

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE CONCENTRATION
SENIOR THESIS HANDBOOK



Dana-Palmer House
16 Quincy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
complit.fas.harvard.edu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Letter from the Director of Undergraduate Studies	page 2
II.	Senior Tutorial Timetable and Workshops	page 3
III.	Senior Thesis Guidelines	page 5
IV.	The Translation Thesis	page 8
V.	Incorporating Creative Material into the Senior Thesis	page 10
VI.	Sample Title Page for Senior Thesis	page 11
VII.	The Thesis Proposal	page 12
VIII.	Thesis Proposal Samples	page 15
IX.	How to Write a Good Research Proposal	page 22
X.	Twenty Tips for Senior Thesis Writers	page 23
XI.	Academic Resource Center Senior Thesis Tips	page 23

CompLit

Harvard University
Department of
Comparative Literature

Fall, 2024

Dear Seniors,

It is with great delight that I welcome you to your senior year in Comparative Literature. May your last year at Harvard be exciting and inspiring and full of stirring adventures, both personal and academic.

The senior thesis should be a central element in this adventure and the material contained in this Handbook is intended to facilitate the thesis writing process. It includes a thesis calendar that lists all relevant thesis-related dates. There are guidelines that address practical and logistical issues, as well as important information on writing the thesis proposal and selected sample thesis proposals. Note “How to Write a Good Research Proposal” and “Twenty Tips for Writing the Senior Thesis,” which are helpful documents especially in the early stages of thesis formulation. Please read all of this material carefully. You will find it both useful and reassuring.

In 2020, we inaugurated a series of **required tutorial workshops** for both juniors and seniors, which focus particularly on upcoming assignments and elements that are fundamental to your senior tutorial—thesis research, proposal writing, writing strategies, and more. Jacob Meister will lead the workshops and the dates and times are included in the Senior Tutorial Timetable below. **Make a note of them in your calendar now. All workshops will meet on Wednesdays, from 6-8pm in the Dana-Palmer Seminar Room. Please do not schedule any other obligations, academic or extra-curricular, during this time. Attendance at the workshops is mandatory and a priority commitment. Failure to attend may result in a grade of UNSAT for tutorial.**

The early days of the semester are inevitably very full and the prospect of the senior thesis can seem daunting. Remember that we are all here to assist you in any way possible. Your tutor is an invaluable resource, and you should schedule a meeting with them as soon as possible, if you have not done so already, and on a weekly basis thereafter.

Your **faculty mentor** can also be a terrific source of information and support, and we encourage you to meet as often as your schedules allow throughout the year and to include your tutor in these meetings whenever possible. At a minimum, we require **four meetings** between you and your mentor: The first should take place in early September and should bring together you, your tutor, and your mentor to discuss your thesis project and proposal. Three subsequent meetings between you and your mentor should follow the submission of the three chapters you are required to submit as you progress through the year and ideally should include your tutor as well. **Remember that you are responsible for scheduling these meetings. Please give your mentor enough time and advance notice to accommodate your meeting request.**

Needless to say, you should not hesitate to check in with me about any concerns or ideas you might have about the senior thesis, or, for that matter, any aspect of the upcoming year. I plan to meet with each of you individually in the course of the semester to review your program of study and to discuss your Comp Lit experience, but you need not wait for that meeting to get in touch. I am very eager to see you all again.

