



Research Master Humanities, Program Literature and Contested Spaces  
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam - Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen - M Humanities (research) - 2017-2018

In this Research Master specialization, you examine the roles literary texts play in the representation and shaping of contested spaces. Novels, poems, and plays shape our perceptions and affect our lived experience of such spaces as the nation, wilderness, or the body. These spaces are contested in our current context, and have been in the past centuries. In our seminars, tutorials and individual research projects, you explore how literary texts have played a role in shaping our experience of such contested spaces. In this specialization, you pursue your fascination with the ways in which literary representations interact with real or imagined spaces, geographies and ecosystems. You focus on literature and three kinds of contested space: the (trans)national, the environment, and the body. We welcome students who are keen to hone their critical thinking and research skills in this field; we offer you the chance to pursue your research interests under the guidance of specialists in the field.

In the Literature & Contested Spaces Research Master programme, you examine the roles literary texts play in the representation and shaping of contested spaces. Novels, poems, and plays shape our perceptions and affect our lived experience of such spaces as the nation, wilderness, or the body. These spaces are contested in our current context, and have been in the past centuries. In our seminars, tutorials and individual research projects, you explore how literary texts have played a role in shaping our experience of such contested spaces. In this specialization, you pursue your fascination with the ways in which literary representations interact with real or imagined spaces, geographies and ecosystems. You focus on literature and three kinds of contested space: the (trans)national, the environment, and the body. We welcome students who are keen to hone their critical thinking and research skills in this field; we offer you the chance to pursue your research interests under the guidance of specialists in the field.

### **The (trans)national as contested space**

The role of the nation state and its connection to supranational organizations is one of the most hotly debated issues in politics today. As Brexit and the current American elections show, the sovereignty of the nation state may be making a comeback. Yet political developments can also be read as reactions to an unstoppable globalizing process that has accelerated since the twentieth century, and which has had an impact on the canon, on our student population, and our curriculum. In the wake of the transnational turn that has questioned mononational narratives of literature, we study literature in the understanding that issues of nationality, transnationalism, regionalism, race, and ethnicity are contested spaces that invite constant redrawing. Literature can be read as reflecting as well as shaping this dynamic interplay historically and as a space where these tensions can be tested and discussed today.

### **Space, place and environment**

When astronauts on the Apollo 17 took this photo of the Earth as a small blue planet surrounded by infinite space, they sparked a sense of belonging that grew into the environmental movement. Like photos, literary texts shape our perceptions of the spaces we live in, expressing and affecting our connections to our environment. This spatial perspective is fully integrated into your ecocritical readings of literature's role in shaping and contesting ideas of wilderness, interconnectedness, and belonging. In our ecocriticism courses, you explore literary as well as visual representations of the relations between humans and their environment from the early modern period until now. You learn to think about the role scale and perceptions of space play in environmental awareness, and the ways literature can foster a sense of connection with places.

### **Mapping the body**

Like the nation and ecology, the body -- whether human or animal -- is a contested space. While dominated in Western cultures by the Cartesian distinction between body and mind for centuries, various discussions about the classification, demarcation, function, and nature of the body have taken root since the last century. These have intensified in this century as a result of new scientific discoveries, new and anticipated future technological developments, and the influence of non-Western cultures. We are principally concerned with the literary and visual representation of the body as being gendered, enslaved, traumatized, and having agency or not, and the relationship with hegemonic discourses in society, from early modern times to now. We are, in other words, interested in the notion of life as an embodied experience, and how literary forms provide a space to foreground that issue. We welcome students who are eager to work in that area.

### **Electives**

In the first year, next to the core courses and modules in the Humanities Research Master, you also choose 4 MA courses offered by the department, or opt for a course from other departments in the faculty (see below). Three of our MA courses have a specific spatial focus, and are therefore recommended in the schedule above:

#### *Place and Planet in the Anthropocene*

In this course, you explore how recent novels respond to our changing sense of planet in the context of the current climate crisis. Geologists have suggested that the current era be named the 'Anthropocene' to mark human's

overwhelming impact on the earth. We analyze literary texts from the perspective of questions of space, place, and environment to see how what Adam Trexler has called Anthropocene fictions respond to this increasing awareness of human impact on the planet. Using concepts such as sense of place, interconnectedness, belonging, and hyperobject, we explore how novels shape new ways of inhabiting our planet in the current climate crisis.

