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# Comparative Literature

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Newsletter of the Department of Comparative Literature  
University of California, Davis



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Interview with Sheldon Lu	1
Interview with Michiko Suzuki	5
Interview with Michael Subialka	7
Amy Lee Prize	11
Undergraduate and Alumni News	14
Graduate News	16
Graduate Speaker Series	20
Faculty News	21

In 2016, Juliana Schiesari stepped down from chairing Comparative Literature after five years. During her sure, steady tenure the department has witnessed exceptional growth and development. Her leadership was instrumental in bringing in two new faculty members with fifty percent appointments in Comparative Literature: Michael Subialka (in Italian and Comp Lit) and Michiko Suzuki (in Japanese and Comp Lit). We also added three new faculty members from other departments who will offer courses in the department: Noah Guynn (French), Joshua Clover (English) and Sven-Erik Rose (German). At the end of year celebration, the Department acknowledged Juliana's contributions with warmest thanks and a piece of her favorite Italian ceramic. Juliana is eager, after recharging her batteries, to take up her work on animals in Ariosto's epic *Orlando Furioso*, and to pursue a new interest in detective fiction, especially Scandinavian *noir*.

The new chair of Comparative Literature is Sheldon Lu, who has been a Professor in the department since 2002.

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## An Interview with the New Chair

by Zhen Zhang

*What brought you to the field of comparative literature?*

This has been a tormenting question for me over the years, and I will try to be brief, if possible. I hope I am finally at peace with myself. I was born in China, and grew up in a very specific historical period. The Cultural Revolution ended when I was a teenager. People in China were sick and tired of hollow rhetoric and endless revolutions that did not deliver. Many people thought that science was the way to go for their children and the nation. Right after the United States and the People's Republic of China established diplomatic relations, my family sent me to the United States, not to study Chinese literature of course, which would have been counterintuitive, even absurd, but to study science in order to modernize a backward country. My mother would have been proud to tell her neighbors and friends that "my son is a scientist"! But I did not study science, nor did I return to China. What a failure... As an undergraduate student at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, I tried civil engineering at first, and then physics. Soon I found out that my heart was not there. I took classes in

comparative literature, philosophy, and foreign languages – and I really liked them. As I recall, Comparative Literature classes and foreign language classes were taught in Van Hise Hall and Bascom Hall, which were right next to Lake Mendota. It was a very scenic campus. One of my teachers happened to be Kari Lokke, who was then a young faculty member in Comparative Literature (now Professor Emerita in our department). I took her class on the eighteenth century. Kari was fluent in several languages and was well versed in British, French, and German literature. She taught us how to read Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu, Laclos, Kant, Goethe, Schiller, Mendelsohn, and so on. I thought that was so cool! Comparative literature brought things into international perspective. It dealt with literature, ideas, theory, and history across national and linguistic boundaries. The material was at once abstract and sensuous. I particularly loved the cosmopolitanism of comparative literature. Decades later, I still have the textbooks for that class on my bookshelf.

I recently met my former high school classmates. Some of them got admitted to Colleges like Tsinghua University in Beijing, and majored in science or engineering. But they told me they were also at a loss about what to do after graduating. In the end, most of them did not pursue science and instead took up more practical professions. That is the irony of life. I hope people of my generation can look back with a light heart at the twists and turns of their paths in life.

Sometimes people ask me what I do. For instance when I take a taxi to the airport. When the driver asks, “Where are you going?”, I say I go to an international conference. Then he asks: “an engineering conference?” Well, what can I say? People look at me and make assumptions. If I said, “I



Sheldon Lu in Stockholm

am a professor of comparative literature,” he would not understand, and would ask the next question: “What literatures do you compare?” I dread such conversations which sound casual but bring up another round of soul-searching in the backseat of a taxi!

*What was your dissertation about? And why did you choose that topic?*

This is another issue that still brings up emotions for me. When I was a graduate student in the 1980s, modern Chinese literature was a tiny field in the US, and Chinese film studies barely existed. I was a graduate student at Indiana University in Bloomington, which was rather strong in the humanities. People at Indiana were doing semiotics, narrative studies, comparative literature, Bakhtin, and so on. I was drawn

into narrative theory, comparative poetics, and classical Chinese literature. I wrote a dissertation that examined the relationship between history and fiction in classical Chinese literature, and attempted to map out a comparative, East-West narrative theory. The revised dissertation became my first book and was published by Stanford University Press.

