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INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

24-25 MAY 2024

Keynote speakers

Seeta Chaganti, Professor of English, University of California, Davis

Mark Currie, Professor of Contemporary Literature, Queen Mary,
University of London

Carla Freccero, Distinguished Professor of Literature and History of
Consciousness, University of California, Santa Cruz

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Joseph Hankinson, Career Development Lecturer in English, University of
Oxford

Gareth Lloyd Evans, Rebecca Marsland Lecturer in Medieval Literatures,
University of Oxford



Affiliations Towards a Theory of Cross-Temporal Comparison

In recent years, comparison and comparability have generated thorough critical discussion within the fields of cultural and literary studies. But despite the popularity of comparison as a critical methodology, it is nevertheless the case, as Rita Felski notes, that ‘comparison across space—that is to say, across nations, cultures, or regions—has received far more attention in comparative literature than comparison across time.’ To some extent, existing disciplinary distinctions produce this uneven distribution of attention. Period boundaries impose an often arbitrary temporal delimitation of inquiry, which in turn lends weight to reified and institutionalised categories of thought. Consequently, cross-temporal work is, as Felski argues, habitually ‘seen as evidence of dilettantism or insufficient professionalization.’ But, we suggest, that which has been dismissed as dilettantism itself promises reinvigoration and expansion of the possibilities of literary criticism more generally. Xiaofan Amy Li’s work on the ‘three kinds of comparabilities’ associated with the conventions of ‘existing comparative literature’ (the ‘genealogical, temporal, and generic comparabilities’) has provided a vocabulary for understanding the ways comparative thought makes assumptions about how texts might relate across time (2015, 14). Like the ‘world’ of world literature, which can serve, as Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora, and Francesca Orsini have argued, as ‘dominant explanatory grid’ (2018, 291-2), time in ‘existing comparative literature’ tends to be either reduced to lines of inheritance or treated as a static frame or macro-category that justifies comparability in advance. With this in mind, this conference seeks to provoke discussion of and experimentation with asynchronous encounters, to stage interactions between texts and fields of research routinely kept separate, and to develop collectively a theory of cross-temporal comparison.

Seeking to bring into discussion a wide variety of perspectives on the theory and practice of ‘cross-temporal comparison’, we invite proposals for papers of relevance to the subject of the conference, which might include considerations of:

- Case-studies which stage encounters between texts and contexts from antiquity to the present day, without recourse to lines of influence and inheritance, or a shared cultural context.
- Broader conceptual, philosophical, methodological considerations of the theory of cross-temporal comparison.
- Examinations of the role that social, political, economic, and cultural contexts play in shaping the ways in which cross-temporal comparisons are made, and how can we account for these factors when making such comparisons.
- Explorations of the pedagogical and institutional implications of any thinking-beyond the limits of periodisation.

The conference will be in-person at St Anne’s College, University of Oxford. We welcome (but do not require) joint proposals and innovative styles of presentation.

To submit a proposal, please include in one document the following information: proposals for 20-minute papers (300 words), paper title, and participant(s) biography (100 words).

Please send proposals by email to affiliations.conference@gmail.com

The deadline for submissions is 15 November 2023.