With my warmest wishes for a fulfilling and productive year,

Matylda Figlerowicz

Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature

Interim Director of Undergraduate Studies, Comparative Literature

SENIOR TUTORIAL TIMETABLE 2024-2025

Date	FALL 2024
Sept. 3	Fall Term Begins
Sept. 3-25	Meet with Mentor to discuss thesis work and proposal
Sept. 11	Senior Tutorial Workshop: Writing Your Thesis Proposal, 6-8pm
Sept. 18	Draft of Thesis Proposal due to Tutor and Mentor
Sept. 26	Final Thesis Proposal due to Department by 2pm
Oct. 2	Sr. Tut. Wrkshp: Navigating Library Resources & Developing Research Skills, 6-8pm
Oct. 16	Senior Tutorial Workshop: Chapter One Workshop, 6-8pm
Oct. 31	1st Chapter of Thesis due by 2pm
Nov. 4-8	Meet with Mentor to discuss 1st Thesis Chapter
Nov. 6	Spring Course Registration Begins
Nov. 20	Spring Course Registration Deadline
Nov. 20	Senior Tutorial Workshop: How to Write Over Winter Break, 6-8pm
Nov 27-Dec 1	<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>
Dec. 4	Last day of Fall Term Classes
Dec. 5-10	Fall Reading Period
Dec. 5	2nd Chapter of Thesis due by 2pm
Dec. 9-17	Meet with Mentor to discuss 2nd Thesis Chapter
Dec. 11-20	Fall Exam Period
Dec 21-Jan 26	<i>Winter Recess/Winter Break</i>
Date	SPRING 2025
January 27	Spring Term Begins
February 13	3rd Thesis Chapter due to tutor and to Department
February 17-21	Meet with Mentor to discuss remaining thesis work
February 19	Senior Tutorial Workshop: Introductions, Conclusions, and Abstracts 6-8pm
February 28	Full Thesis Draft due to Tutor
February 28	Thesis Title and Abstract due to Department
March 14	Thesis due to Department by 2pm
March 15-23	<i>Spring Break</i>
Mar 24-May 2	Orals Preparation
Mar 26	Senior Tutorial Workshop: Prepping for the Oral Exam, 6-8pm
April TBD	Senior Thesis Panel, 7pm
April 17	Orals List Draft due to Tutor
April 24	Final Orals List due to Dpt.
April 28	Orals Essay due to Dpt. by 2pm
April 30	Last day of Spring Term Classes
May 1-7	Spring Reading Period
May 5-6	Senior Oral Exams
May 8-17	Spring Exam Period
May 27	Comp Lit Graduation Reception 11am-12pm

COMP LIT SENIOR TUTORIAL WORKSHOPS

FALL 2024 & SPRING 2025

DANA-PALMER SEMINAR ROOM

With Jacob Meister

jmeister@g.harvard.edu

FALL 2024:

Writing Your Thesis Proposal (Wednesday, September 11, 6-8PM)

How to write a senior thesis proposal? To explore the process and to prepare for your upcoming deadline, we will study the genre by reading and dissecting proposals from previous years. Attention will also be paid to creating an annotated bibliography. In the second half of the workshop, you will draft an outline and first paragraph of the proposal, a revision of which will be shared for peer review on our discussion board.

Navigating Library Resources & Developing Research Skills (Wednesday, October 2, 6-8PM)

How to begin the daunting task of researching a thesis? How to find what you're looking for? How to work with primary and secondary sources? Dr. Odile Harter, Research and Pedagogy Librarian and Departmental Liaison, will join us for this workshop, designed to guide you through the craft of research as you begin to write the first chapter.

Chapter One Workshop (Wednesday, October 16, 6-8PM)

To prepare for your upcoming deadline, you will submit a draft abstract, outline, and one-page introduction of your first chapter to our discussion board one week prior to our meeting. Having read through everyone's materials, you will choose the work of one peer and respond with questions and suggestions. In the workshop, you will present a brief synthesis of your argument in a short informal talk, followed by Q&A.

How to Write Over Winter Break (Wednesday, November 20, 6-8PM)

How to avoid feeling lost and indulging in procrastination after the semester ends? As a check-in just before Thanksgiving, this workshop will offer strategies on how to get writing done during winter break, including forming Zoom writing groups in December and January, when many students will be off campus.

SPRING 2025:

Introductions, Conclusions, and Abstracts (Wednesday, February 19, 6-8PM)

By now you've written your last chapter. The full draft of your thesis is due soon to your tutor. What's left? The introduction, conclusion, and thesis abstract. This workshop will look at successful examples of each as we think about how to open and close a thesis. You will then draft the first page of your introduction and a thesis abstract, a revision of both will be shared for peer review on our discussion board.

Prepping for the Oral Exam (Wednesday, March 26, 6-8PM)

In preparation for oral exams at the end of the semester, which require a pivot from written to oral expression, this workshop will offer you the chance to practice speaking about your completed work. To simulate the exam experience, you will give a précis aimed at synthesizing your thesis for listeners both familiar and unfamiliar with the work, followed by Q&A.

SENIOR THESIS GUIDELINES

The following guidelines address some of the basic questions regarding the more practical dimensions of the senior thesis project. In general, however, we recommend that you consult the most recent edition of either the Modern Language Association's *Style Manual* or the University of Chicago's *A Manual of Style* for full information regarding the mechanical aspects of the thesis.

THESIS PROPOSAL: A final description of the thesis project should be submitted to the undergraduate Comp Lit office by the deadline indicated on the timetable above. The proposal should consist of a full description of the project and include an annotated bibliography. It should be drawn up in full consultation with the thesis advisor and the faculty mentor. It will then be reviewed by a sub-committee that is headed by your senior tutor and includes your faculty mentor and one member of the Tutorial Board, which is followed by a meeting that includes the thesis-writing student. For more information on the thesis proposal process as well as sample thesis proposals, please consult the "The Senior Thesis Proposal" memo and thesis proposals below.

