

EL691 Comparative Short Literature: from Trace to Text

Instructor: Jameson Kismet Bell

Office: TB460

Time: Thurs 11-14:00

Place: TB 480

Course Description

This course introduces students to the study and criticism of short literary genres and their entangled relationships with other types of representations. There is something both unique and cliché about short genres; ancient proverbs, aphorisms, and epigrams were once thought of as carefully crafted verbal truths meant to be memorized and contemplated at length. By the Renaissance, they became a display of wit, social status, and the foundation for a new science. Today, through social media captions, comments, hashtags, and AI prompts, literary short forms have become the symbol of accelerated lives, attention deficits, and the crisis of language. This course offers students a comparative introduction to short genres and discussions of the relationship among short genres, longer genres, and theoretical frames such as rhetoric, (new) historicism, (new) materialism, psychoanalysis, structuralism, post-structuralism, and more.

Course Objectives

Students will become familiar with

1. the history of short genres; their origins in rhetoric and shifting literary and cultural value when compared with longer genres
2. critical theories and methods to analyze, collect, compare, and display short genres
3. teaching at the graduate level
4. writing for professional purposes

Requirements

- 10% Attendance and active participation. Students are future professors; missing, coming unprepared, or not participating in seminars without a valid excuse is grounds for grade reduction or failure
- 20% Discussion leader
- 20% Book review from secondary sources
- 50% Final paper of 15-20 pages (with approved abstract & presentation)

Grade Meaning

- AA** Outstanding oral, written, and seminar work; possible thesis topic or submission to conference/publication
- BA** Good; argument well developed; presentation and research very strong; submission to conference/publication with major revisions
- BB** Minimum grade; need for major revision in presentation, argument, style and/or research
- CB (and below)** Inadequate for the graduate level. Significant weaknesses in argument, style, and/or research still exist

Resources

All primary readings will be provided in digital form and I have many of the secondary sources. Texts marked with a (*) are on the PhD qualifying exam reading list for future preparation (as best as possible). You will need to find some secondary sources online, order through ILL, or purchase on your own. You should start research early to be sure you can obtain the books in time to complete assignments.

Academic Integrity (Plagiarism)

All submitted work is expected to be solely your own. In the event that you must use someone else's ideas or

information, or if you use wording that is not your own, you MUST provide a citation with a consistent style (MLA, Chicago, etc.). Representing someone else's work as your own is plagiarism and is a breach of academic integrity, which includes the use of Artificial Intelligence (When in doubt, cite!). Plagiarism will automatically receive an F on the assignment. Depending on the severity, student may fail the course. Repeat offenders will be referred to the department and faculty disciplinary committees.

Artificial Intelligence policy: TBA

Weekly Schedule

Sept 24/9 Thurs Week 1: Introduction to The History of Short Genres (or Figures?)

Readings: Grant, Ben. 2016. *The Aphorism and Other Short Forms*. Routledge.

Other works on the history of short genres: Morson, Gary Saul. 2012. *The Long and Short of It: From Aphorism to Novel*. Hui, Andrew. 2019. *A Theory of the Aphorism: From Confucius to Twitter*. Princeton University Press. Stanford. "The Aphorism: Fragments from the Breakdown of Reason." *New Literary History* 34 (3). Hui, Andrew. 2018. "The Infinite Aphorisms of Erasmus and Bacon." *Erasmus Studies* (Leiden, The Netherlands) 38 (2): 171–99; Morson, Gary Saul. 2011. *The Words of Others: From Quotations to Culture*. Yale University Press.

Oct 01 Thurs Week 2: Ancient & Modern Rhetoric: Memory, Enthymemes, Tropes, and Figures

Readings: Aristotle, *from Art of Rhetoric* (II/III)*; *from Quintilian, Institution of Orator**, *from Lakoff, Women, Fire, and Other Dangerous Things*

Other works on language and rhetoric: *Figurative Language and Thought*, eds Albert N. Katz, Christina Cacciari, Raymond W. Gibbs, and Mark Turner. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998; Fletcher, Angus. 2012. *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*. Princeton University Press; Booth, Wayne. 1983. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. 2nd ed. University of Chicago Press; *A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism*, edited by Walter Jost and Wendy Olmsted. Blackwell; Vickers, Brian. 1988. *In Defence of Rhetoric*. Clarendon Press; Copeland, Rita, and Peter Struck, eds. 2010. *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*. Cambridge University Press.

Discussion Leader _____ Book Review _____

Thurs Oct 08 Week 3: Comparative Analysis of Metaphor, Idiom, and Proverb

Readings: Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Wife of Bath's Tale" *Canterbury Tales* (14th century); Erasmus of Rotterdam, "Introduction" *Adages* (1536); Richard Wright, "Chapter 2" *12 Million Black Voices* (1943), 30-89. (Cuddon, John Anthony, Matthew. Birchwood, and Rafey, Habib. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.)

