will consist of discussion boards, informal writing assignments, and, occasionally, Flipgrid for oral presentations. Recorded lectures will be available for writing instruction, and quizzes will occasionally be held to reinforce your knowledge of grammar points and MLA conventions.

Discussion boards and quizzes in each module will close on Friday before midnight; you have a week to complete these assignments. It is your responsibility to make sure you submit these on time. I will not reopen quizzes and discussion board threads, though I may excuse you for one discussion and one quiz if there were exceptional circumstances.

Individual conferences will take place through Zoom at a mutually convenient time. Please make an appointment by email: professortomasulo@gmail.com.

Below is a brief explanation of the list of features available on Bb:

Announcements-Reminders and all other communication from professor will be emailed through Announcements, which will be forwarded to your email addresses on file on Blackboard.

Syllabus- Our syllabus will be posted here.

Course Materials- Includes pdf copies of the books we will be reading as well as ebooks, scholarly articles, handouts, and relevant links to websites.

Week-by-week: Perhaps the most important link on Blackboard. This is where you will view weekly modules, which will include all the work to be completed for the week (discussion board assignments, presentations, & quizzes).

Assignments—Writing assignments will be posted here. You should also submit them through the Assignments tab on the day they are due. There will be a separate folder for Revisions.

Quizzes- All quizzes can be found here.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR DISCUSSION BOARD ASSIGNMENTS

Each week, you will be required to complete a discussion board assignment on Blackboard after you finish the reading for the week. Discussion board assignments are due each Friday by the end of the day (11:59pm). Their purpose is to enable you to engage on a deeper level with the readings, which will result in more nuanced, layered, well-reasoned essays.

I strongly suggest that you write and save your discussion board assignment on a separate Word doc so that you don't lose your work if there are technical issues on Blackboard.

Copy and paste your response into the text box when you reply to the thread.

After you have submitted your assignment, you should respond to at least one peer's response. You want to engage in a meaningful way: extend the conversation, ask a clarifying question, correct a misreading, draw conclusions from your peer's analysis, or point out what has been overlooked. I will model how to give peer feedback for you by participating in the conversation. **You should read my comments in the discussion board before commenting a peer's response.**

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

If you have any technical issues with Blackboard or Zoom, you should contact the Queens College Helpdesk at helpdesk@qc.cuny.edu or call (718) 997-4444. An additional email contact for Bb assistance is BBSupport@qc.cuny.edu.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

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

1. Gain an understanding of the discipline of comparative literature and the requirements of interdisciplinary scholarship.
2. Use philosophical concepts to write about literature and life-changing experiences.
3. Situate literary works in their biographical, historical, and critical contexts.
4. Read literary works through the lens of different schools of literary criticism.
5. Effectively research a topic to support your argument, using reliable sources.
6. Write a comparative analysis of a philosophical idea in two literary works.
7. Evaluate what other critics have written about works of literature.
8. Collaborate in the evaluation of peer writing.
9. Write more clearly and coherently, applying MLA conventions of style and sentence structure.
10. Reflect on your goals as a learner and the progress you have made as a writer and as a thinker through writing about writing assignments.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **PARTICIPATION (10%):** Participation includes discussion board assignments, Flipgrid presentations, and other informal writing assignments, such as outlines and synopses, all of which are available in Week by week.
2. **QUIZZES (10%):** There will be five quizzes that focus on grammar and MLA conventions.
3. **WRITING (80%):** All assignments should be submitted on Blackboard. There will be **four major assignments**, weighed according to the grading scale below.

Genres of writing

In this course you will become familiar with three philosophical concepts: the notion of the **absurd hero**, as articulated in Albert Camus’s “Myth of Sisyphus;” **the lightness/weight opposition**, the subject of reflection by Italo Calvino and Milan Kundera; and **the will-to-power**, as articulated in Frederick Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. Each of these concepts falls under the umbrella of **existentialism**, a school of philosophy that emerged after World War II which assumes that, in the words of Jean Paul Sartre, “existence precedes essence”; that is, meaning is not inherent in existence; we create the meaning of our lives through our choices and the stories we tell. For more on existentialism, see the link below: <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Existentialism>

You will be assessed on four assignments, each of which will focus on a philosophical topic of your choice. Your writing will be recursive; that is, you will read literary works through the lens of a philosophical concept and read the philosophical concept through the lens of the literary works. By putting literature and philosophy into a dialogue with each other, you will arrive at a new understanding of each.

1) Autobiographical essay (3-4 pages): 10%

You will reflect on a philosophical concept of your choice through the lens of a personal, life-changing experience.

2) One lens-analysis: (4-5 pages). 20%.

You will apply your understanding of a philosophical concept to a reading of Kawakami’s *Heaven*.

3) Double lens-argument essay (5-6 pages): 20%

You will write about *Heaven* or *The Baron in the Trees* through the lens of a philosophical concept of your choice AND through one of the following critical frameworks: ecocriticism, feminism, Marxism, or New Historicism, creating a debatable argument about the literary work. Research is required.

4) Comparative analysis (5-6 pages): 20%

You will compare a philosophical concept of your choice in two literary works we have read this semester, focusing either on cross-cultural connections or on contrasts, while situating each work in its historical context and using one of the following critical frameworks: ecocriticism, feminism, Marxism, or New Historicism. Research is required.

5). Reflection (2-3 pages): 10%

At the end of the semester, you will write a short reflection on how the course helped you to achieve at least three of the course objectives listed on this syllabus.