### *The Diasporic Experience*

This course examines literary and visual texts that originate in a wide variety of North American diasporic cultures, and that have triggered new ways of thinking about life after migration. In their narratives and imagery of diaspora life, do authors and artists relate similar (chronological) outlines of displacement, uprootedness, intercultural encounters, transculturation and cultural hybridization? Or have they come up with new and innovative (non)plots and imageries? How do gender, race, ethnicity and nationality intersect in their projects?

### *Gothic Spaces*

The Gothic as a literary genre has undergone several defined phases of 'production, style and representation' since the eighteenth century. The course 'Gothic Spaces' will examine how important the concept of 'space' has been in this development of the genre. Specifically, we will look at how the Gothic problematizes the relationship between ideas of place in terms of cultural, geographical and as an abstract location of meaning and examine the ways in which Gothic spaces are almost always ambiguous and liminal-a characteristic that might explain our enduring interest in the genre.

### **Electives outside the department**

In addition to these courses, you may either choose another course from our regular MA programme, or opt for a course with a spatial perspective offered by another department, for example the course Biography of Landscape (6 EC, period 2) in the Landscape and Heritage module of the Research Master Classics and Ancient Civilizations, or a course in the specialization Migration and Mobility in the MA History, which focuses on the history of a mobile world in which migration, travel, tourism and pilgrimage have always been central to human interactions and identities, linking that history to contemporary politics.

[Programme overview](#)

[Teaching and Examination Regulations \(in Dutch\) on VUnet \(inlog\)](#)

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## Core Course Contesting Spaces

<b>Vakcode</b>	L_AAMPALG011 ()
<b>Periode</b>	Periode 5+6
<b>Credits</b>	9.0
<b>Voertaal</b>	Engels
<b>Faculteit</b>	Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen
<b>Coördinator</b>	dr. E.L. la Cour
<b>Examinator</b>	dr. E.L. la Cour
<b>Docent(en)</b>	dr. E.L. la Cour
<b>Lesmethode(n)</b>	Werkcollege
<b>Niveau</b>	500

## Core Course National Historiographies and Contested Heritage

<b>Vakcode</b>	L_AAMPALG008 ()
<b>Periode</b>	Periode 2+3
<b>Credits</b>	9.0
<b>Voertaal</b>	Engels
<b>Faculteit</b>	Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen
<b>Coördinator</b>	dr. B. Boter
<b>Examinator</b>	dr. B. Boter
<b>Docent(en)</b>	prof. dr. S. Legene, dr. B. Boter
<b>Lesmethode(n)</b>	Werkcollege
<b>Niveau</b>	500

### Doel vak

This core course trains Research Master students and PhD candidates in devising and executing a common research project, based on theoretical and historical texts, which critically engages with libraries, archives and cultural institutions that house and provide access to relevant textual, material or visual collections. The course focuses on tracing and re-interpreting primary sources that have been canonised in national historiographies, while inviting the participants to reflect on and discuss various theories and methodologies related to notions of evidence, experience, authenticity, voicing, representation and reception.

Participants work independently and align their approaches and results with the common overarching theme of the workings of the imagination in political contestations around nation building. They will be trained to review and report on each other's work in class and at the Graduate School. They will do so in both oral and written form, and at a high academic level.

### Inhoud vak

In the edited volume *Nationalizing the past*, a number of historians present their predecessors as 'nation builders in modern Europe' (Berger/Lorenz 2010). Moreover, recent literature from Cultural Studies, Museum Studies, Comparative Literature, Public History and Anthropology zooms in on museums as nation builders, or on artists, novelists, photographers, cartographers, and film makers as historians. So who does

what? Whereas 'traditional' Political History typically focuses on the politicians, the armies, the electorate, and the unruly crowd in order to explain processes of state formation and nation building, Cultural Studies and Cultural History seem to be oriented more towards the nationalizing impact of narratives, and of cultural expressions and activities. They invoke anthropological concepts like the 'theatre state' (Geertz) to analyze political processes and explain how (auto)biographies or historiographies of individual objects and rituals, such as those labelled as being part of 'world heritage,' project national histories onto specific political or national sites. How does this cultural turn relate to political processes of nation-state formation and what are the implications for history as a discipline? In order to find answers to these and other questions the course will revisit Anderson's famous notion of 'imagined community' (1991) in order to examine and discuss the workings of the imagination in political contestations around nation building. The course offers a case study approach. Recent developments in South African historiography and representations of the South African past in biographies, exhibitions, movies, truth-reports, constitute one such possible case. The selection of case studies will partly depend on the research interests and ongoing (RMA or PhD-thesis) work of the participants. This course outline is a draft, open for revision during the first class sessions.

### **Onderwijsvorm**

Seminar. The research project will relate to ongoing research by Legêne, Boter and others within the framework of the 'Global History, Heritage and Memory' programme at the VU research institute CLUE+. The participants will (1) read common theoretical literature and historical monographs; (2) meet other researchers at international conferences or seminars on heritage policies and national identity. In addition they will discuss various approaches to the relevant sources and their institutional contexts and (3) select one cultural production (exhibition, biography, theatre play...) for an in-depth analysis. Finally (4) each participant will work on an individual case study, related and relevant to a common research question and their own Research Master or PhD project. At a final Graduate Seminar, the participants will present their research and conclusions to other VU-students and -staff and in the context of relevant research schools (OPG, Huizinga, other).

### **Toetsvorm**

Pro-active and full participation during class sessions; individual and group presentations in class; feedback on work by fellow participants: 30%.

Individual final paper: 40%.

Contribute to the organisation of, and individual presentation during, the Graduate Seminar and/or Research School Seminar: 20%.

Contribution to a general article on the selected cultural production: 10%.

Each aspect has to be satisfactory for a pass. No compensation of partial grades will be allowed.

### **Literatuur**

To be announced

### **Doelgroep**

This core module is part of the disciplinary programme of History and of xxxx in the broad Humanities Research Master programme and the second

year Research Master History and xxx programme. PhD students (VU), external PhD candidates and students from the relevant interuniversity research schools are invited to participate as well.

### Overige informatie

This course alternates on a yearly basis with the other core course 'Emotional Economies'. The course will be taught in 2017-18.

## Digital and Environmental Humanities

<b>Vakcode</b>	L_AAMPALG007 ()
<b>Periode</b>	Periode 2
<b>Credits</b>	6.0
<b>Voertaal</b>	Engels
<b>Faculteit</b>	Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen
<b>Coördinator</b>	prof. dr. I.B. Leemans
<b>Examinator</b>	prof. dr. I.B. Leemans
<b>Docent(en)</b>	prof. dr. P.J.E.M. van Dam, dr. S.J. Kluiving, dr. K. Steenbergh, dr. J.W.H.P. Verhagen, dr. C.M. van den Akker, prof. dr. I.B. Leemans, prof. dr. K. Kwastek
<b>Lesmethode(n)</b>	Werkcollege
<b>Niveau</b>	500

### Doel vak

This course offers an introduction for all Humanities Research Master students into the present state of Humanities research, specifically to the VU research environment, and the cross cutting themes Digital Humanities and Environmental Humanities, as examples of relatively new, dynamic interdisciplinary research fields. Introduction to these fields will provide insight as to how humanities research can connect to other sciences and how can we connect Humanities research with societal challenges.

### Inhoud vak

After a general introduction into Humanities research and the VU interdisciplinary research institutes, students choose for either Digital Humanities or Environmental Humanities.

#### Environmental Humanities

This part of the course introduces you to a relatively new and flourishing field: the environmental humanities. When you think about pollution, animals rights or climate change, you may not immediately realize the relevance of the humanities for these issues. The question how we imagine our relation to nature, however, is just as essential as measuring CO2 emissions. Our imagination of the relationship between humans and environment has a direct impact on our interactions with planet earth.

We focus on the perception of the relationship between humans and the environment from a mix of disciplinary perspectives. We do so by exploring four interdisciplinary themes: agency, sources, time scales, and cognition. For the theme sources, we investigate how the choice of certain types of sources influences the perspective on the environment, and how sources affect visions about the present and the future, for instance in city planning. For the theme agency we examine the question whether literary texts can "speak for nature." For the theme time scales

we study time scales that inform human conceptions of the environment as well as research in the environmental humanities. For the theme cognition, we explore the relation between human cognition, literature, history, and our perceptions of the environment.