Secondary Sources on Idiom, Metaphor, Proverb: Draaisma, Douwe. *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind*. Cambridge University Press, 2000; Hawkes, Tarence. *Metaphor*. Vol. 24. The Critical Idiom Reissued. Routledge, 2018; Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press, 1980; Lakoff, George., and Mark. Johnson. *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*. Basic Books, 2010; Lakoff, George, and Mark Turner. *More than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*. University of Chicago Press, 1989; Carruthers, Mary. *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*.* Cambridge University Press, 2008; Yates, Francis. *The Art of Memory*. University of Chicago Press, 1966.* Litovkina, Anna T. 2019. *Women Through Anti-Proverbs*. Palgrave Macmillan; Moss, Ann. 1996; Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Verso, 1993.

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Thurs Oct 15 Week 4: Anthology, Miscellany, and Commonplace Book

Readings: Isabella Whitney, *A Sweet Nosegay* (1573)*

Secondary Sources on Whitney, Anthologies, Miscellanies, and Commonplace Books: Price, Leah. 2004. *The Anthology and the Rise of the Novel: From Richardson to George Eliot*. Cambridge University Press. *Isabella Whitney: Poems by a Sixteenth-Century Gentlewoman, Maid, and Servant*. Edited by Shannon Miller. Iter Press, 2023; *Women's Bookscapes in Early Modern Britain*, edited by Leah Knight, Micheline White, and Elizabeth Sauer. University of Michigan Press, 2018; Hess, Jillian. 2022. *How Romantics and Victorians Organized Information: Commonplace Books, Scrapbooks, and Albums*. Oxford University Press; *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought*. Oxford University Press.

Primary Sources for Archival Work on Short Forms:

Penn State Emblem Book Project: <https://libraries.psu.edu/about/collections/english-emblem-book-project>
EEBO, Early English Books Online: <https://library.bogazici.edu.tr/tr/data?list=1>
Broadside Ballads, Oxford, <https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/collections-and-resources/special-collections/finding-aids-and-catalogues/ballads>
Broadside Ballads, University of California, <https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/>
More available at major libraries, as well as my website, [here](#)

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Thurs Oct 22 Week 5: Early Modern Epigrams, Maxims & Aphorisms

Francis Bacon, *Nouvom Organon**; Duke de La Rochefoucault, *Maxims and Moral Reflections* (1664)

Secondary Sources on Early Modern Short Genres: Milburn, Daniel Judson. 1966. *The Age of Wit: 1650-1750*. MacMillan; Hoyt, Hudson. 1947. *Epigram in the English Renaissance*. Princeton University Press; Fitzgerald, William. *Martial: The World of the Epigram*. University of Chicago Press, 2007. Jardine, Lisa. *Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse*. Cambridge University Press, 1974. Vickers, Brian. *Francis Bacon and the Rhetoric of Science*. Clarendon Press, 1968.

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Thurs Oct 29 Week 6: No Class Republic Day

Final Paper Abstracts Due

Thurs Nov 5 Week 7: Prompt

Readings: “Myth(s) of Cadmus,” Herodotus & Ovid; McLuhan, Marshall. “Myth and Mass Media.” *Daedalus* (Cambridge) 88, no. 2 Myth and Mythmaking (1959): 339–48; Bluijs, Siebe. “Oracle, Echo, or Stochastic Parrot: Who (or What) Speaks in AI Generated Literature?” In *The Routledge Handbook of AI and Literature*, edited by Will Slocombe and Genevieve Liveley. Routledge, 2025.

Secondary Sources on the Prompt and Electronic Short Literature: Wilde, Lukas, Miriam Kyselo, Thomas Brandt, Guri Hanem, and Roger Søraa, eds. 2026. *Humanities Perspectives on AI: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*. Scandinavian University Press. Hayles, Katherine. *Writing Machines*. MIT Press, 2002; Hayles, Katherine. *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2008; Hayles, Katherine, and Jessica Pressman, eds. *Comparative Textual Media: Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era*. Vol. 42. Electronic Mediations. University of Minnesota Press, 2013; Slocombe, Will, and Genevieve Liveley, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of AI and Literature*. Routledge, 2025.

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Thurs Nov 12 Week 8: Emblem and other Hybrid Forms

Readings: Bath, Michael. *Speaking Pictures: English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture*. Longman, 1994, 1-56; Latour, Bruno. "Visualisation and Cognition: Drawing Things Together." In *Knowledge and Society Studies in the Sociology of Culture Past and Present*, vol. 6, edited by H. Kuklick. JAI Press, 1986, 1-40. Whitney, Geoffrey, *A Choice of Emblemes*, 1586 (Selections).