Now when I meet colleagues at conferences, some say to me, "I really liked your early work. I read your first book when I was a graduate student. That was comparative literature. The modern stuff and film that you are doing now is interesting too, but..." Then I get into the "what if?" mode. What if I had stuck to comparative poetics and classical literature, and had not changed focus? Well, life is a puzzle.

*Where have you taught as a professor? And what were the similarities and differences between these institutional settings?*

I have always worked at large public universities: the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Indiana University in Bloomington, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Pittsburgh, and UC Davis. I have known this kind of university culture since my student days. Let me just comment on one thing. Graduate students work hard. Everybody has to teach while taking classes and, later, writing their dissertation. I respect that difficulty and the hardship. This is what it takes to get a graduate degree. After all, these are also tremendous opportunities. Young people are funded by a public university and given a chance to learn, to grow, and to prepare for the future. I myself am a product of this public university system. I hope that, together, we can make this educational environment even better.

*What courses have you taught so far? Do you have a favorite course to teach?*

I have taught a variety of courses at UC Davis: Asian literature, Chinese cinema, Hong Kong Cinema, world cinema, introduction to film, literary and critical theory, and graduate seminars on special topics. Of course, students and circumstances are different every year. There are also difficult moments. On the whole, I enjoy teaching all my classes.

*What is your current research project?*

In English, I am working on a book about the theory and historiography of Chinese-language cinema. Recently, I have also begun to write things in my mother tongue, Mandarin Chinese. That has been very rewarding. And my essays and books in Chinese have had an impact in the broad, pan-Chinese reading public. People contact me, and invite me to give lectures. I write about Chinese literature, poetry, film, critical theory, and I even write fiction in Chinese. It is satisfying to be a bilingual writer, to be read and recognized in that way.

*What do you enjoy most about being a professor?*

Being an academic at a major research university like the University of California is a privilege. Your job is to teach, write, serve, think, and contemplate. Once in a while you can step back from the rush of daily routines and think about what you want to teach and bring to the students. You deal with ideas, and you convey your ideas and thinking to the community (local, national, and international) through publications, classroom teaching, invited lectures, and through interactions with students and peers. Ideas can be powerful. Being contemplative is also an important mode of being, a way of living in the world. Contemplation, or critical reflection, is not passivity or elitism.

Academics serve society and intervene in their own unique ways.

*What is your vision of the humanities in a public institution like UC Davis?*

We humanists often complain about being marginalized in modern, consumer-oriented societies: we are not listened to, and cannot act in an effective manner. But I think that the humanities do have an important role to play. We influence people's minds. We are teachers. Students and academics do act when the moment calls for action, and they can directly intervene in social processes.

I understand the importance of fiscal responsibility for a university. But I don't think you can run the humanities like a corporation. Our classes may not always attract large numbers. You cannot teach foreign languages or writing in huge classes. Our work cannot be quantified and judged in the same way as some other disciplines. You cannot mechanically compute the benefits of teaching a humanities class versus a huge science class. The humanities train students in different ways: independent thinking, logical analysis, spiritual cultivation, how to be well-rounded human beings. Of course, the humanities also prepare students to become future specialists in certain professions. But we also prepare students to be active citizens in civil society. The use of the humanities is their non-utilitarianism, if you want to put it this way. People must understand that we are not a professional school, a medical school, or a law school.

*How do you see your role as department chair?*

First of all, I hope that I could be an active champion of the causes of the department, its students, and my colleagues. Chairs should do their best to facilitate an environment in which everyone can thrive. I am also mindful of the Taoist political principle of "non-

action" (wuwei). It does not mean that the administrator does nothing. It means that the administrator should not be heavy-handed and should not impose his/her agenda on other people. He/she should listen to the voices of others – students, colleagues, or staff. He/she should give people room to breathe and sort things out.