THESIS DUE DATE: The thesis is due by **2:00 pm on the date indicated in the timetable above. THIS IS A FIRM DEADLINE. A late thesis will not be accepted.** Extensions will be considered only in the case of exceptional circumstances, such as prolonged illness or family emergency, upon application to the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

LENGTH: The thesis should be no less than 11,250 words and no more than 18,750 words (~45-75 pages). This does not include footnotes, endnotes, bibliography, appendices, or other critical or creative apparatus. Any student who anticipates exceeding this limit must petition the DUS at least two weeks in advance of the due date for an exception. Please note that a reader may penalize a thesis that is over the limit, even if an exception has been granted, if the excessive length is deemed unnecessary.

THESIS ABSTRACT: Each thesis will be accompanied by a thesis abstract. The abstract will be 300-500 words long, and will be submitted to the department on the thesis title due date. The abstract will be included with the thesis when it is sent out for evaluation, and should be used to present the project to an outside reader. What are the main goals and stakes of the project? Why did the student choose to engage with this research question, and through what methods? (If the thesis has a creative component, this is a good place to address the creative methods as well.) What are the central claims and findings? Is there anything about the process of the thesis work that was particularly meaningful, or that the student wants to highlight for some other reason?

**HONOR CODE
AFFIRMATION:**

Students must append an acknowledgement of the Harvard College Honor Code to the page following the thesis title page. The

statement should read: "I affirm my awareness of the standards of the Harvard College Honor Code."

TRANSLATION THESIS: Specific information on the translation thesis is included below.

ORIGINAL CREATIVE MATERIAL:

Specific information on incorporating original creative material is included below.

QUOTATIONS:

Quotations of four lines or less should be surrounded by quotation marks and incorporated into the text. Longer quotations should be set off from the text, indented, and single-spaced, and should not be set off in quotation marks. All direct quotations from a foreign language, whether a single word, a short phrase or a longer excerpt, should be given in the original and accompanied by a translation. We generally recommend that a student include translations of brief passages (single words or short phrases) in the body of the text, while translations of longer passages should generally be included in the footnotes/endnotes. In any case, a student should be consistent in their translation practices. Translations may either be from a published source or may be the student's own. Non-Romanized alphabets may be transliterated for quotation purposes when necessary.

**FOOTNOTES/
ENDNOTES:**

Either footnotes or endnotes may be used. Consult either the *Chicago Manual of Style* or the *MLA Style Manual* for proper formatting.

In general, notes should contain supplementary textual commentary/information or reference information. For further remarks regarding note logic and format, consult the sources above.

APPENDICES:

Any longer supplementary material that is considered useful for understanding the thesis but is not part of the actual analysis or exposition may be included in an appendix. Such material may include an original text under consideration if not readily available, illustrations or similar visual material, original creative work that supplements the analysis at hand, etc. Material included in the appendix is not included in the final word count of the thesis.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

A list of works cited and works consulted should be appended to the Senior Thesis. Again, refer to the above sources for the proper bibliographical format.

TITLE PAGE:

See Section VI for an example of the proper format of the thesis title page.

FINAL COPY:

A clean final presentation of the thesis is very important, and a student should not under-estimate the time necessary to prepare the final copy. The thesis should be error-free; all accent marks should be included in quotations in foreign languages; and both footnotes/endnotes and bibliography should be complete and correct. All pages should be numbered, and each thesis should include a table of contents.

Students should submit one single PDF document of their thesis by the official deadline to Isaure Mignotte (mignotte@fas).

**JOINT
CONCENTRATORS:**

Students in **Joint Concentrations** should follow the policies and deadlines of their primary concentration for all matters pertaining to the senior thesis. You should submit one copy of the thesis to Comp Lit and a copy to their other concentration, regardless of which concentration is primary. A joint thesis is ordinarily evaluated by one faculty member in each department.

THESIS EVALUATIONS: Each thesis will be reviewed by two readers. In cases where two widely divergent readings are submitted, a third reader will be asked to evaluate the thesis as well. A joint thesis is ordinarily evaluated by one faculty member in each department, as noted above.

Students are encouraged to meet with their readers to discuss the comments. Any thesis that receives a grade of MAGNA or above will be sent to the University Archives. The final thesis grade is an average of the two (or exceptionally three) thesis rankings. This grade is factored into the final departmental degree recommendation.

