The academic year 2015-2016 gave students, staff, and faculty affiliated with Comparative Literature many reasons to celebrate, not least of which was the granting of the promotion and tenure to Ignacio Infante, who has become a mainstay of our undergraduate and graduate program. His future assured, we are in an even better position to plan for the future, one that is certain to support the theory and practice of literary translation. This newsletter highlights many but certainly not all of the many achievements of our students and faculty from this past year and previews events to come.

As registration for Fall 2016 unfolds, we’re watching our courses fill rapidly. We are offering more courses, both undergraduate and graduate, than we have for many years. These courses, which model the variety and excitement of the field of Comparative Literature, span the globe from China to the Middle East to Europe to the US, examine literature from western antiquity to contemporary world literature, and explore approaches to literature from digital humanities to literature and politics, to literary translation, and many more.

In the fall, we expect five new Ph.D. students, hailing from five different countries and working in and with five different languages, to join our new international writers track. They promise to invigorate the program, combining creative work with academic inquiry. Given our good experience this spring with “Literature in the Making,” we know that a combination of literary praxis with literary criticism and theory can produce exciting conversations among creative writers, translators, and academics, as well as outstanding work by all three groups.

Save the date: Thursday, August 25 from 4:00-6:00 pm
Annual Comparative Literature Open House, featuring an international poetry reading and photography contest

May ’16 Bachelor of Arts candidates include:
Comparative Literature majors:
Caleb DeLorme—2015-2016 Merle Kling Fellow
Dinora Murota
Thach-Thao “Lace” Nguyen
Shelby Ozer
Kate Shin

Comparative Arts majors:
Libby Perold (with Honors)
Laura Roettges

Comparative Literature minors:
Rory King
Deedee Pearce

Congratulations to our May graduates!

May ’16 Ph.D. graduates include:
Ph.D. in Comparative Literature:
Julia Leverone
Dissertation title: “A Daring Voice: Confessional Poetry from Argentina and the United States”
Dissertation chair: Professor Ignacio Infante
Ph.D. in Chinese/ Comparative Literature:
Chun Yu Lu
Dissertation chair and co-chair: Professor Letty Chen and Professor Bob Hegel

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German Symposium

The 23rd International Symposium on German Literature and Culture, a biennial event, took place from March 31 to April 2. This year’s topic was “Knowledge in Motion: Constructing Transcultural Experience in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods (1200–1750),” which explored the ways in which societies have shared information across time, and how this impacts methods of reading, writing, and translating. Space, location, and bordercrossing also arise as important themes in relation to knowledge creation and transmission.

Professor Christian Schneider, who organized the event alongside Professor Gerhild Scholz Williams, adds these comments indicating that the theme is geographically, historically, and intellectually very expansive: “Knowledge is what builds and drives communities, what makes them prosper and transforms them into societies that are open to mutual influence and cultural exchange. This is as true today, as it was true in previous centuries. Exploring movements of knowledge in the medieval and early modern periods helps us to better understand the mechanics and dynamics of how different cultural settings influence each other, how they communicate and interact, either by way of adaptation or demarcation. Studying earlier periods in history invites for comparison with our times--what is different, what is perhaps not so different--and thus enhances our understanding of movements of knowledge today.”

Every other year, the theme is determined by the research interests of the two faculty organizers. This year’s was inspired by a book by Dr. Ottmar Ette, a visiting scholar from the University of Potsdam. Ette launched the symposium with his opening keynote lecture, “Knowledge in Motion–Knowledge through Motion: Nomadic Patterns of Life Writing.” Ette was just one of many visiting academics to the conference, who travelled from various parts of both Europe and North America to present and attend.

Congratulations! Faculty news


Ignacio Infante has been promoted to Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and Spanish, with tenure. Additionally, two excerpts of his co-translation with Michael Leong of Vicente Huidobro’s Sky-Quake: Tremor of Heaven appeared recently, the first one in the translation journal Asymptote, and a second one in Boston Review.

Professor Tim Moore (Classics), in cooperation with Olin Library and the Digital Humanities Workshop of Washington University in St. Louis, has completed an on-line database of all the meters used in the plays of the Roman comic playwrights Plautus and Terence. The database will allow users to study in an efficient manner how the playwrights used different meters to produce various effects in their plays.