Secondary Sources on hybrid works: Alpers, Svetlana. *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the 17th Century*. The University of Chicago Press, 1983*; Bal, Mieke. *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond Word Image Opposition*. Routledge, 2006; Bath, Michael. *Speaking Pictures: English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture*. Longman, 1994; Edgerton, Samuel. *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective*. University of Michigan Press, 1976; Lee, Alexander, Harry Schnitker, and Pierre Péporté, eds. *Renaissance? Perceptions of Continuity and Discontinuity in Europe, c.1300- c.1550*. Brill, 2010; Mitchell, W. J. T. *Iconology Image, Text, Ideology*. University of Chicago Press, 1986; Mitchell, W. J. T. *Iconology, Visual Culture, and Media Aesthetics*. University of Chicago Press, 2015; Bryson, Norman. *Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze*. Yale University Press, 1983; Mitchell, W. J. T., and Mark Hansen. *Critical Terms for Media Studies*. University of Chicago Press, 2010; Yellowlees Douglas, Jane. *The End of Books—or Books without End?* University of Michigan Press, 2003; Barthes, Roland. *Image-Music-Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. Hill and Wang, 1977.

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Thurs Nov 19 Week 9: The Material of Short Literature

Readings: Bornstein, George. *Material Modernism: The Politics of the Page*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Other works on media, materialism and literature: *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*. Edited by Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka. University of California Press, 2011; Parikka, Jussi. *What Is Media Archaeology?* Polity Press, 2012; Kittler, Friedrich A. *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*. Translated by Michael Metteer. Stanford University Press, 1990; Kittler, Friedrich A. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Stanford Univ. Press, 1999; Ong, Walter J., and John Hartley. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Routledge, 2013; McLuhan, Marshall. *Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*. Duckworth Overlook, 1951; McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. University of Toronto Press, 1962; McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Routledge, 2001.

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Thurs Nov 26 Week 10: Fragments and Wastebooks

Readings: *from* Schlegel, Friedrich. *Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by Peter Firchow. University of Minnesota Press, 1991; *from* Lichtenberg, Georg Christoph. *The Waste Books*. Translated by R. J. Hollingdale. New York Review of Books, 2000.

Secondary Sources on the fragment, Marxist, structuralist, and post structuralist criticism; *Manuscript Misellanies 1450-1700. English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700*, edited by Richard Beadle, Peter Beal, C. Burrow, and A. Edwards. The British Library, 2011; Lichtenberg, Georg Christoph. *Georg Christoph Lichtenberg: Philosophical Writings*. Translated by Steven Tester. Suny Press, 2012; Krauss, Karl. *Half Truths and One-and-a-Half Truths: Selected Aphorisms*. Translated by Harry Zohn. University of Chicago Press, 1990; Derrida, Jacques. *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge. Routledge, 1992; Barthes,

Roland. *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Lavers. Paladin, 1972; Lefebvre, Henri, and David Fernbach. *Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche: Or the Realm of Shadows*. Reprint edition. Verso, 2020.

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Thurs Dec 3 Week 11: New Historicism and the Anecdote

Readings: *Selections*, Edgar Lee Masters, *Spoon River Anthology* (1915); New Historicism, “The Anecdote” from *Practicing New Historicism*. University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Secondary Sources on New Historicism: Gallagher, Catherine, and Stephen Greenblatt. *Practicing New Historicism*. University of Chicago Press, 2000;* Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, and David Damrosch. “Comparative Literature/ World Literature A Discussion (2011): Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and David Damrosch.” In *World Literature in Theory*, edited by David Damrosch. Wiley and Sons, 2014; Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton University Press, 2003; Ermarth, Elizabeth Deeds. *Sequel to History: Postmodernism and the Crisis of Representational Time*. Princeton University Press, 1992; Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*. University of Chicago Press, 2005; Greenblatt, Stephen. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. University of California Press, 1989.*

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Thurs Dec 10 Week 12: Case Study and Dream

Sigmund Freud, *from* “Interpretation of Dreams”* (1900/1929) NA; “A Note upon the ‘Mystic Writing Pad’” (1925).

Secondary Sources on Case Studies & Dreams: Chaucer, G. (2006). *Dream Visions and Other Poems* (K. Lynch, Ed.). Norton; Feagin, J., Orum, A., & Sjoberg, G. (1991). *A Case for the case study*. University of North Carolina Press; Freud, S. (1900/1929). *The Interpretation of Dreams*; Höcker, A. (2021). *The Case of Literature Forensic Narratives from Goethe to Kafka*. Cornell University Press; Mulvey, L. (1989). *Visual and Other Pleasures*. University of Indiana Press; Mulvey, L. (1996). *Fetishism and Curiosity*. University of Indiana Press; Nolan, B. (1977). *The Gothic Visionary Perspective*. Princeton University Press; Schor, H. (2013). *Curious Subjects: Women and the Trials of Realism*. Oxford University Press.

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Thurs Dec 17 Week 13: Research Presentations

TBA: