We in Comparative Literature were deeply saddened in December by the news of the death of William H. Gass, emeritus professor of philosophy and the David May Distinguished University Professor in the Humanities. Professor Gass, one of the most esteemed American authors of our time, was a friend of the program in Comparative Literature for many decades. The International Writer’s Center, which was founded by Gass in 1990 and hosted leading writers from around the globe, served as an inspiration for the launching of our international writers track in the PhD Program in 2014. Reviewers have appraised Professor Gass’s novels, essays, and translations as savage, Baroque, piercingly sad, luminous, and haunting in vain attempts to characterize aptly the literary voice that was all his own. In an appreciative commemorative essay, the New York Times recalled not only Professor Gass’s literary achievements, but also his strong views on literature, and his acerbic wit. In reply to a colleague’s lofty metaphor of high flying art, Professor Gass replied of his own work, “What I really want is to have it sit there solid as a rock and have everybody think it is flying.” (New York Times, December 7, 2017). Our literary life has been made poorer by his passing; we will continue to read his work.

Lynne Tatlock, Director, Comparative Literature and Hortense and Tobias Lewin Distinguished Professor in the Humanities

Matheson Lecture and Events

Monday, February 26 at 5:30 pm
“Kafka from Puszta to Pampa”
DUC 276, preceded by a reception

Tuesday, February 27 at 12:00 pm
Graduate Student Workshop:
“Literary Activism and the Academy” Hurst Lounge, room 201 in Duncker Hall

Tuesday, February 27 at 3:00 pm
Panel Discussion with English faculty members Danielle Dutton and Martin Riker
Hurst Lounge, room 201 in Duncker Hall

The lecture and panel discussion are open to the public; graduate students who wish to attend the workshop should RSVP.

Daniel Medin: Matheson Lecturer

The Matheson lecture series is given in honor of the late William H. Matheson, a venerable member of the Comparative Literature faculty for thirty years. Each year, a different scholar is invited to spend several days at Washington University to give a lecture and to meet with faculty and students. This year’s Matheson lecturer is unique because he is himself an alumnus of Washington University, having earned his Ph.D. in English and Comparative Literature in 2005. Since 2010, he has taught Comparative Literature and English at the American University of Paris. Additionally, he is the associate director of the Center for Writers and Translators and an editor of its Cahiers Series. Daniel Medin also co-edits Music & Literature magazine, edits The White Review’s annual translation issue, and advises several journals and presses on contemporary international fiction. A former judge for leading translation prizes in the United States (Best Translated Book Award) and the United Kingdom (Man Booker International Prize), he is now on the jury of their German equivalent (HKW Internationaler Literaturpreis).
Faculty and Student News

Baba Badji (graduate student in Comparative Literature’s track for international writers) has several recent publications, including several poems in issue 16 of TRANSverse journal, Atlas and Alice, Snapdragon, Free Verse, Palimpsest and the Foothill journal.

Aaron Coleman (graduate student in Comparative Literature’s track for international writers) has a book of poetry forthcoming from Four Way Books entitled Threat Come Close (March 2018). Additionally, Aaron’s poem “Too Far North” was selected and introduced by poet Terrance Hayes in the July 9th issue of New York Times Magazine. Aaron also published poems in issue #8 of Palimpsest.

Tili Boon Cuillé (Associate Professor, French and Comparative Literature) has been awarded an NEH Fellowship for her book project Divining Nature: Aesthetics of Enchantment in Enlightenment France and will be on leave for the 2018-19 academic year.

Matthias Göritz (William Gass Fellow) has published a novel, Parker (C.H. Beck Verlag, Munich). His translation of Mary Jo Bang’s poetry collection Elegy has also come out and two of his novels, The Short Dream of Jacob Voss and Dreamers and Sinners have recently been translated into Slovene and Turkish. He was also awarded the Fellowship at the Cultural Academy in Tarabya (in summer 2018) at Istanbul by the German State Department and the Dane Zajc Residency in Ljubljana (January 2018).