THE TRANSLATION THESIS

The undergraduate Comp Lit program allows students to undertake a translation as their senior thesis project. In general, a translation thesis is comprised of a translation of a text that may or may not have been translated previously, as well as a significant critical commentary on the work in the form of a translator's preface/critical commentary and notes on the text. **Students who wish to undertake a translation thesis are strongly encouraged to have the appropriate background in translation and translation studies, either through their academic work, an internship, or engaged scholarship, and should consult with the Director of Undergraduate Studies before launching the thesis work.**

The following guidelines provide valuable information on the form and content of a translation thesis:

- FORMAT:** One clear copy of the original text must be provided as an attachment along the thesis submission. For other formatting indications, refer to the general thesis guidelines.
- LENGTH OF TRANSLATED TEXT:** The translation itself should be between 15,000 and 22,500 words, or about 60-90 double-spaced pages. Texts that fit this format well include novellas, plays, collections of short stories or poems, and some critical essays. A student who wishes to translate from a longer work (such as a novel) should choose a representative excerpt or a collection of excerpts that functions well as a standalone text.
- TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE:** The translator's preface/critical commentary is an essential component of the translation thesis. It should be no less than 5,000 and no more than 7,500 words, or about 20-30 double-spaced pages. The preface should:
- Introduce the text to a general academic readership and explain its significance. Relevant information about the author and the composition or reception of the text may be provided. If English translations of the text already exist, the preface should situate the new translation in relation to existing ones and explain what the new translation seeks to achieve.
 - Detail the translation challenges posed by the text. Using well-chosen examples, the stylistic particularities and semantic richness of the original text should be highlighted, demonstrating an informed understanding of the text in the original language.
 - Describe and justify the translation strategies chosen in order to best render the original text. It may be useful to refer to other translations used as models (or counter-models), or to relevant texts on translation theory.

**FOOTNOTES/
ENDNOTES:**

Footnotes or endnotes should highlight within the translation places where a difficulty presented itself (such as word play, semantic ambiguities, or terms with no English equivalent), and explain how that difficulty was handled. In the case of a recurring difficulty, a note at the first occurrence is sufficient. A translation should not be overloaded with notes: in some cases, it may be advisable to limit notes to representative or significant instances. Important or recurrent difficulties can be addressed at greater length in the translator's preface.

Notes can also be used to provide information about cultural or historical background relevant to an understanding of specific elements in the text.

**THESIS
EVALUATIONS:**

Translation theses will be evaluated by two readers, at least one of whom will have a knowledge of the original language. In addition to the accuracy and readability of the translation, evaluators will devote particular attention to the quality of the critical apparatus (preface and notes).

INCORPORATING CREATIVE MATERIAL INTO THE SENIOR THESIS

The undergraduate Comp Lit program supports the inclusion of original creative material into a critical thesis, although we do not accept stand-alone creative projects such as a collection of poems, a dramatic production, an installation, or a musical composition as a complete senior thesis.

Some past examples of how creative material has been incorporated into a senior thesis in Comp Lit are:

- The conclusion to a thesis on the graphic novel *Persepolis* that was written in the style and format of a graphic novel.
- A live musical performance and recording of various compositions based on the figure of Mignon in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* in a thesis that analyzes both the literary and the musical representations of the character.
- The inclusion of a video documenting a musical performance in a thesis on performance in both verbal and musical media.
- An original non-fiction personal essay on cheerleading camp in a thesis on the creative non-fiction writing of David Foster Wallace.
- An installation that uses video and sculpture to meditate on how individuals enter virtual space. The critical component of this thesis (a joint project for Comp Lit and AFVS) examines the theoretical premises of this topic.

Each of these examples offers a different way of including the creative material into the thesis: as a chapter in the thesis itself, as an appendix, or as extra-documentary material. **You should discuss carefully how you plan to use your creative material with your thesis advisor and with the Director of Undergraduate Studies well in advance of submitting your thesis in order to avoid any unanticipated complications. You should also make sure that you have the appropriate background in your creative enterprise, whether through a course, a workshop, or engaged scholarship. All creative material should add value to the thesis itself and should be undertaken thoughtfully and carefully.**

FORMAT:

If the creative work is non-verbal in nature, it must be included with the thesis submission. If the work involves a performance or an exhibition, the student should inform the department of the dates and location well in advance so that the readers can attend.

LENGTH OF

CREATIVE MATERIAL: If the creative material is part of the thesis itself, it should be included as part of the thesis word count. Material that is included in an appendix or is included in another medium is considered outside of the word count tally.

THESIS EVALUATIONS: The thesis readers will consider all creative material as an integral part of the senior thesis as a whole. The final evaluation of the thesis will consider the creative material on its own terms as well as the way it contributes to the overall argument and analysis of the topic at hand. Every effort will be made to find at least one reader who is knowledgeable about the relevant medium or art form.

SAMPLE TITLE PAGE FOR SENIOR THESIS:

“over there is over here”: Politics, Gender, and Authority in Contemporary Arabic and English Performance Poetry

By

Cassandra Euphrat-Weston

Presented to the
Undergraduate Comparative Literature Concentration
in the Department of Comparative Literature
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Honors

Harvard College
Cambridge, Massachusetts

March 14, 2025

THE SENIOR THESIS PROPOSAL

Writing the senior thesis proposal is the first step in formulating your senior thesis project. The proposal should define carefully the parameters of your field of exploration and inquiry and should consist of three parts: 1) a **tentative thesis title**; 2) a prose description of approximately **800-1000 words** outlining your proposed topic; and 3) **an annotated bibliography** listing at least five works that are relative to your topic. The proposal due date is indicated on the timetable above.

READ AND REFLECT: It can be difficult at the outset to decide the focus of your thesis work, so take plenty of time in the early days to think about what you are most interested in. It's often useful to start by reflecting on past projects and papers. What texts have you found most provocative over the past three years? Which courses have served as your intellectual touchstones? This kind of reflection can be helped enormously by reading widely in both primary and secondary literature as you are trying to formulate your topic. Re-read works you already know well; read the books that you've been meaning to read for years but haven't, if they tie into your field of interest. Look back at critical and theoretical texts that have opened up new fields of inquiry for you, paying special attention to the introductory chapters and the way the problem is formulated. Finally, talk at length to your tutor or any other member of the faculty or Tutorial Board about your interests and ideas. Use them to help you formulate your thoughts, define an area of study, and determine interesting texts to consider for your project.

ASK A QUESTION: One of the most productive ways to formulate a thesis project is to ask a question and then attempt to answer it, e.g.: What does it mean to write in a new or revived or "minor" language? How do we define authorship and how is that definition altered by new media? How do we define a refugee narrative and what is its relationship to current governmental policies on immigration? Tease out the various implications and ramifications of the question. Try it out on different texts. Don't feel that you need to know the answer to the question, or even have a working hypothesis at the outset of the project. But make sure that you find the question interesting, and that it is rich enough and provocative enough to sustain you through seven months of reading, thinking, and writing.

BE SPECIFIC: Your proposal should specify which works you intend to examine in your thesis. There is no set or recommended limit to the number of works to analyze. Successful theses in the past have concentrated on one work alone, while others examine several works from different genres and traditions. Similarly, there is no one kind of text to investigate. Some theses have focused primarily on theoretical texts, others on primary works of fiction or poetry; still others on works drawn from different media. The important thing to remember here is that you should read closely whatever work(s) you choose to investigate and analyze. Engage your works carefully as a means of answering the questions you have asked.

You should also outline the structure of your thesis in your proposal: How many chapters do you anticipate? What will each chapter address? Do you expect to include an appendix or other textual material that is not a part of the thesis itself (e.g., the original text of a work you are translating)? Will your thesis contain external material (e.g., a video, a recording, a website)? This structure will change as your project develops, but it is very helpful to think early on about the shape of your work.

CREATIVE COMPONENTS IN THE CRITICAL THESIS: See the section entitled "Creative Material" above for information on incorporating creative material into the senior thesis.

THE TRANSLATION THESIS: See the section entitled "The Translation Thesis" above for information on the translation thesis.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: In addition to specifying those texts to be examined in the body of your proposal, you should append an annotated bibliography of at least five critical or theoretical works that pertain to your proposed topic. You should have read these works **before** submitting your proposal, and in addition to giving the conventional bibliographic information, you should write three or four lines outlining the subject matter of the book, making its relation to your thesis topic clear. Keep in mind that your final thesis project will include a lengthier bibliography indicating works cited and consulted in the course of your research.

MENTORS: The goal of the mentoring program is two-fold: to facilitate more contact and communication between students and faculty; and to provide seniors with, if possible, an expert in their field of study with whom to consult as they develop their thesis project. Ordinarily, a student's mentor is a member of the Department of Comparative Literature, although it is possible to ask a faculty member in another department to serve in this capacity.

There is no prescribed formula to follow in facilitating the connection between student and faculty member, but we do have a few requirements in place to make the relationship as productive as possible. You should meet with your mentor to discuss your thesis project before you submit your proposal, and if possible, your tutor should join you in that meeting. Three subsequent meetings should take place following the submission of your three chapters to discuss feedback and progress. In return, your mentor will serve as a member of the committee that reviews your specific thesis proposal and will read and comment on your three required written submissions. We urge you, however, to take full advantage of your mentor and to meet with them as often as you can.

It is your responsibility to choose and initiate contact with your mentor. You should contact your mentor as soon as possible to set up an initial meeting to discuss your thesis plans. The Director of Undergraduate Studies is available to discuss any questions and concerns you may have. Please give your mentor enough advance notice when you request a meeting to accommodate their schedule.

PROPOSAL PRESENTATION: Your proposal needs to include the Thesis Proposal Cover page shown below. Students should email their entire proposal in a single document to the Undergraduate Office by the specified deadline. Your tutor must also send a separate acknowledgment to indicate approval to the Undergraduate Program Coordinator. The proposal itself and the annotated bibliography should be included with this form.

PROPOSAL FEEDBACK: A small sub-committee, headed by your senior tutor and including your faculty mentor and one member of the Tutorial Board, will review the individual proposal for content, argumentation, bibliography, etc. and will offer ideas for further development as necessary. Your tutor will arrange a meeting that includes the student and the sub-committee to discuss proposal feedback. Occasionally a student will be asked to rewrite the proposal and resubmit it.

SENIOR THESIS PROPOSAL COVER PAGE

NAME:

TUTOR:

MENTOR:

TENTATIVE THESIS TITLE:

Please use this form as the cover page for your proposal and save it all in one document. Please limit your proposed senior thesis topic description to 800-1000 words and include an annotated bibliography. Consult “The Senior Thesis Proposal” above for further information.

Email your entire proposal in a single Word file to Isaure Mignotte at (mignotte@fas.harvard.edu) by the specified deadline. Your tutor must also send a separate acknowledgment to indicate approval to Isaure Mignotte.

THESIS PROPOSAL SAMPLES

THE PROPOSALS BELOW ARE EXCERPTS.
FOR THE FULL PROPOSAL, CLICK ON THE LINK IN THE TITLE.

Modern Ghosts, Modern Machines:
Meaning, Intention, and Artistic Creation in Postwar American Philosophy
& Literature
(Joint with Philosophy)

In 1946, WK Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley famously proclaimed that any equation of textual meaning with authorial intention amounted to a romantic “fallacy” (Wimsatt & Beardsley 421). The following year, the writer William Gaddis developed a paranoid obsession towards the self-playing piano, which he saw as a harbinger of the “loss of the autonomy of the individual artist” (Moore). Inspired (or perhaps terrified), he began a doomed research project on the history of the player piano that would consume the rest of his life. The year after that, Norbert Wiener announced to the world that “man-made machines...can learn” (Wiener 170).

These seemingly unrelated fragments point to an overarching anxiety which hung over American discussions of aesthetics after the second World War. The once-obvious idea that the meaning of a work of art was to be located in a human creator’s conscious intentions now appeared to be hopelessly outdated. On one hand, many leading postwar artists and critics endeavored to purge any traces of human intention from their respective practices. On the other hand, technological breakthroughs in artificial intelligence and cybernetics suggested that intentionless non-human entities could seemingly create and appreciate meaningful art. These two currents converged in America in the three decades following World War II, which saw the simultaneous rise of New Criticism, poetry-generating computers, and artistic methods based on chance, free improvisation and the imitation of machine production.

As a discussion which spanned the analytic/continental divide in philosophy as well as literary theory, art criticism and even popular fiction, scholarship on the postwar intention debate has largely been highly specialized. This compartmentalizing approach, however, neglects the extensive dialogue that was occurring between disciplines, as well as the fact that a large portion of the discourse centered around re-negotiating the aims and boundaries of each discipline. As a joint concentrator in Comparative Literature and Philosophy, I hope to utilize a more holistic approach, one that compares the distinct objectives and methodologies of philosophy, criticism and fiction while simultaneously emphasizing the translatability of key ideas across discipline barriers. Ultimately, I wish to argue that postwar American literature, philosophy and criticism engaged in a collaborative referendum on human artistic intention, one which introduced new standards for artistic meaning and permanently destabilized accepted notions of who (or what) can create meaningful art.

[...]