Professor and Vice Provost and Associate Vice Chancellor Gerhild Williams (German) recently gave two presentations: at the Early Modern Women conference in June, 2014 (Milwaukee), she gave a talk entitled “Making Time Go Away: Magical Manipulations of Time and Space.” At the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference in October, 2015 (Vancouver, Canada), she gave a talk entitled “The Turkish Melting Pot: On Becoming Turk in Ottoman Eurasia.” Professor Williams also recently published an article entitled “Early Modern Translation and Transfer: Mixing but (not) matching Languages, Johannes Praetorius and Eberhard Werner Happel” in Un/Translatables, ed. Catriona Macleod and Bethany Wiggin (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2016).

Congratulations! Student news

Ling Kang (Ph.D. student in Chinese/Comp Lit) was awarded a Dean’s Award for Teaching Excellence.

Hilah Kohen (Comparative Literature major), has been named a Merle Kling Fellow for the 2016-2017 academic year.

May Ph.D. graduate Julia Leverone recently published a chapbook of poetry, entitled Shoulderering (Finishing Line Press). December '15 graduate Anastasia Sorokina, a Comparative Arts major, won this year’s Emma Kafalenos Prize for the best honors thesis.

Congratulations! Alumni/ae news

Elizabeth Scarlett (B.A. Comp. Lit., 1983) reports that the University of Michigan has published her book, entitled Religion and Spanish Film: Luis Buñuel, the Franco Era, and Contemporary Directors. She is Professor and Chair of the Department of Romance Languages & Literatures at the University at Buffalo of the State University of New York, and she can be reached at scarlett@buffalo.edu).

Rafika Zahrouni (Ph.D. '14) has become an Assistant Professor at the Nabeul Higher Institute of Languages in Tunisia.
Washington University at ACLA

Washington University graduate students and faculty members affiliated with the Comparative Literature program participated in this year’s American Comparative Literature Association annual meeting which took place in Boston, Massachusetts (March 17-20).

Associate Professor Ignacio Infante (Comparative Literature and Spanish) presented a paper on a panel on Translation and/as Literary Theory. His paper was entitled, “The Form of Translation: Vischer, Benjamin and the Cognitive Poetics of Übertragung.”

Assistant Professor Anne-Marie McManus (JINELC) gave a talk on “Stretching Sound: Language in Saadi Youssef’s Algerian Poetry.”

Professor Akiko Tsuchiya (Spanish) organized a panel on “Transoceanic Perspectives on Gender, Race and Colonialism in the Hispanic World.” Her talk was entitled “Gender, Colonialism, and Transatlantic Sex-Trafficking in Fin-de-siècle Spanish Literature.”

On a panel entitled “Performance and/as Exception,” Associate Professor Julia Walker (Drama and English) gave a talk entitled “Performing the State: Rudolf von Laban, Eurhythmics, and the Nazi Body Politic.”

Postdoctoral Fellow Saul Zarritt (JINELC) gave a paper on “Yiddish, Translation, and a World Literature To-Come.”

Among the graduate students, Deniz Gundogan Ibrisim (Comp Lit) gave a talk entitled, “Ethical and Relational Witnessing in Samer Yazbek and Ahdaf Soueif: Expanding the Contours of Grievability and Livability Under Political Violence.”

Hao Jin (Chinese/ Comp Lit) gave a talk on “The Myth of Shangri-La and Its Paradox: Reading An Yiru’s The Sun and the Moon.”

Lei Qin (Comp Lit) presented a paper entitled “Between Political Movement and Artistic Value - Literary Journalism in 1930s China.”

Finally, Ling Kang (Chinese/ Comp Lit) and Yunzi Melody Li (Comp Lit) co-organized “Reconsidering Sinophone Literature and its “Politics of Recognition.” Ling’s talk was entitled “A Non-Local Sinophone Literature: Kim-chew Ng’s Writings of Malayan Communists” while Melody’s paper posed the question: “What does ‘South’ mean to Sinophone Literature?”

An Undergraduate at the ACLA — by Hilah Kohen

For someone less than two years out of high school, attending the American Comparative Literature Association’s Annual Meeting feels akin to transforming oneself into an anthropomorphic sponge that asks too many questions. During this year’s conference, my attempts to hold in a saturation of new ideas left me with a few notable droplets to convey:

1. Portable sundials made in sixteenth-century Nuremberg were modular both physically (they could be adjusted for latitude) and culturally (some were inscribed with Turkic words in Arabic script).

2. Wash U graduate students are just as kind and open if you meet them in another time zone.

3. In the year Crime and Punishment was published, 80% of Croatians were illiterate.

4. Literary scholars who are anxious about the institutional status of the natural sciences rarely seem to have been involved in that field themselves.

5. One early cultivator of cross-cultural botanical gardens in Mauritius was named Pierre Poivre (literally Peter Pepper).

6. Sometimes, the word you hear most in a weekend is “Anthropocene.”

7. Machine guns were originally designed as defensive weapons.

8. There are rooms in this country where conversations in French, Arabic, German, English, Mandarin, and Hebrew take place all at the same time solely because those are the most comfortable languages of the interlocutors.

9. Sometimes, the cheesiest statements turn out to be true:

10. Every day, as I left that conference, I felt incredibly lucky to have landed in this field.

Hilah Kohen is a second-year student majoring in Comparative Literature with a minor in Russian.
1. Tell us about your honors’ thesis (“(Im)possible Spaces: Invisible Cities in an Age of Urban Crisis”) what made you decide to include both an online presence (the website) and the written thesis for this project?
Throughout my undergraduate career, I’ve had seemingly divergent interests in the humanities — literature, language, and art theory — and web design. It had always been a personal goal to combine these interests in my thesis but it wasn’t until I read Invisible Cities that I discovered the intellectual link between them. Artists and architects have ‘illustrated’ the book many times over, yet no one had ever translated the book’s themes onto the web. To me, the medium of the web suits wonderfully Calvino’s emphasis on exploration, navigation, and losing oneself.

2. What were your favorite classes taken at WashU?
I’ve loved so many of my classes at WashU! Professor Cuillé’s Introduction to Comparative Arts was right up my alley and I have adored my Sam Fox courses, particularly Gina Grafós’ photography classes and Ken Botnick’s History of Communication Design. Also, Professor Parvulescu’s course in Literary Theory and Professor Pardue’s Kill Assessment remain two of my favorite classes.

3. Do you have any post-graduation plans?
After graduation, I am moving to Boston, where I’ll start a full-time position as a User Experience Designer at athenahealth, a healthcare software company.

4. What advice would you give to a first-year student considering majoring in Comp Arts?
I think new Comp Arts majors should take advantage of the flexibility of the program. It’s one of the unique majors at WashU because it gives you the freedom to design your education. When I became a Comp Arts major, I had never even heard of User Experience design. Comp Arts gave me the opportunity to discover my professional and intellectual passions as they evolved.
25 Years of Graduate Student Symposia

In honor of the 25 years of graduate student symposia in their respective programs, this year’s symposium brought graduate students in the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures and in the Comparative Literature program together for a day of intellectual vigor. The symposium took place on February 26 in Umrah Lounge. Professors Erin McGlothlin and Lynne Tatlock gave a warm welcome to the full audience. Topics of discussion during the two panels, two keynote talks (including one by alumnus Nick Tamarkin (Comp. Lit. Ph.D. ’15; pictured) and the roundtable discussion included themes of resistance and belonging within the realm of international literature and film.

Comparative Literature and joint Comparative Literature graduate students who were involved with the planning of or participated in the event included Baba Badji, Amy Braun, Deniz Gundogan-Ibrisim, Bethany Morgan, Ling Kang, Erika Rodriguez, Corinne Zeman, and Christin Zenker.

A Day of Literature in the Making

On April 26, two readings took place that celebrated international writing and translations. Two Swedish poets, Ida Börgel and Jenny Tunedal, shared their poetry. The audience experienced the poetry in its original Swedish, as well as the English translations. Graduate student Claire Ross (German) read the English translations, at times simultaneously with the Swedish poets. The Swedish poetry reading was organized by Matthias Goeritz, William Gass Fellow, who is currently earning his Ph.D. in the new track for international writers.

Matthias also collaborated with Professor Lynne Tatlock this semester on the “Literature in the Making” course in which students work on their own creative writing or on translations of world literature. Students in the Literature in the Making course gave a reading to showcase their semester’s work. The participants shared their original or translated works, including poetry and short stories. The pieces were read in English, but the languages of the original works include German, English, French, Spanish, Vietnamese, Wolof, and Bulgarian.

Pictured above from left to right:
Claire Ross reading with Jenny Tunedal
Claire Ross reading with Ida Börjel
Members of the Literature in the Making class: Dorotea Lechkova, Professor Lynne Tatlock, Thomas Scholz; Gabriella Martin, Baba Badji, Matthias Goeritz, Rebecca Dehner-Armand
Fall 2016 courses

L16 151C Freshman Seminar: The Short-Story Sequence: Imagined Communities Miriam Bailin
L16 1540 Freshman Seminar: Literature and Politics Steven Zwicker
L16 1590 Freshman Seminar: Literature and Justice Wolfram Schmidgen
L16 201A Classical to Renaissance Literature (3 sections) Jami Ake; Philip Purchase; Robert Henke
L16 211 World Literature Ignacio Infante
L15 228C Theater Culture Studies I Rob Henke
L16 301C Greek Mythology Cathy Keane
L16 3040 Intro to Digital Humanities: Cultural Analysis Anupam Basu
L16 3050 Literary Modernities Erika Conti
L16 3071 Caribbean Literature Dillon J Brown
L16 211 World Literature Ignacio Infante
L16 301C Greek Mythology Cathy Keane
L16 3040 Intro to Digital Humanities: Cultural Analysis Anupam Basu
L16 3050 Literary Modernities Erika Conti
L16 3071 Caribbean Literature Dillon J Brown

L16 313E Introduction to Comparative Arts: Cultural Constructs Tili Boon Cuillé
L16 3231 Topics in Literature: Transatlantic Foreignisms Vivian Pollak
L16 325 Introduction to Arabic Literature Instructor TBD
L16 3263 Topics in East Asian Studies: Chinese Media Old and New: History, Practice, Perspectives Laura Wen
L16 343A Literature and Science: One Culture or Two? Steven Meyer
L16 3552 Introduction to Literary Theory Margaret Guinn Batten
L16 375 Topics in Comparative Literature I: "The Trope of 'China' in the Imagination of the Chinese Diaspora" Letty Chen
L16 4300 Data Manipulation for the Humanities Anupam Basu
L16 4310 Statistics for Humanities Scholars Greg Whitfield
L16 4340 Topics in English and American Drama: Melodrama Julia Walker
L16 450A Interdisciplinary Topics in the Humanities: Romancing the Ruins: Victorian Rome Miriam Bailin and Philip Purchase
L16 461A Literature of Globalization in the Age of Darwin and Marx William McKelvy
L16 475A Queering Sexual Cultures in Africa and the Diaspora Jordache Ellapen
L16 4980 Spenser Joe Loewenstein
L16 498W The Spenser Lab Joe Loewenstein
L16 502 Introduction to Comparative Literature Anca Parvulescu
L16 512 Literature in the Making Two Lynne Tatlock and Matthias Goeritz
L16 5230 Literature of the New U.S. Immigration Long Le-Khac
L16 529A Seminar in Cultural Theory: Vienna 1900 Caroline Kita
L16 551 Methods of Literary Study: the Theory and Practice of Literary Translation Gerhild Williams
Just as, historically speaking, Comparative Literature arose from the emergence of nationalism (borders can’t be crossed if none exist) the field today cannot prosper without strong national literature departments. But for both students and faculty, Comparative Literature appeals to the pervasive desire to transcend the merely national point of view, to engage with great imaginative works of literature from different places and times. Mandating an intense immersion in at least one foreign language and literature, and with courses on literature in translation that seriously engage non-western literature as well as western texts, Comparative Literature provides to its students a serious, sustained understanding of cultures beyond their own, and helps them become better global citizens. Comparative Literature is well situated to study, as no single national literature department can, relationships between literary cultures as they involve influence, encounter, exchange, and translation.

Historically, Comparative Literature’s transnational orientation has made it the home for literary theory, which has transformed the study of literature since the 1960s. For the benefit of all literature majors at Washington University, Comparative Literature therefore offers courses on literary theory at both the undergraduate and graduate level. We also uniquely offer an interdisciplinary major in Comparative Arts, founded on an introductory core course, in which students explore relationships among literature and painting, sculpture, architecture, music, drama, and film.

Cracked Blue - (from Norm and Paradise of the Blacks)
By Laura Roettges, ’16, a Comparative Arts and Mathematics major