In my own work, I like efficiency, and getting things done quickly. But working with others requires patience. The process might be time-consuming, but it is important. You need input from other people, to solve problems together. That is the democratic process. You need to constantly communicate and explain. Lao Zi (Lao Tzu), the founder of Taoism, often expresses things in a paradoxical way: "The person who knows does not speak. The person who speaks does not know." This may be a profound insight, though old-fashioned interiority will not work in a modern, democratic society. Communication is important.

*Do you have any tips for graduate students to help them succeed in the program?*

I suppose it is important that everyone finds their unique balance between breadth and specialization. Here we can talk comparatively about graduate programs in the US, Europe, China, and so forth. As you know, the curriculum of American graduate programs is quite detailed. You are required to take courses in different categories. But in other countries, doctoral students don't need to take that many courses. They get into research and dissertation writing early on.

New students will be curious, will want to learn new things and takes as many interesting courses as possible. That is the beauty of being an intellectual. But at some point, you need to move on and focus on your own research. As Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu) puts



it in his typical sarcastic tone: “My life is limited, but knowledge is unlimited. To pursue the unlimited with the limited, isn’t that tiresome?”

On the other hand, someone who comes into the program without much of a comparative background may want to start by

exploring a range of different areas and topics. This is different for each person. Each student needs to figure out the right ratio for him or herself.

*Zhen Zhang is a doctoral candidate in the Department.*

## An Interview with Michiko Suzuki

by Megan Ammirati

Prof. Michiko Suzuki joined the department this fall as a joint appointment with East Asian Languages and Cultures. She received her Ph.D. in Japanese from Stanford University, and previously taught at Indiana University Bloomington. She is the author of *Becoming Modern Women: Love and Female Identity in Prewar Japanese Literature and Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), which won a *Choice Outstanding Academic Title* award. Her current projects include a book on representations of kimono in Japanese literature and film from the 1930s to the 80s. Other areas of interest include early twentieth-century sexological discourse, material culture and literary objects, gendered representation, women writers, and feminism.

*What inspired you to study literature?*

Books have been of the utmost importance to me since my childhood. I am sure this is the case for most professors of literature! I love the act of reading and interpreting texts – this discipline allows self-expression and contribution to broader humanistic investigations about ourselves and the world we live in. I also appreciate the rich, varied content of “literary studies” – a field open to different subjects and interdisciplinary approaches. At its core, studying literature is about interpretation – a necessary life skill, as I always tell my students.

*Do you get a different sense of enjoyment from literature when you teach it as a subject?*

It is very exciting for me to see students developing confidence in

their own interpretive abilities and that is something I always try to nurture by presenting different ways of analyzing a text. Of course, since reading is essentially a solitary activity, being able to interact with others and discussing texts together is fun as well.

*Your book, *Becoming Modern Women*, explores the conceit of love in the early twentieth century in Japan. What is it about that era that makes it a particularly interesting time to think about women writers and their identities?*

After opening up to the West in the late nineteenth century, Japan underwent a tremendous transformation in its efforts to become a “modern” yet “non-Western” nation. During the early twentieth century, Japanese women writers were exploring what it meant to be “modern” and “advanced” in light of such changes, especially with regard to intimate relations and the understanding of female identity as a process. They were adopting ideas from new Western and



Michiko Suzuki

Japanese discourses and incorporating and transforming such concepts in their fiction. During this period, women's writing as a genre became prominent in the context of a very vibrant print culture – literacy was high and people were reading intellectual and popular texts as well as works from all over the world. Additionally, because there was so much political and social change during this time, from liberalism to militarism, there were also great shifts with regard to understandings of idealized and normative gender identity.

*So what makes love a useful lens to think about women in the twentieth century as opposed to gender more generally?*

Love was in many ways how women imagined “becoming modern” in this context and expressing themselves as part of modernity. The new ideal of the love marriage (as opposed to the traditional arranged marriage), for example, was touted as a way for women to develop themselves and attain gender equality – and there are texts that show such idealization as well as its failures. I also look at certain new terms that emerged at the time, such as “same-sex love” and “maternal love,” which were also considered important in understanding female development. What I call “modern love ideology,” the idea that love was necessary in completing female identity, emerged from various influences, including Western discourses.