The Tempest: An Isle Full of Noises

(Joint with Music)

In retrospect, I have lived a tame and happy existence, in picturesque northeastern Massachusetts, where my paternal family has lived for centuries. However, I have grown up on a hearty diet of riveting stories from my mother's family, which consists of feminist iconoclasts and Puerto Rican immigrants. While one side is secure and comfortable the other is adventurous and even mischievous. I like to think of myself as much the same. While "Lincoln" obviously comes from my New England side, "Mateo" is my mother's maiden name. In fact, the Mateo family consisted originally of itinerant ranchers in southern Puerto Rico, and my grandfather, now nearing his 97th birthday, tells stories of his upbringing, weathering hurricanes, raising cattle, and fending off bandits. I was brought up listening to Caribbean music, sometimes eating Puerto Rican food, and most of all knowing that somewhere in me were characteristics of the huge, festive, garrulous Mateo family I've heard so much about but have barely met.

My thesis will be an ambitious musical retelling of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a 19th century colonial narrative in Puerto Rico, accompanied by a critical essay of twenty to thirty pages. I am planning to use the Translation Thesis guidelines for the form of my thesis, except that instead of a "translated text" I will produce a musical adaptation. Still, my critical essay will roughly take the form of the translator's preface and will explain the workings of my musical and position the piece in relation to previous musical adaptations of *The Tempest*. I will illuminate exactly how my vision of Shakespeare's play is communicated in the music, and how I form a literary and comparative argument through my reshaping of the original text. Fortunately, *The Tempest*, like other Shakespeare plays, expands beyond itself and implicates philosophical, theatrical, musical, and even anthropological ideas. The playwright takes the chance to open up conversations around colonialism and utopian societies (through Gonzalo's famous speech in which he echoes Montaigne's essays about indigenous peoples) as well as about the very nature of human existence: as Prospero says, "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little / Is rounded with a sleep" (IV.1.156-158).

Having dealt extensively with issues of intercultural musical exchange (most recently when I worked with the Silkroad Ensemble this summer), I am eager to delve into such "exchange" within *The Tempest*. To do so, I must hearken to the musical history of Puerto Rico, which was inhabited originally by the Taíno people but colonized by the Spanish in the 16th century and again by the United States in the last years of the 19th century in the wake of the Spanish American war. I will choose this later date because I feel that I have a greater capacity to access the history of the later period as well as the music that might have been played then (the Mateos were also already settled down on their ranch by then). On the most fundamental level, I plan to have Ariel and Caliban sing a different kind of music than everyone else in the play. Because they are native to the island, they will perform using a Latin-Caribbean musical idiom, whereas the colonizers (everyone originally from Milan, though, in my adaptation, from the United States), will embody a more traditional musical theater aesthetic. I will engage critically with the cultural responses

to and repercussions of colonization both in *The Tempest* and in colonial and postcolonial writings. Importantly, Prospero wields much of his power thanks to the music of the enslaved Ariel, which has the ability to control people and put them to sleep.

[...]

*Tentative Thesis Title: Trump Country and America's Refugee Capital:
Creating a Community through Everyday Acts of Welcome*

There are 65.6 million “forcibly-displaced people” in the world, 22.5 million of which are documented as refugees. Though 86% of refugees are hosted by developing countries, the United States is “the top resettlement country in the world,” and it has taken in over 3 million refugees since 1975.¹ There is a long history of refugee relocation to the United States; it is a history primarily based on changing political circumstances that determine who qualifies for resettlement. The Trump Administration made one of the most sudden and extreme changes to refugee policy in recent years, following campaign rhetoric that was hostile toward refugees. The administration reduced the number of refugees admitted to the country to 50,000, from 110,000 under the Obama Administration, and the number could drop further still. The original version of the executive order pertaining to immigrants and refugees ended refugee resettlement for 120 days and banned individuals from seven countries. Despite this change, many refugees continue to make a home in communities across the United States, including Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

Lancaster County is a rural community, historically rooted in the Anabaptist faith, that has voted conservatively since 1964; however, last year BBC dubbed it “America’s Refugee Capital” for taking in 20 times more refugees per capita than anywhere else in the country.² These seemingly contradictory characteristics create an interesting case study of rural America’s private and public opinions concerning immigration. Why is a community that voted for Donald Trump in 2016, and has a history of conservative ideology, also one of the most vibrant communities of refugee resettlement in the United States? Over the last two months I conducted over 15 interviews in Lancaster that will serve as both my primary literature and the qualitative data with which I will write my thesis. How are people in rural America responding to the resettlement of refugees in their community? And what explains the seeming divergence between public will and the will of political representatives in the community.

[...]

¹ "Resettlement in the United States." *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, UNHCR.

² "Lancaster, Pennsylvania: America's Refugee Capital." *BBC News*, BBC, 27 Jan. 2017.

