Donald Trump is a presidential candidate, and, whether you love him or hate him, he makes for great television. At the same time, some of the highest-grossing shows in the U.S. are about the “real world” of politics: House of Cards, Veep, Madame Secretary, The Good Wife, etc. “News” channels like FOX, CNN, and NBC have celebrity guests, colorful personalities, skits, explosive graphics, and all manner of attempts to be “entertaining.” Millennials get their news fix from The Colbert Report, The Daily Show, and Last Week Tonight more than anywhere else. For a while now, it seems, the world of politics has become another lucrative piece of the entertainment industry. The real question is: is this all just an act, hiding the reality of what goes on “behind the scenes,” or, is the act the reality? With cameras and smartphones everywhere, with social media and the 24-hr news cycle, is anything behind the scenes? Is there any distinction between politics and political theater? And what about us—the viewers, the consumers—what role do we play in all of this?

The aim of this course will be to harness the critical skills involved in comparative literary study—close reading, textual analysis, critical thinking—and demonstrate how vital these skills are for all of us as political agents. From State-of-the-Union addresses to the spectacle of televised presidential debates, from national protests to Donald Trump’s hat, from popular novels to memes, we will learn to read and study the world of politics like a text. We will also read the narratives that are constructed in our own history, with topics including: Ronald Reagan, Black Lives Matter, the atom bomb, Stephen Colbert, Watergate, the Nixon-JFK debates (and the Frost-Nixon interview), hippies and Rock & Roll, Take Back the Night, etc. We will then use our skills to compose polished, analytical essays, to make strong arguments while appreciating the complexity of political issues. Our goal is to move past the need to see issues in black and white terms, to become better participants in public debate, and to look for a way out of the monkey house.

Course Requirements:
The goal of First-Year Writing Requirement is to prepare students to write in diverse academic contexts. As a broad preparation for the range of writing tasks students will encounter at the University of Michigan and beyond, FYWR courses emphasize evidence, academic writing in a variety of genres and rhetorical situations. This course is foundational for students to master the kind of analysis and argumentation found in sophisticated academic writing.

Intended Audience:

Students, primary in their first year, who need to fulfill the first year writing requirement.

Class Format:

Seminar-discussion

COMPLIT 382 - Translating World Literatures

Section: 201
Modern Literature in Dialogue with Film, Music and Painting
Term: SU 2016
Subject: Comparative Literature (COMPLIT)
Department: LSA Comparative Literature

Credits: 3
Requirements & Distribution: HU
Daniel Herwitz

This course introduces students to the interdisciplinary study of literature and the arts. It poses general questions about the concerns shared by different media (language, paint, music, etc.) as well as arguments between them. It introduces students to basic ideas about aesthetics broadly conceived and permits an exploration of art issues in an inclusive climate where language, music, and the representational arts may come together.