To pass this course, you need to complete ALL assignments. **I only give incompletes when there are exceptional circumstances. Note: I reserve the right to refuse to accept essays that are riddled with grammatical errors to the point of unreadability.** If you struggle to write coherently, you should make an appointment with a Writing Center tutor for help (see below).

REVISIONS

You will have the opportunity to revise ONE of the three writing assignments for a better grade. **For a revision to be accepted, your essay must incorporate suggestions from your peers and from the professor; it should be substantially improved, not just tweaked or edited in places. Ideas should be fleshed out, and stronger conclusions drawn from your analysis. Your revision should be accompanied by a brief reflection of how you improved your essay and the challenges involved in writing it.** Schedule an individual conference with me on Zoom at professortomasulo@gmail.com if you need help with the revision process.

LATE PAPERS

Late papers will not be accepted after more than a week has passed from the deadline. A grade penalty of half a letter will be applied.

WRITING CENTER

The Writing Center is in Kiely Hall, Room 229. The phone number is (718)997-5676. They offer e-tutoring at <http://writingatqueens.qc.cuny.edu/the-writing-center>.

ACCOMMODATING DISABILITIES

Qualified students with disabilities will be provided reasonable academic accommodations if determined by the Office of Special Services for Students with Disabilities. Prior to granting disability accommodations in this course, the instructor must receive written verification of a student's eligibility from the OSS, which is located in room 111 of Frese Hall. It is the student's responsibility to initiate contact with the OSS staff and to follow the established procedures. To register with the OSS, you must bring proper documentation of your disability from a qualified professional. To learn more about CUNY Assistive Technology Services at Queens College, call (718) 997-3775 or email QC.SPSV@qc.cuny.edu.

College's Statement on Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's ideas, words, or artistic, scientific, or technical work as one's own creation. Using the ideas or work of another is permissible only when the original author is identified. Paraphrasing and summarizing, as well as direct quotations, require citations to the original source. Plagiarism may be intentional or unintentional. Lack of dishonest intent does not necessarily absolve a student of responsibility for plagiarism.

It is student's responsibility to recognize the difference between statements that are common knowledge (which do not require documentation) and restatements of the ideas of others. Paraphrase, summary, and direct quotation are acceptable forms of restatement, as long as the source is cited.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

8/26: Introduction and discussion of course requirements. Albert Camus, "Myth of Sisyphus"

[CamusA-Myth-of-Sisyphus-1942.pdf](#)

"Lightness and Weight," first two sections of *Unbearable Lightness of Being*

[Unbearable Lightness of Being The - Milan Kundera.pdf](#)

9/1: Nietzsche: The Will to Power

<https://eternalisedofficial.com/2020/09/17/nietzsche-the-will-to-power/>

Excerpts from *Beyond Good and Evil*

[Nietzsche- Beyond Good and Evil -selections.pdf](#)

Thus Spake Zarathustra

[zarathustra.pdf](#)

9/8: *Heaven*, Chapters 1-6; Lecture on writing autobiographical essay

[Heaven.pdf](#)

"Strong Lights and Dark Shadows: Mieko Kawakami Interviewed by Makena Goodman."

<https://bombmagazine.org/articles/mieko-kawakami/>

"A Feminist Critique of Murakami Novels, with Murakami Himself."

<https://lithub.com/a-feminist-critique-of-murakami-novels-with-murakami-himself/>

Sample autobiographical essay using the notion of the absurd hero:

<https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2013/10/29/sisyphus-is-happy/>

9/15: No class

9/22: **Autobiographical essay due**; Finish *Heaven*.

9/29: Peer review of autobiographical essay & recorded lecture on one lens analysis (second essay)

Italo Calvino, "Lightness." [sixmemosforthenextmillennium_italocalvino.pdf](#)

10/6: *The Baron in the Trees*, Chapters 1-10

[528620325-Calvino-Italo-Baron-in-the-Trees-Harcourt-1977 2.epub](#)

"*The Baron in the Trees*: An Exercise in Civil Disobedience"

<https://hypercritic.org/collection/italo-calvino-the-baron-in-the-trees-1957-review/>

10/13: **Second essay (one lens analysis) due**; *The Baron in the Trees*, Chapters 11-20

Introduction to literary schools of criticism:

Marxist criticism & Ecocriticism:

<https://natureofwriting.com/courses/writing-about-literature/lessons/marxist-literary-theory/>New

Historicism:

<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/cliffsnotes/subjects/literature/what-is-new-historicism>

Feminist criticism:

https://www.athenscsd.org/userfiles/37/Classes/970/feminist_criticism.pdf?id=2194

10/20: Peer review of second essay & recorded lecture on writing an essay about literature using two lens; informal writing assignment: Brainstorm your argument. Write the introduction and the first body paragraph; *Baron in the Trees*, Finish.

10/27: *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Part I. Informal writing assignment: Finding relevant sources and connecting them to your argument. Write the third body paragraph

11/3: *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Part II. Informal writing assignment: Developing your argument through textual evidence. Write 2-3 body paragraphs in which you support your argument with textual analysis.

11/10: *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Part III. *The Life and Times of Milan Kundera*.
<https://www.socialismrealised.eu/pathways/the-life-and-times-of-milan-kundera/>

11/17: **Third essay due (double lens argument essay)**. *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Part IV.

11/24: No class

12/1: **Revision of essay 1 or essay 2 due**. Peer review of third essay. Recorded lecture of writing a comparative analysis. *Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Part I.

12/8: **Reflection due**. Conclusion. Informal writing assignment: Write a synopsis (summary) of your comparative analysis and include a list of sources.

The fourth paper (the comparative analysis) is due on 12/20, or final exam day.