Language and Tongue:
Micah Yosef Berdichevsky's Philosophy of Literatures

“The personal is political,” wrote Carol Hanisch in 1969, in an essay reflecting on the conflicts between feminist theory and personal reproductive choices. And although her words were written more than a century after the first modern Hebrew literary works began to penetrate the Pale of Settlement, the collapsing of personal and political choices encapsulates the historical, linguistic and national debates surrounding the development of a modern Jewish literature. In this time of upheaval, the *linguistic* was political, a struggle for the hearts and minds of Jewish readership between Hebrew, Yiddish and a plethora of local languages in the Pale of Settlement. In the period between 1828 and 1921, the end of the Russian Revolution, Hebrew was transformed from a language of liturgy and exegesis into a viable medium for sophisticated modern prose, poetry and journalism. In my senior thesis, I hope to explore and translate critical and theoretical works by Micah Yosef Berdichevsky (1865-1921), one of the foremost—and most radical—writers in this literary revolution, in an effort to inform English-language readers about this unprecedented linguistic, literary and ideological phenomenon.

I plan to translate three early-twentieth-century Hebrew works by Micah Yosef Berdichevsky: *Lemahut Hashira* (Towards The Essence of Poetry), *Al Ha-Perek* (On the Chapter), and *Inyanei Lashon* (Matters of Language). Each work is a thematic collection of smaller essays that allow Berdichevsky to express himself in his preferred form—the short and often cryptic reflection. These essays, on the border between literary theory and literary criticism, express Berdichevsky's views on issues pertaining to the philosophy of literature: the specific role of Hebrew literature in a modern world; the role of the artist in historical memory; and the role of poetic creation in man's relations with the divine, among other topics. Cumulatively, the essays provide a fascinating insight into the self-conception of an author writing amid the revival of his language of choice. The essays reflect the perspective of a man trained in the classical German philosophical tradition in Berlin and Bern, and, at the same time, the expressions of an artist writing in a half-formed and continually evolving language, with a minute and disputed readership. As these essays have never been translated into English, my work will allow a new set of readers to access a series of questions evoked by Berdichevsky's thought: What does it mean to

write in a new, or revived, language? What is the role of national art, and the artist in a developing nation? Was the development of Hebrew into a spoken tongue historically inevitable—or historically necessary? These, among other questions, are ones I plan to answer in my translator's preface.

[...]

How to Write a Good Research Proposal

Dennis Yi Tenen, Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University

Many research proposals I read begin with a set of propositions or a thesis. But don't you find it strange to offer conclusions *before* the actual work of collecting, organizing, and synthesizing the material? To my mind, it makes more sense to think about a proposal as *a plan for research*--a document that poses questions, rather than answering them. To these ends, I suggest your proposal contain a concise treatment of the following questions (in any order):

- What has prompted your interest in the topic?
The purpose of the first paragraph is to ease your audience into the field of your research. A small case-study, a quotation, or an anecdote can be used to create a reader-friendly "point-of-departure," which introduces the reader to the range of questions that motivate your work.
- What kinds of questions will you be asking?
What is your **problematic**? What philosophical, literary, social, ideological, or historical problems will your work engage? What kinds of questions do *not* interest you? What categories of thought and critical assumptions involved?
- How do your questions fit into a broader intellectual tradition?
What is the **tradition** of answering these types of questions? Where do you expect to continue or break with the tradition?
- How will you answer your questions?
What are your **methods**? Close reading? Distant reading? Interviews? Archival research? Text analysis? Be practical and specific here.
- Where will you look for your answers?
Create a sense of your **archive**. What kind of materials will you be looking for (literary, legal, scientific)? What period? What language? What medium? What genre? Where is it located? How will you get to it and when? This could be as simple as "Ulysses, by James Joyce," the graphic novel collection at Butler Library, or as complicated as "Comparative traditions of Medieval Slavonic hagiography." What are the biases implicit in your archive or dataset? What kind of things are included or excluded?
- What kind of answers do you anticipate?
What do you **expect** this material to tell you? What possible problems (theoretical, practical, or otherwise) could stand in the way of your analysis?
- How might you structure your writing?
What form do you expect your thesis to take? What sections or subsections will be helpful in organizing your materials and your argument? Do you need to include some cultural or historical context? Make a diagram on a whiteboard, take a picture, and include it in your proposal. Write a section-by-section outline.
- A plan of action
Identify any gaps you have. Describe work completed (if any). Come up with a reasonable **schedule**. Suggest per-week, per-month, per-semester goals and milestones.

TWENTY TIPS FOR SENIOR THESIS WRITERS

(and other writers, too)

by Sheila M. Reindl, Ed.D.

ACADEMIC RESOURCE CENTER SENIOR THESIS TIPS