### Digital Humanities

In our globalizing and increasingly digital world of big data, there is growing demand for scholars who are trained in comparing complex and long term sets of quantitative and qualitative data. The sources and objects studied in history, media, literature, and linguistics are also increasingly becoming available digitally.

What is Digital Humanities and what is the history of this field of research? What are the main debates, the most dominant subfields and techniques used? In this part of the course we will introduce this cross-disciplinary research field, by exploring subfields e.g. Digital Hermeneutics, Geographical Information Systems, Text and Sentiment Analysis, and Visualisations. Students will be introduced to data collections and computational tools and methods used in the field, and try out some techniques. Students write a reflective paper, partly based on a digital micro project.

In a final session, both groups will join again to communicate their findings.

### Onderwijsvorm

Seminars

### Toetsvorm

Class participation, oral and written assignments (30%); final paper (70%).

### Literatuur

Provided through Canvas.

### Vereiste voorkennis

BA in a Humanities programme

### Doelgroep

Students admitted to the Research Master Programmes of the VU Faculty of Humanities

## Gothic Spaces

<b>Vakcode</b>	L_ELMALTK004 ()
<b>Periode</b>	Periode 5
<b>Credits</b>	6.0
<b>Voertaal</b>	Engels
<b>Faculteit</b>	Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen
<b>Coördinator</b>	dr. A.S. Raghunath
<b>Examinator</b>	dr. A.S. Raghunath
<b>Docent(en)</b>	dr. A.S. Raghunath
<b>Lesmethode(n)</b>	Werkcollege
<b>Niveau</b>	400

**Doel vak**

This MA course aims to explore the relationship between the Gothic and ideas of space, location and liminality. Gothic has perennially been associated with the unseen, the hidden, the taboo and the course will look to explore how this central theme has been present in Gothic literary production from the mid-Eighteenth Century to the present. This study will allow students to develop independent research skills throughout the programme and we aim to examine why the Gothic remains both current and important in culture today.

**Inhoud vak**

The course will examine a range of texts from a variety of cultural domains, both literary and visual, to explore the connections between the Gothic and space. Our programme will be organised chronologically from the 18th Century to the present to highlight the development of Gothic from a popular form of literature that was at the outset seen as 'low-brow' and unimportant to (arguably) one of the most widespread cultural genres of literature in the 21st Century.

**Onderwijsvorm**

lecture and seminar (two hours a week each)

**Toetsvorm**

one 4000 word essay

**Literatuur**

tbc

**Vereiste voorkennis**

BA degree

**Doelgroep**

MA/RMA students of literature.

## Humanities in Society

<b>Vakcode</b>	L_AAMPALG005 ()
<b>Periode</b>	Periode 4
<b>Credits</b>	6.0
<b>Voertaal</b>	Engels
<b>Faculteit</b>	Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen
<b>Coördinator</b>	prof. dr. P.J.E.M. van Dam
<b>Examinator</b>	prof. dr. P.J.E.M. van Dam
<b>Docent(en)</b>	prof. dr. P.J.E.M. van Dam, dr. T. Krennmayr
<b>Lesmethode(n)</b>	Werkcollege
<b>Niveau</b>	400

**Doel vak**

Learning to position the field of Humanities in society and to position your discipline in the Humanities; composing a research proposal; presenting this in a convincing, well-argued manner for an educated, partly non-specialist audience, both orally and in writing; learning 'interdisciplinary communication,' in particular also using visual tools

to present your research.

### **Inhoud vak**

The course comprises plenary discussions on the basis of literature on the role of humanities and other topics; individual and group assignments for presentations on the perspectives of digital humanities and other topics; an excursion to important Dutch Institutes in the Humanities field; discussions in groups on research proposals written and presented by the students; written reports on attended Graduate School Events

### **Onderwijsvorm**

Seminar and Excursion.

### **Toetsvorm**

Research proposal (written version) 60 %; other assignments 40 %.

### **Literatuur**

Provided by the lecturers.

### **Doelgroep**

The course is compulsory for all research master students.

## **Place and Planet in the Anthropocene**

<b>Vakcode</b>	L_ELMALTK001 ()
<b>Periode</b>	Periode 1
<b>Credits</b>	6.0
<b>Voertaal</b>	Engels
<b>Faculteit</b>	Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen
<b>Coördinator</b>	dr. K. Steenbergh
<b>Examinator</b>	dr. K. Steenbergh
<b>Docent(en)</b>	dr. K. Steenbergh
<b>Lesmethode(n)</b>	Werkcollege
<b>Niveau</b>	400

### **Doel vak**

After completing this course, you:

- will be familiar with theories on the cultural imagination and understanding of place and planet in the Anthropocene;
- will be able to apply these theories in an analysis of the literary texts on the syllabus;
- will be able to engage with other critics' arguments in your own analysis of a literary work in class discussion and in a written essay.

### **Inhoud vak**

In this course we explore theories on the role of the perception of our planet and the environment in the Anthropocene, the current geological period named after man's pervasive impact on our planet. The Norwegian environmentalist philosopher Arne Naess has argued that with respect to humans' capacity to care for others, "the nearer has priority over the more remote—in space, time, culture, species." In response, other writers from a range of theoretical frameworks seek to shape a sense of eco-cosmopolitanism, or forms of cultural imagination and understanding that reach beyond the nation and around the globe. In this course, we

will analyze a number of literary texts written in English from the perspective of these theories, and examine the role of literature in the shaping of a sense of place and planet.

### Onderwijsvorm

Seminars (2 x 2 hours a week)

### Toetsvorm

The course will be assessed with a written essay.

### Literatuur

To be announced (registered students will receive a mail ahead of class)

### Doelgroep

Students in the MA English Literature in a Visual Culture or the RMA Humanities / Literature and Contested Spaces / Environmental Humanities track.

## The Diasporic Experience: Ethnic Cultures of America

<b>Vakcode</b>	L_ELMAENG014 ()
<b>Periode</b>	Periode 4
<b>Credits</b>	6.0
<b>Voertaal</b>	Engels
<b>Faculteit</b>	Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen
<b>Coördinator</b>	dr. B. Boter
<b>Examinator</b>	dr. B. Boter
<b>Docent(en)</b>	dr. B. Boter
<b>Lesmethode(n)</b>	Werkcollege
<b>Niveau</b>	400

### Doel vak

After completing this course, students are able to:

- draw on theories that are relevant for an understanding of the processes of migration and transculturation as mediated in literary and visual texts.
- apply theoretical concepts such as nationality, ethnicity and hybridity to representations of diaspora in (literary and visual) texts.
- comparatively analyze diaspora texts coming from different cultural and national contexts.
- formulate a research question, locate and interpret sources, assess the significance of their own research within the framework of current debates on diaspora writing.
- explain how diaspora writing is implicated in the processes of identity formation (both collective and individual) and intercultural exchange.
- freely express their ideas in both written work and oral presentations.

### Inhoud vak

This course examines literary and visual texts that originate in a wide variety of (North American and other) diasporic cultures, and that have triggered new ways of thinking about life after migration. In their narratives and imagery of diaspora life, do authors and artists relate similar (chronological) outlines of displacement, uprootedness,

intercultural encounters, transculturation and cultural hybridization?  
Or have they come up with new and innovative (non)plots and imageries?  
How do gender, race, ethnicity and nationality intersect in the  
representation of diaspora?

### **Onderwijsvorm**

Two seminars per week of two hours each; one extra film viewing session  
to be scheduled in the first week of the course.

### **Toetsvorm**

30% Class participation, including group presentation and moderation of  
a discussion.

30% Written posts on Canvas (weekly). Submitting all posts on time is a  
prerequisite for being allowed to take the exam and thus for  
successfully finishing the course.

40% Written exam. Students will not be allowed to compensate an exam  
grade that is lower than 5.5 with other partial grades.

### **Literatuur**

Novels, short stories, memoirs, graphic novels, academic articles. We  
will start off with a close-reading of three short stories from  
Chimamanda Adichie's collection *The Thing around Your Neck* (2009).

### **Doelgroep**

MA and RMA students.