*Is there a particular primary source you would recommend to non-Japanese specialists if they were intrigued to learn more?*

Most of the texts I work with in that book are not translated, but there is a canonical 1920s novel by a male writer that people may find interesting – Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's *Naomi* – a Pygmalion tale with a twist in which a

femme fatale overpowers her male “creator.” I have interpreted this work as a parody of the modern love marriage ideal. For nonfiction, Swedish feminist Ellen Key's *Love and Marriage* (English edition 1911) is a text that influenced early Japanese feminists in thinking about the importance of love for female development.

*Could you tell us a bit about your newest research project?*

I'm in the middle of writing a book on the representation of kimono in Japanese literature and film from the 1930s to the 1980s. After the introduction of Western clothing to Japan, kimono eventually disappeared as everyday wear from the mid-twentieth century, and the rich symbolism of these garments has now become more or less esoteric knowledge. Using ideas from object studies, I examine modern texts and films that highlight kimonos in interesting ways, often as part of the past, and address issues such as nostalgia, national and gender identities, and historical change.

*Have you noticed a shift in your way of thinking or your methodology since you started working on material culture?*

Thinking about material culture and objects in texts (rather than characters, ideology, etc.) has opened up new interpretive possibilities I had not considered before. Unless something is obviously symbolic we usually tend to ignore objects, but by exploring how they work and “speak” within the text we can gain new ideas about the text itself. Of course, because literary objects are depicted through language, I am also still very much writing about issues of representation, discourse, and history.

*What do you think is the biggest misunderstanding people have when it comes to kimono?*

I am not sure what the biggest misunderstanding would be, but a person once told me that he did not realize that men also wear kimonos. Although kimonos are often associated with women, there are many kinds of men's kimonos. The terminology is also complicated – there are many kimono-types or associated clothing that are not called kimono at all, such as *yukata*, the casual summer kimono formerly worn as indoorwear or nightwear; also, kimono outfits are comprised not just of a kimono itself but are put together with different types of sashes, undergarments, overgarments, accessories, and footwear.

*What do you find to be the most rewarding aspect of using a comparative perspective in your work?*

Because I approach literature as part of a global conversation, I have always employed a comparative perspective when thinking about any kind of text. This is the case even though I do not especially focus on comparing different national literatures in my research. For example, early twentieth-century feminists around the world were often reading the same texts, but in different languages, different formats and at different times. So thinking about Japanese feminists requires an understanding of such intertextual, intercultural circulation. Having a comparative perspective in this sense is foundational for my research, but also opens up rich, unexpected ways of reading. In my work on global sexuality discourse, I have discovered how readers in different parts of the world were using the same texts from the field of sexual science in very similar as well as completely divergent ways. By becoming a part of this department, I hope I can further develop my use of such comparative perspectives.

*What else are you looking forward to about moving to Davis?*

I am looking forward to the sun, abundant fresh produce and getting to know my colleagues and students.

*Megan Ammirati is a doctoral candidate in the Department.*

## An Interview with Michael Subialka

by Carmine Morrow

Prof. Michael Subialka joined the department this fall as a joint appointment with French and Italian. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, and was previously the Powys Roberts Research Fellow in European Literature at St. Hugh's College, University of Oxford, and a Visiting Assistant Professor at Bilkent University in Ankara. He is the editor of *PSA: The Journal of the Pirandello Society of America* and has co-edited *Pirandello's Visual Philosophy: Imagination and Thought across Media* (forthcoming this year from Fairleigh Dickinson University Press) and Brunoro Zampeschi's *Linnamorato* (1565) (Ravenna: Longo, 2010). His interests are in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature and philosophy, theatre, and film.



Michael Subialka

*When did you decide that graduate school was right for you?*

Not until the end of my undergraduate degree, I believe, and the choice wasn't really motivated by anything specific. Choosing to major in philosophy and Italian was just a

natural extension of my interests. At first I enrolled in the Mendoza College of Business at Notre Dame, and had vague plans to become some kind of consultant or something, but after my first semester it became clear that courses in management weren't what I was looking for and I switched to philosophy. I would never have thought to do that out of high school because like most public high schools mine didn't offer any kind of philosophy courses. The closest I got to philosophy before college was reading Freud on my own for psychology class! But in college, I came to love philosophy for its rigorous approach to thinking, its challenging problems, and especially its willingness to tackle profound questions at the root of who we are and how we live. My interest in those kinds of questions also encouraged me to pick up Italian as a major. I had been taking language courses so that I could study abroad. Soon I realized that the language was really just the beginning and that there was so much to discover about Italy in terms of its culture and history. Looking at a foreign culture became a great way to gain new insights into my own culture and ideas. I realized that so many things are taken for granted until we see how differently other people behave, or think, or live. After this I grew as a thinker, became a more mature person, one more comfortable with what he was doing, and now with whom he's become.

*Did you ever consider doing something else – like fiction or journalism – before moving on to your postgraduate degrees and settling on academics?*

Even after starting my Ph.D. I hadn't yet decided that I was interested in an academic career. It wasn't until after my first year as Ph.D. student that I knew that I wanted to go into scholarship and teaching after my degree. When I first started out as an undergraduate

I planned to work in business, maybe on Wall Street – something like that. But by the end of college, I was applying to organizations like the Peace Corps and Teach for America. I just became much more interested in teaching, travelling and doing development work. I love to write, and I imagine I would have been happy as fiction writer. But in the end, the intellectual problems I found really interesting drew me down a more academic path. From there, my interest in literature and philosophy began to encompass other literary traditions and languages, which also demanded a broader comparative scope

*And what drew you to research the intersections of literature and philosophy? Was there something intrinsic to the material that you felt needed exploring?*

Majoring in philosophy as an undergrad I was always a little bit unconventional – in the eyes of mainstream analytical philosophy, anyway. Analytical philosophy is very good at responding to certain kinds of questions (for example, questions about propositional knowledge), but if you're interested in more existential questions – for example, questions about what it means to live a good life – then you need tools that come from literature. Literature and the arts are where human cultures think through their most pressing challenges; in these fields we reflect on ourselves, look in the mirror and model ourselves to ourselves. Philosophy furnishes questions and approaches that help us to grapple with the most exciting and interesting parts of literature, but literature provides tools for philosophy that too often go unused. If you look at some of the most important thinkers in the history of philosophy, people like Plato, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, it's obvious that for them the task of philosophy cannot be accomplished without using



literary form and artistic experience as ways to handle questions that they want to ask. In the end, I see literature and philosophy as being concerned with much the same thing. The more I delve into specific examples of this overlap, the more convinced I am that it is fundamental to the way we sort out the most important kinds of questions for ourselves, both as individuals and as societies.

*So what do you think is the role of a comparative literature department in our community here on campus, perhaps in relation to other humanity departments? Do you think of comparative literature as a discipline of its own?*

In my opinion the humanities are interdisciplinary by nature, even if departmental structures and research programs don't always make that obvious. What makes comparative literature special, I think, is that it is defined by this interdisciplinarity that other departments don't always openly acknowledge. Comparative literature requires bringing together specialized knowledge of multiple languages, literatures, cultural traditions and histories. I see comparative literature as a kind of model or ideal for the humanities. That is, it models the combination of specialized knowledge with a boundary-crossing scope, which helps to put that knowledge to work in exciting new ways. In comparative literature, like any humanities department, drawing too many distinctions and insisting too firmly on that which sets it apart, at some point, becomes artificial. It is definitely true though, that there is something exhilarating about having a department where people come together with very different specialized backgrounds, thereby leading us to all sorts of unexpected new ideas, perspectives, and approaches. In comparative literature one can find this in a

single departmental home, which is the best that interdisciplinarity has to offer.

*You have taught as volunteer in Italy, as a visiting professor in Turkey, and spent time as writing coach at the University of Chicago and, most recently, at Oxford. How do you think your research and understanding of literature and philosophy has affected your various roles as a teacher and mentor?*

I guess I've been interested in teaching for a long time and took on many different teaching roles over the years. Early on, as an undergraduate, I was a writing mentor and language teacher – I volunteered to teach English as a second language both in South Bend, Indiana, and also over a summer trip to Oradea, Romania. Those experiences inspired me to pursue teaching. Once I started doing academic research at the University of Chicago, my teaching began to incorporate more complex content. I loved integrating cultural learning into the Italian language courses I taught. I also integrated intensive rhetoric and composition training into summer courses. I included the kinds of big-question problems that drew me into my research work in the first place, and so ended up teaching writing classes like "Art and Meaning," "The Art of Dreams," or "Awakening into Consciousness."

After getting my PhD, I taught at Bilkent University, in Ankara, Turkey, which gave me the opportunity to use those skills in a different cultural context, and to teach philosophy and literature from the western canon to students who were not native English speakers. Teaching in this international context cast a new light on those western classics – much like doing comparative research often casts new light on individual texts and traditions. In fact, this inspired me to undertake a project with a colleague from Bilkent, Professor Jennifer

Reimer. We used our experience teaching in an international context as a starting point for an academic panel at the American Comparative Literature Association and then edited a special issue of the academic journal, *New Global Studies*, based on the results. The fact is, research informs teaching, but teaching also informs research; and in the globalized world, we all need to be thinking in a comparative or transnational way to some extent, both in our research and in our teaching.

*That's an interesting connection you make between research/teaching and comparative/transnational thinking. In this light, can you tell us what kind of classes you might design at UC Davis?*

I am very interested in teaching courses that examine the relationships between overlapping modes of thought – literature and philosophy, transnational and comparative perspectives, translation and adaptation, etc. I'm also interested in how research and teaching overlap and how that can be integrated into the classroom. Let me give you some quick thoughts I have on this.

Technology opens up exciting new possibilities for comparative work, in terms not only of the texts being read/discussed but likewise the form of that discussion. In a globally networked learning environment, for example, students from multiple universities in different parts of the world discuss a text or problem together, making the transnational aspect part of the learning experience and integrating a multicultural component reflected in course discussion itself. I would be interested in seeing how the use of technology like this might be applied to courses here at Davis.

I have also led immersive Italian theater projects, where students put on a full production of a play from another language/

culture and learn experientially about the text. This is particularly fruitful when the play is staged in a foreign language. This gives students some excellent opportunity to do some weird and experimental things. For example, two years ago at Oxford we staged a series of avant-garde Futurist theater pieces, rapid-fire sketches of absurd, funny, and disturbing performance art. Students just loved bringing these works to life. I'm hoping to start a similar theater project here at UCD.

In any case, I see the main goal as ensuring that learning *knowledge* (about history, culture, etc.) goes hand in hand with learning *skills* and/or approaches to thinking. That is, how to think analytically, critically, and creatively, for example, and furthermore how to rhetorically craft convincing arguments based on that analysis, both in writing and in verbal communication. These skills are as essential to what we learn as any specific content given in those courses. And we hone and deepen these skills when we think in comparative ways in the classroom that challenge our own ideas with different cultural perspectives. These skills are essential not only to studying, mind you, but also to thriving in a complex, global world. Our twenty-first century challenges demand us to think with rigor and creativity. This means combining skills and knowledge from STEM fields with the skills and knowledge of something like comparative literature.

In recent years much discussion by leaders in all sorts of industries highlights the value and importance of the kind of critical and creative thinking skills fostered by the humanities and liberal arts. When I think about the importance of combining technical skills with these kinds of critical and creative skills, I think of the fundamental question: Do we envision ourselves as becoming a nation of technical operatives, or do we

envision a future where we create, design, and re-imagine our world in innovative ways?

*Okay. How about an easy one: can you recommend some summer reading? Perhaps some contemporary translated works from Italy that many of us might not come across on our own?*

Right now the Italian author everyone is talking about is Elena Ferrante – whoever that is. The mystery of her identity has been a big topic of discussion. Most people find her books addictive, difficult to put down and forget. But I would recommend something a little less well known. I have been deeply immersed in the world of the neo-avant-garde Italian author, Luigi Malerba, who passed away eight years ago. It's called *Roman Ghosts* (*Fantasmî romani*) and should come out in print at the beginning of 2017. But check out his earlier works, I don't mean to be self-serving and just recommend my own translation. William Weaver, who was probably the most important figure in translation from Italian to English in the twentieth century, translated *What Is this Buzzing? Do You Hear It Too?* and *The Serpent*, two very weird and hard to follow books that are as confusing and puzzling as they are

funny and delightful. They're under-appreciated in the Anglophone world, but when they first came out in Italy they were significant works and were translated into Russian and Chinese, all of the major European languages, and a host of other languages from across the world. They are books with global reach, resonating every bit as much today with our environmental, political, and philosophical crises as they did when they were written in the 60s.

Links to some of Michael's work online:

<http://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/taylorian/2015/05/15/futurism-fascism-and-the-art-of-war/>

<https://www.hastac.org/blogs/michaelsubialka/2016/03/13/stark-naked>

<https://oxfordearlycareeracademicoutreachnetwork.wordpress.com/2015/02/23/reflections-on-this-terms-training-event/>

<http://mag.uchicago.edu/arts-humanities/proper-introduction>

*Carmine Morrow is a doctoral candidate in the Department.*

## Amy Lee Prize

Each year, the Department awards a prize for an outstanding undergraduate essay in memory of Amy Lee, who was a graduate student in Comparative Literature from 2005-07. This year's winner is Christine Chung (Comparative Literature 2017) for her essay "Trauma as Inheritance in 'Momik'," reproduced below. Christine was nominated for the prize by Celine Piser, her instructor for COM 4. Christine is a Comparative Literature major who will graduate in 2017.

### Trauma as Inheritance in "Momik"

*by Christine Chung*

In David Grossman's chapter "Momik" in *See Under: Love*, Momik's ambitious nature causes him to struggle with understanding how to help his family. From his birth, Momik was raised as a symbol of survival in his community. Despite the efforts of his elders to foster him in a world set apart from the Holocaust, Momik loses his innocence through the role of his parents' aggressor. The pedestal upon which Momik is placed by his society encourages him towards victimhood,

and in his attempts to empathize with the survivors around him Momik undermines their hope for survival in a life after the war.

Although Momik is a Jew living in a community of Jewish people, his detachment – and so his inherent foreignness – from his elders resides in the matter of his youth. To the victims of the Holocaust, Momik is living proof of their survival as a people after the events of the war. This figurehead within the community, however, is rooted in precarious soil; the “symbol” of survival is the boy’s innocence, which is subject to corruption at any moment. Momik’s curiosity and desire to empathize especially causes tension because of this: “Bella snapped...a nine-year-old boy doesn’t have to know yet” (Grossman 13). His ignorance of the issue that hangs over all of them, spoken about only as “Over There,” becomes a matter that must be maintained for the sake of posterity and their own fragile sanity. This preservation of sanity is expressed most clearly through Momik’s parents, whom with “their eyes [devour] him” (48) and think, “The battle is over. They’ve earned another day” (49). The dialogue surrounding him is time-sensitive; Bella’s mention of Momik’s age and the words “doesn’t have to...yet” imply that his society sees Momik’s vulnerability as only a matter of time. Momik’s parents’ actions of rushing home to see their son, as well as counting each day they survive, denote that there is a quality to Momik that gives them a sense of reprieve from the burdens of memory they carry, however temporary they may be. For the survivors, Momik is the fragile link between “Over There” and what can now be described as “Here.” He is a daily reminder that the Jewish people might continue to endure, unscathed both mentally and physically, into the next generation.

Momik, on the other hand, while not fully aware of his role within the community or the reason why he is placed there, inherently understands and assumes a sense of responsibility for the people around him. His ambitious nature is expressed through his desire to explain and rationalize his parents’ suffering. He says, “he’s the only one in the whole wide world who can do it...they were trying so hard to forget and not tell anyone” (18). Momik realizes that what sets him apart from those around him is the unshared experiences of “Over There,” and it is precisely that which he must know in any aspect possible in order to “save” his family. He is the “only one” because he has not suffered as they have suffered, and has not had the “curse” upon him. The refusal of his elders to communicate the trauma of the Holocaust to Momik is also what motivates and inspires him to solve the issue in the only way he knows how, as it if were a game: “with Blacky or Bill or with mindpower...anything” (55). Momik combats what is essentially post-traumatic stress disorder with the childish notion that whatever “it” is from “Over There” is a physical thing, something that could be defeated with sheriffs and horses or super powers; this innocent idea only heightens the audience’s awareness of Momik’s juvenility. Momik’s unending sentence structure in this section also suggests a sense of childishness, in the breathless manner with which he goes over his thoughts, never pausing for rest; it is as if he cannot afford to waste a single moment. Furthermore, the evidence that his parents are “trying so hard to forget” while simultaneously depending on Momik despite his inevitable growth into adulthood belies a denial that their son will ever come to learn about the Holocaust, and implies the hope they might delay their eventual pains if his ignorance is encouraged.

Momik’s ambition, driven by altruism, contributes to his piece-by-piece understanding of the war and the convoluted ways he approaches the underlying “solution.” It is his desire for empathy in a community that so obviously cherishes him and his well being that ultimately



brings him to victimhood. We see the progression of his waning innocence and endurance as he delves further into the reality of the Holocaust: "In war there's suffering...the innocent suffer too...(these are the words that came to him)" (56). This observation of a "necessary evil" in the mechanics of war is a marked difference from his idealistic, hero-saves-all notions earlier in the text; Bill, for example, always "comes back to life" (55). The shorter, terser sentence structure also contrasts with the rambling tone earlier in the text, when he was more ignorant of the issue at hand. The addition of the parenthetical text is disturbing as well – this insight is something Momik comes to through his own thought process, the result of his experiments to understand the "Nazi Beast" – and this parenthetical reference to his own mental effort underlines the toll it takes on the purity that his community upholds so desperately. It is ironic that his community does not notice his slow loss of innocence until it is too late: in a similar way the war crimes against the survivors were not discovered until well after the Jewish population had been decimated.

Momik's breaking point is essentially the culmination of his internalized struggle to solve the Holocaust mystery coupled with the lack of any support he receives for his efforts. By completing his final experiment in gathering "real Jews" in his cellar, he takes on the role of the oppressor, or so-called "Nazi Beast": "Momik...felt himself fill with hatred and rage and revenge...these Jews were scurrying" (83). These emotions are all characteristic of the aggression of the Nazis, who Momik has now fully "understood" through a reenactment of a concentration camp. Momik seems to emulate ideas he might have read about in books about the Holocaust, for example, the image of "scurrying Jews" is reminiscent of the Nazis' comparison of Jews to rats. However, the realization of the loss of his own innocence, as well as his failure to save anyone – including now, himself – from the Beast truly motivates his outburst. Ironically, the very reason Momik was heralded as a "foreigner" in his community – his ignorance – leads to his destruction. His elders' avoidance of the topic that weighs over all of them as "Over There," as well as their inability to intuit Momik's activities and the resulting trauma he receives from them, undermines the pedestal upon which they placed Momik. Momik's mother and Bella cry, "I tell you, we brought it with us from Over There...Oy, God help us till God helps us" (76). It is clear that the older generation sees the experiences of the Holocaust as a collective trauma that "no doctor can help", and seeing Momik so affected gives them the impression that their suffering will continue to subsist, no matter how many years after the war has ended.

While Momik is living, physical proof of their survival of the war, the weight of the suffering is only exacerbated by the lack of communication behind it: "[Momik] thought the Beast would never be able to get him...[but] he knew...it was too late now" (86). Momik says it is "too late" for him now because he understands that his efforts have led to his own victimhood; in this scene, surrounded by the older Jews, he has finally lost the characteristic of being a foreigner in his society – in a sense, he is a "Real Jude" like all the others. This phrase also describes Momik as having become markedly older, with the ability to judge a "before" and "after" period in his life, despite the fact that less than a year has passed within the text over the entire course of his attempts to fight the Nazi Beast.

Momik's progression from foreigner to fellow victim is traceable over the course of the work as we see Momik struggle through his journey to understand and empathize with his family. His parents' unwillingness to speak openly about the issue, and their need to place Momik's

ignorance and his innocence as the marker of their salvation, only ended up hurting the boy. Whether Momik would have felt less a victim had his community helped to explain the trauma is debatable; the community itself seems unable to confront the trauma they only so recently and narrowly escaped. The idea of a “collective trauma” of a people throughout the text is prevalent, and raises the question of whether the effects of one generation’s suffering’s upon the next are inevitable.

Works cited:

David Grossman, *See Under: Love* (London: Cape, 1990)

## Undergraduate and Alumni News

Congratulations to our recent graduates! