

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE NEWSLETTER

Bon Voyage to our graduate alumni!

It has been a busy year, with six students completing their dissertations over the course of the 2008-2009 school year. We are exceedingly proud to present the following students with their dissertation titles:

Belén Bistué completed her Ph.D. in May of 2009 with her dissertation "The Multilingual Imagination: Placing Early Modern Translation Strategies in a Cultural History of the Novel."

Shawn Doubiago's dissertation is titled, "Writing Wrongs: Representation and Resistance in Twentieth Century Women's Writing on War and Conflict." She will file at the end of summer.

Rune Christensen recently finished his work titled, "Local Inflections of Darkness: Danish Film Noir During the Classical Noir Style."

Jing Nie completed her dissertation "Beijing in the Shadow of Globalization: Production of Spatial Poetics in Contemporary Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Drama."

Anne Salo completed her Ph.D. in May of 2009. Her dissertation was titled "Concealment and Invective in *Celestina*."

Wendy Yamamoto finished her dissertation this Spring with, "Nobody's Nation: Transnational and Translocal Connections in Nikkeijin Identity within U.S. and Canadian Nikkeijin Literature."

Here, There, Everywhere: 08/09 Conferences

The UC Davis comparatists often appear at a number of conferences, but it seems that this past year has been an especially busy one, with not only a massive



attendance at the annual meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA), but several other conferences along the way. And oftentimes, our students and faculty presented at multiple conferences, or presented multiple papers at one conference, or in the case of second-year Chris Tong--a whopping five papers at five different conferences!

The following are the paper titles presented at the 2009 ACLA at Harvard University, "Global Languages, Local Cultures," and elsewhere: **Elena Mauli Shapiro**, "Ground into Silence: Breaking the Human Animal in Lillo's Sub Terra;" **Elisabeth M. Lore**, "Tangled Voices: A code-switching analysis of Chamoiseau's *Chronique des sept misères* and Collins' *The Colour of Forgetting*;" **Giovanna Montenegro**, "Sex Work, Transnationalism, Tourism, and Migration: Putas y Jineteras represented in Transnational Cinema" for the ACLA and "Beauty in Nature Transformed: A Study of the Contemplation of Nature vs. the Artwork in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, and Derrida's *The Truth In Painting*" for the Graduate Student Colloquium in Early Modern and 18th Century Studies at UC Davis; **Shawn C. Doubiago**, "Inhabiting Anguish: Feminine Dwellings and the City at War" for the panel "The City at War," which she organized with Susanne Hoelscher, U of San Francisco; **Michael R. Graziano**, "A Mythology of Daggers: Borges and Cultural Memory;" **Fei Shi**, "Paper, Water and Cloud: The Unfolding Poetics in Shen Wei's Modern Dance" and "Mimesis, Representation, Theatricality: Tracing the Dramatic Discourses of Body and Space of Antiquity in Contemporary French Philosophy;" Professor **Xiaomei Chen**, "No Tale of a Hero: From 'The Internationale' to Global Play;" **Natalie Strobach**, "Playing Plato's Child: Derrida's Education

Undergraduate Achievements

At the end of spring quarter, the Comparative Literature program awarded prizes to its top undergraduate majors. Those honored were **Caitlin Kelly-Sneed**, **Sayyeda Zehra Razvi**, **Jennifer Schwartau**, **Brittany Manley**, **Sarah Abravanelli**, **Robert Snyder**, and **Cameron Yanoscik**. In addition, junior **Kris Ide**, won a Regents fellow scholarship for the 2009-10 school year. Congratulations to these talented and dedicated graduates. We look forward to their next achievements.

from Antiquity” in the panel “Antiquity’s Body in Pre- to Post- Modern Literature and Culture,” which she co-organized with Megan McMullen from the UC Davis French Department; Professor **Gail Finney**, “Little Miss Sunshine: Behind the Comic Veil;” **David Dayton**, “Locating the ‘Minorities’ in Multicultural China: A Case for Chinese Ethnic Minority Literature;” **Chris Tong**, “Chineseness with(out) ‘Chinese’: Locating the Beijing Stadium in Global Discourse,” as well as presentations at the following conferences: Asian Visual Cultures Workshop at University of California Irvine, April 10,

2009, the Transformations at Center for Chinese Studies at University of California Los Angeles, May 22-3, 2009, The Symposium on Location/ Dislocation at California State University in Sacramento, March 21, 2009, and the Anthropology of Contemporary China conference at University of California Berkeley, March 13, 2009, and this year’s 18th Century and Early Modern Studies conference in April; **Kristen Bergman**, “Modes of Transgression;” **Masha Boston** presented at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS); **Daphne Potts**, “What the hell kind of a place is this...?” King Kong (1933) Meets King Kong (2005) – Global Reconfigurations in Perceived Blackness” as well as a presentation at the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association in November 2008 entitled “A Dislocated Algeria Mapped onto French



Consciousness: A Comparison of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Le Petit Soldat* (1960) and Claire Denis’ *Beau Travail* (1998).”

Shannon Hays, **Giovanna Montenegro**, and **Zoya Popova** will be going abroad for conferences: Shannon is heading to the National University of Ireland in June (read more about her travel grant for this below!), and Giovanna is heading to the Freie Universität Berlin to present “German Conquistador and the Native Other: Niklaus Federmann and the German Colonization of Venezuela,” while Zoya is jet-set for the annual Association of Chinese and Comparative Literature (ACCL) conference in Beijing.

We also had a presence at the annual Graduate Research Symposium for the Davis Humanities institute focusing this year on: “Lost and Found in Translation: Perspectives on the Movement of Meanings.” First-year **Jessie Christensen** and third-year **Elena Shapiro** were together for the session, “Traduttore/Tradittore: The Role of the Translator,” where Jessie presented on “Translating Language in Motion: Sandra Cisneros’ *Carmelo*” and Elena gave the paper “The Book in Question: Translating Valéry’s *Alphabet*.” Later than day, **Fei Shi** presented his paper “The Theatricality of Translating Chinese Poetry: Gesture, Embodiment, and Performance.” There are surely more than we can begin to note here.

Noteworthy Achievements

Many of our students and faculty have been active inside and outside the classroom pursuing new opportunities and working with students and peers.

Nicholas Sanchez was recently awarded a Fulbright U.S. Student Grant to spend the year 2010 in Chile, where he will do research for his dissertation on the relationship between science and discourses of liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Chile. **Shannon Hays** and **Fei Shi** also received travel support in the form of a Research Grant Internal Fellowship through the Graduate Student Association and Graduate Council at UC Davis.

Two graduate students, **Brian Young** and **Natalie Strobach**, and faculty member **Seth Schein** were recently nominated for the Associated Students for UC Davis Excellence in Teaching Awards. Brian also recently acted as a sponsor for his student **Glenn R. Hoban**, who presented her essay “The Evolution of Villains in Literature and Film: Is the Modern Antagonist an Endangered Species?” at the UC Davis Undergraduate Research Conference.

Professors **Kari Lokke** and **Brenda Schildgen** were invited to give Plenary addresses. Professor Schildgen gave her plenary October 10-12 on “Christian Poetics: Dante, Prophecy, and the Urgency of Time,” for Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Villanova University. Professor Lokke’s address “British Legacies of Corinne and the Commercialization of Enthusiasm” was on May 10th at the Germaine de Stael Symposium at Washington University in St. Louis.

Oh the Places You'll Go: Notes on Undergraduate Study Abroad

Many undergraduates in Comparative Literature have had the opportunity to travel abroad through the Education Abroad Program which offers students the chance to study for a summer, a quarter/semester, or even a year. It is often a memorable time of visiting the country of one's dreams and meeting other students with similar interests. Time abroad as a student allows you a unique opportunity to see beyond the usual tourist attractions and to become more deeply immersed in the local culture. The many experiences of studying abroad can be too diverse to imagine, and for that reason, we have asked a few students to share, in their own words, their experiences (and photos). If you would like more information of doing an exchange, please contact Professor Archana Venkatesan at avenkatesan@ucdavis.edu.

Diana Arkans: Germany

The initial culture shock was, admittedly, the least enjoyable aspect of my time so far in Germany; that is, after my newly-begun study abroad experience turned into something a lot more serious than a European vacation: classes at the



Photo on this page are courtesy of Diana Arkans during her trip to Kassel Germany.

university. Although the university system in Germany has only recently been conforming to the Bachelor/Masters programs, the course formats are still a transition from what we're accustomed to in the US, even though I find the more voluntary structure of classes easier to manage. But as you can imagine, I've also explored Germany outside of academics. Going to the Christmas Markets (*Weihnachtsmärkte*), which, I was excited to see, the Germans take very seriously, was a really unique experience for me. Standing in the freezing cold weather with a hot mug of *Glühwein*, or any other hot beverage mixed with alcohol for that matter, was certainly nothing I had ever experienced in the United States! And in the summer as well as year-round there is traveling to be done, as there is a great train system and a few cheap air-

lines that can get you just about anywhere you want to go around Europe. Anyone who has considered the study abroad option for even a moment should look into it, as my junior year has been a truly unforgettable experience. Aside from Göttingen, my university town, I've already been to Italy, Spain, England, Ireland and many cities in Germany.

Sarah Abravanelli: France

My third year, I decided to go back to Paris, where I was born and raised, in order to attend one of the top political science schools in Europe called "Sciences Po." It was particularly interesting for me to go back because it gave me a new sense of Parisian culture and lifestyle. I got to experience the city and its people from an adult perspective and not from that of the child I was when I used to live there. I reunited with some friends and family but, through my program, also had the amazing opportunity to meet international students from all over.

My program was structured in such a way that orientation gave me the opportunity to meet other students from UCs and to interact with them on a closer basis than I did the others. This was great because it did not stop me from making other international students friends from other states/countries and yet I was able to make local friends that I came back to this year. I lived this year with one of the other girls from UCD who was on the program and am close friends with the other one. We, together, have remained close friends with two of the Berkeley students who were with us in Paris. But as in any long term stay in a place, there were challenges.

People in Paris and the culture in general were not easy to get accustomed to, even for me and I am French! People are not as open as in the US and can even look down on Americans and other foreigners. There were some new manners



to mind also, in public places and in daily interactions with students and people in general. The teachers were not accessible as they are in US universities (no office hours, no direct emails) and you are not always told what to read and what to do for your classes; you have to take initiative and there is a lot of personal work you have to do to stay competitive. That said, I can honestly still say, without cliché, that it was the best experience of my life and the one that made me grow and learn the most, about me, about life and about the world. I would trade it for nothing and highly encourage students to study abroad!

Hilary Powell: Sweden

I studied abroad in Sweden during the summer of 2007 with a small group of people who were interested in studying all about the Vikings. This was definitely not just a classroom experience, but one in which we took several field trips to excavation sites, preserved ruins, and forests with untouched remnants of Viking civilization. The opportunity to study in a "hands-on" environment and to really live and experience life away from one's comfort zone is an invaluable experience to both one's education and way of life.

I would go far as to say that while studying abroad may not change you as a person, it definitely affects the way in which you perceive the world and its history. I am so excited to participate in another exchange program this coming fall in Berlin, and would encourage all who have even the faintest interest in traveling to take advantage of all the wonderful programs that the EAC has to offer!

Megan Macklin: Argentina

During Spring Quarter 2008, I studied abroad in Mendoza, Argentina, located near the border with Chile in the eastern foothills of the Andes. My ten-week program consisted entirely of Spanish language and culture classes and included frequent excursions such as wine tasting, hiking, and an extended trip to the Patagonia region. This experience provided an excellent opportunity for me to acquire another language, as I found myself immersed at the host university, in my home stay with an Argentine family, and everywhere in between. I also was able to complete one year of Spanish language courses in just one quarter. In addition, I learned to appreciate the much slower and relaxed Argentina lifestyle, especially the daily siesta period, and came out with many new friends and once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Studying abroad was certainly among the best experiences of my undergraduate career, and I would recommend it, and this program in particular, to anyone interested in languages, cultures, and of course, literature. Following my stay in Mendoza, I graduated in June 2008 and am now working full-time for the University in the Department of Academic Preparation Programs.



This photo is courtesy of Megan Macklin at the Andes Mountains

Daniel Harkin: Chile

When I arrived in Santiago, Chile in late January I was immediately overwhelmed by the burning summer heat and the Chilean Spanish dialect that includes many slang words known as "modismos." Other elements of "culture shock" for me included the numerous stray dogs everywhere in the city and the excessive amount of mayonnaise used on sandwiches. Santiago is a very big city but it has an excellent public transportation system and weather that is quite similar to Sacramento and Davis: very warm summers and very cold winter nights. As I write this, I am in the last few weeks of the first semester of 2009 at the Universidad de Chile in the Facultad de Filosofía y Humanidades Departamento de Literatura. The classes have been very interesting and include entirely Latin American authors, many of which are Chilean including Manuel Rojas, José Donoso, Vicente Huidobro, Oliverio Girondo, Horacio Quiroga and Antonio Skármeta. However, the university classes are generally not as well organized as UC classes: all of my course texts have had to be purchased at a campus photocopy shop or found online and classes can be cancelled without prior notice because sometimes a professor fails to show up or the students can vote to go on strike for up to several days at a time. I also got tear-gassed on one occasion because of an almost violent student demonstration taking place outside of my classroom building as I was leaving. Most of the Chilean students I have met are very friendly and spend lots of time studying as they normally take 5 or 6

courses a semester and many still live at home with their families in Santiago. The university sometimes feels as if it is organized as a continuation of high school for this reason and also that there is a designated lunch hour each day between classes. Overall I have greatly enjoyed my experience studying and living in Santiago as I have immensely improved my Spanish speaking and comprehension skills, and have even had some time to travel in Argentina and Uruguay and plan to visit more places in the north of Chile when the semester ends.

Propaganda and Expansionism in *The Song of Roland*

Written around 1100 CE, *The Song of Roland* reflects the zeitgeist of religious Medieval Europe—a deep nostalgia for the days of Christian chivalry under the ambitious Carolingian Empire, when values such as spreading Christian salvation, attaining glory on the battlefield, and following a lofty feudal code of honor were held sacred. However, a more critical look at the implications beneath the chivalric moralizing of this poem reveals its most paramount truth: that these highly exalted values serve only as a superficial façade, a contrived projection that obscures the ugly reality of murder, revenge, plunder, deception, and greed. The actions of the Christian knights stand in stark contrast to the high-minded rhetoric put forth in *Roland*, fallacious claims that would appall a true believer in the non-violent teachings of Jesus Christ. *Roland* is a tale that changed over centuries, conveniently reinterpreting, an unquestionably ignominious defeat in 778 CE, spinning it into a pre-ordained victory to promulgate the crusades. It exists today not as a document of historical accuracy, but as a campaign of blatant propaganda—an immaculately edited, crystalline portrait of the Crusader's agenda. This reinvention of history is based upon a nostalgia for a past that never existed, a reinvention that effectively used the institution of Chivalry, which had historically functioned as the moral conscience of knights and a mitigation of battlefield brutality, for the purpose of a modern imperialist agenda. Thus, the significance of *The Song of Roland* is an example of the propaganda used to ignite and justify European expansionism.

The composition of *The Song of Roland* coincides with pope Urban II's historic 1095 plea calling for a crusade to reclaim the Holy Lands from Muslim control. Pope Urban II stressed the importance of morality and adherence to the Christian faith. This call is Urban's response to the problems of violence perpetrated by his own "Christian" knights against other Christians. He threatened any who strayed from his prohibition against acts of violence with excommunication and eternity in the fires of Hell: "let robbers and incendiaries and all their accomplices be expelled from the church and anathematized." Urban desperately needed to contain the endemic violence of his knights. The solution to these problems of internecine violence within Christendom was to divert the aggression of the knights to target another group—one that was physically and ideologically foreign. Muslims seemed to be the most logical "Other" to target, especially since they differed in physical appearance and language and had been in possession of the Christian Holy Lands for generations—much to the resentment of the Europeans. The Church seized upon the Crusades as a conduit through which to channel the aggression of these young, armed crimi-



Amy Lee Prizewinning Essay Award Chosen

The department is proud to announce Evan Loker as this year's winner of the annual Amy Lee Prizewinning Essay Award. The prize is awarded to one participant in the Comparative Literature 1-4 series for the creation of a stellar undergraduate literary essay. COM 1-4 instructors submitted their best essays to a specially chosen panel of graduate student instructors and professors, who chose Evan's essay, "Propaganda and Expansionism in *The Song of Roland*," as the winner. That essay is reprinted here, and he will also receive a cash prize and special recognition from the department.

The panel also awarded Charles Ellis an honorable mention for his essay, "Irrationality and Horror in *Faust*."

The Amy Lee prize is given annually in memory of a graduate student in Comparative Literature who died of cancer in September 2007 following a brief illness. Amy was a passionate teacher and a dedicated scholar, and this prize is intended to reward the type of superlative students she loved to teach.

nals away from fellow Europeans. Thus the stage was set for holy war, and in order to draw enlistments, the Church granted the promise of an instant remission of all sins upon death in battle. With a literal ticket to paradise promised to them, the Christian masses began to develop an attitude of fervent righteousness and intolerant hatred towards their new racial and ideological foe, as volunteers for the new Holy War flocked into service by the thousands.

The Song of Roland reflects these historical events as an article of propaganda that was directly produced by them and that also served to promote them. The Catholic Church's construction of the need for war was grounded in the valorization of the European Christian warrior alongside the dehumanization of the Muslim Saracens, and *Roland* takes this binary opposition to melodramatic extremes. Through his belligerent attacks against the Other and his ardent exaltation of his own ethnicity, *Roland's* narrator has enticed the reader with a binary logic that is both simple and universalized: a battle of good versus evil, Christian versus Muslim, saved versus unsaved.



This crusading rhetoric, aimed at inciting a lust for carnage directed at the newly realized Muslims foes, is echoed by the three principle heroes of the poem: Roland, Oliver, and most strikingly, the Archbishop Turpin. Roland gives a rallying speech to his knights, asserting that these “pagans” are merely searching for “martyrdom”. Roland slanders the Muslim Saracens by demeaning their cause and reducing them to primitive pagans, revealing both in him and in the narrator an obtuse ignorance of the fact that Islam is a monotheistic religion. This supposed distinction between the Franks and Saracens is a blatant lie; it serves to juxtapose the vilified,

dark-skinned pagan “Other” with the grand, heroic European figures of Roland and his men. Oliver is so inspired by his leader’s example of brazen masculinity that he is eager to “strike some blows” upon the pagans to defend the honor of the French, so that they would “always remember what manhood is” (*Roland* 85). This exchange masquerades as a glamorous, “natural” assertion of “manhood”—yet to the critical reader, it clearly indicates that the goal of the “masculine” and righteous European warriors is to root out anything unfamiliar in order to conquer and subjugate it.

In *Roland*, Urban’s Crusade rhetoric is voiced most faithfully through a representative of the Catholic church, Archbishop Turpin, who is also one of the most accomplished and brutal soldiers of the poem. Before the first battle of the epic, the Archbishop gives a seemingly Christological sermon on the mountain, declaring to his fellow warriors, “If you die here, you will stand up as holy martyrs... in the highest Paradise.” Once the battle starts, Turpin assumes the role of an angel from the Last Judgment, killing brazenly, hacking off limbs, and enduring the fight almost as long as Roland himself (*Roland* 84). In *Roland*, the people of Saragossa are not viewed as human beings, rather they are presented as dirty, primitive and dastardly villains who need to be either converted or exterminated. This characterization is essentially pseudo-speciation, meant to demean the Other in order to make their slaughter and subjugation more justified and moral in the minds of god-loving white Europeans. This rhetoric is deployed to incite feelings of hatred and intolerance that were integral to the project of launching a potentially suicidal and expensive voyage in a land thousands of miles from the European homelands. Furthermore, in the process of glorifying Roland and his Christian knights, the act of warfare is valorized as a noble campaign, obscuring the true nature of war as the vengeful slaughter of an Other. This vehement and violent intolerance is illustrated by Archbishop Turpin when he overhears a Muslim soldier assert that every one of Charlemagne’s men will be killed in battle on this day. This fills him with Herculean rage, and he surges toward the pagan and stabs his lance “into the body center, drove it down deep... knocked him down, dead...” (*Roland* 88). This passage reveals the truth behind the high-minded pretenses of the Christian crusader mentality: brutal intolerance of differing ideologies and a savage excitement to burst the shield of the enemy and shed his lifeblood. Conversion to Christianity is a value that is both paramount within the Crusader’s agenda and one that is

widely propagated in this poem. It is held as an ultimate good and a primary justification for the Holy War—a heroic effort to save the souls of hapless pagans. This rationalization, however, is expressed, and subsequently nullified, in acts of violence and cruelty that are inherent in the “convert or kill” attitude of the chauvinistic Christian knights. The narrator gleefully remarks that after Charlemagne had sacked the city of Cordres, not one “pagan remained who is not killed or turned into a Christian”. What these Christian warriors fail to realize is that the use of threats and violence to enact religious conversion mutilates and destroys any meaning or substance such an oath might once have held. Spreading the gospel of the peaceful Christ by means of a sword distorts the intent and meaning behind the supposed Savior’s words. Furthermore, while proselytizing is the alleged motive of Charlemagne and Roland, this is really a pretext to justify their desire to control and dominate the land and people, who are constructed as the “Other”; there is a clear bias on the part of the narrator that colors all actions of the Crusaders as righteous and good—a pre-Kipling “white man’s burden”. For instance, the alleged conversion of the Saracen queen to Christianity was one of the most lauded victories for the Franks, but it represents yet another example of iniquity. After Saragossa is sacked, Queen Bramimunde is led “a captive, to sweet France: the king wants her conversion to be led by love” (*Roland* 153). What this dubious account fails to acknowledge is that the more likely reality of Queen Bramimunde’s “conversion” is one of physical and sexual imprisonment, even enslavement, at the hands of the victors. In concluding the poem, the queen’s “conversion” is celebrated as “knowledge of the Truth,” but this supposedly Christian “Truth” hardly reflects the doctrines of Christ, for whom violence, rape, and enslavement—the implications of the queen’s “conversion”—are far from the cornerstones of Christian teachings.

As Turold signs off in the last line of *Roland*, the reader is left with an obtrusive feeling of dissatisfaction. The poem is over, the “evildoer” Ganeleon is dead, and the divine Charlemagne is restored, without question, as France’s Christian shepherd. Yet a troubled sensation lingers. Perhaps if the year were still 1100 CE and the audience still jingoistic French Christians, this tale might prove inspirational; but for citizens of the world who have been bombarded with as many distorted truths and propaganda, *Roland* is just another failed sales pitch. Its rhetoric represents another attempt at winning conversion and support, but rather than masking itself behind a political party or the seductive logic of materialism, it is shrouded in a fanatical nostalgia for an idealized time that never actually existed. The battlefield of *Roland* is not a glorious arena where “God’s will” is to be defended and propagated, but a killing field for medieval Vikings bent on plunder and ultimate domination, rather than valor and honor. One cannot truly believe the teachings of Jesus Christ—the compassionate pacifist—and justify a war in his name without subscribing to a shameless hypocrisy. These “Christians” are simply Romans in sheep’s clothing. The contrast constructed in *Roland* between the dastardly, vile “pagans” and the noble Christians is a blatant instance of hateful propaganda. Hence, *Roland* should be read critically as a piece that was meant to extol Christianity, or more accurately, European chauvinism. Its worth lies solely in the fact that, behind the supposed honor and tragedy of its words, there is a far more gritty and telling truth that reveals much about our destructive social nature and the dehumanizing reality of war.

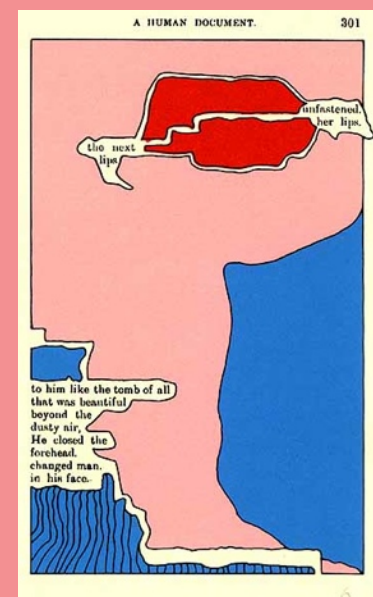
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