Deniz Gundogan Ibrisim (graduate student in Comparative Literature) has organized a seminar for the ACLA Annual meeting. The seminar is entitle “Beyond the Human Psyche: New and Critical Approaches to Violence and Trauma in Global Anglophone Literatures.” Additionally, Deniz has contributed to an entry on “Representation: Fiction, Modern. Africa” in the forthcoming Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures: Middle East and Africa (Northern and Sub-Saharan).

Robert Henke (Professor of Comparative Literature and Drama) edited A Cultural History of Theatre in the Early Modern Age, which is part of a six-volume collection tracing the relationship between theater and culture over the past 2,500 years. The collection was published in September by Bloomsbury Books.

Thai Kaewkaen (graduate student in Comparative Literature’s track for international writers) was interviewed by British journal Structo about his translations of Thai poet Sunthorn Phu’s work, including Poems from the Buddha’s Footprint (Singing Bone Press, 2016), the first complete full-length translation of Phu's work in almost thirty years.

Gönül Kivilcim (graduate student in Comparative Literature’s track for international writers) has published a book entitled Uğultular. Additionally, an anthology to which Gönül has contributed a story (entitled “The Forbidden Land”) is being translated into Japanese by Kayoko Isobe.

Hilah Kohen (Comparative Literature major) presented a talk entitled “The Russians You Don’t Hear About” at the Undergraduate Research Symposium in October 2017.

Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo (graduate student in Comparative Literature’s track for international writers) organized a book presentation and Q&A with Cuban author Jorge Enrique Lage at Left Bank Books. His numerous recent publications include articles in Smithsonian Magazine, US Chess Federation magazine and columns for Ciber Cuba, among others.

Thomas Scholz (graduate student in Comparative Literature’s track for international writers) was a jury member for the Award for Journalism of Weisser Ring, a German association helping victims of violence. Additionally, Thomas recently published two papers: “Where Discourse Meets Discworld: Labyrinths, Humor and the Neo-Baroque in Terry Pratchett’s Discworld Stories” in From Giant Turtles to Small Gods: Literary, Philosophical and Media Theory Approaches to Terry Pratchett (forthcoming) and “Im Anfang war das Sams: Sprache, Macht und die Konstruktion von Realität in Paul Maars Eine Woche voller Samstage” in Paul Maar. Studien zum kinder- und jugendliterarischen Werk (2017).

Di Wang (graduate student in Comparative Literature) won the Prix du Design at the Festival International des Jardins 2017 for her design entitled “Levant” (co-created with Tian Tian) at the Chaumont-sur-Loire castle in the Loire Valley of France. Di also has a co-authored chapter, entitled “China’s State Feminism in Context: The All-China Women’s Federation (ACWF) from Inception to Current Challenges,” that will appear in a forthcoming anthology entitled Women of Asia: Globalization, Development, and Gender Equity (Routledge: forthcoming).

*Faculty, students and alumni(ae) are invited to share your news with the Comparative Literature community. Please e-mail your announcements to Rebecca O’Laughlin (rolaughlin@wustl.edu).
Focus: Certificate Programs

Graduate students in Arts and Sciences at Washington University currently have several options for certificates in specialized areas, including American Culture Studies; Film and Media Studies; Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies; and Data Science in the Humanities. Housed within Comparative Literature, the Translation Studies Certificate requires students to take additional coursework in translation studies as well as to complete several translation modules, working with faculty members on translation projects.

A new certificate is joining Translation Studies within the Comparative Literature program: Early Modern Studies, whose director is Professor Robert Henke. About this new certificate, Professor Henke notes: “I am very excited to be the inaugural Director of the new Early Modern Graduate Certificate program, which has just been formally approved and is being launched this semester. And I am equally excited to say that this program will be housed in Comparative Literature. Comp Lit is in fact the natural home for a program based on early modern studies, which if pursued seriously must be both transnational and interdisciplinary. We will be building on our already formidable resources in early modern (roughly interpreted by us as 1400-1800, although this can vary by field). From the departments of History, English, Romance Languages and Literatures, German, Performing Arts, Art History, Music, East Asian Languages and Cultures, and Jewish and Jewish, Islamic, and Near Eastern Studies, and of course from our own program, we have some thirty faculty members devoted to this period, and we have strong groups (Early Modern Reading Group; Eighteenth-Century Salon), courses (Early Modern Dissertation Seminar), library holdings, digital resources, and affiliations (Folger Shakespeare Library) on which to build. I am delighted to announce that next academic year Steve Zwicker will teach the first methods course required by the certificate. We believe that this certificate will significantly energize early modern studies at Washington University and give those graduate students who study early modern literature and culture a real edge in the job market. Present first-year and second-year students can be considered for admission to the program; anyone interested should begin by contacting me at my email address (rhenke@wustl.edu).”

Literature in the Making: A Reading

The “Literature in the Making” readings that take place at the end of each semester continue to explore translation, creative writing and global literature. The Literature in the Making seminar is taught by Professor Lynne Tatlock and Gass Fellow Matthias Göritz and attracts both graduate students in the international writers track and traditional Comparative Literature students. The fall 2017 reading took place on December 6th.

At left: first-year graduate students Andrea Mendoza Lespron and Thai Kaewkaen at the Literature in the Making reading.
WashU at ALTA

Washington University boasted a large presence at the annual American Literary Translators Association (ALTA) Conference, held October 5-8 in Minneapolis. Associate Professor Ignacio Infante (Comparative Literature and Spanish) spoke on a panel entitled “Using Literary Magazines Well: How to Introduce a Writer to the English-Speaking World.” Several current graduate students also spoke on panels: Rebecca Dehner-Armand (Comparative Literature) presented on a panel entitled “Refracting Meaning in Self-Translation.” Laurel Taylor (Japanese/Comparative Literature) presented on a panel entitled “Raising Valence: Giving Titles to Translations.” Both Annelise Finegan Wasmoen (Comparative Literature, Certificate in Translation Studies) and Gabriella Martin (Spanish, Certificate in Translation Studies) participated in a panel entitled “The Mad, the Bad, the Dreamy: Translating Literary Rogues and Eccentrics.” Olivia Lott (Spanish, Certificate in Translation Studies) also spoke on a panel, entitled “Su voz poética / Her Poetic Voice: Women Translating Women in Spanish-Language Poetry.” Finally, Aaron Coleman (Comparative Literature’s track for international writers) received a 2017 Peter K. Jansen Memorial Travel Fellowship to attend the conference, and participated in the ALTA Fellows Translation Reading.

Spring 2018 courses

L16 115 Freshman Seminar: Introduction to Comparative Arts: Transmediation (Tili Boon Cuillé)
L16 215C Comparative Comic Book Studies (Thomas Scholz)
L16 3050 Literary Modernities (Anca Parvulescu)
L16 306C Voice, Language and Power: Late Medieval Religious Writing (David Lawton)
L16 307B Literary Modernities in East Asia: The Interplay of Tradition, Modernity & Empire (Marvin Marcus)
L16 376 Refugees: Displacement and Asylum in World Literature (Tabea Linhard)
L16 385 Narratives of Childhood (Nancy Berg)
L16 385A Comedy, Ancient and Modern (Timothy Moore)
L16 395C Shakespeare (Anupam Basu)
L16 425A Humanities by the Numbers (Matt Erlin)
L16 432A Programming for Text Analysis (Anupam Basu)
L16 444C Psychoanalysis and its Literary Cultures (Philip Purchase)
L16 449 Humanism (Robert Henke)
L16 512 Literature in the Making (Lynne Tatlock and Matthias Göritz)
L16 524A International Modernism/World Literature (J. Dillon Brown and Anca Parvulescu)
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.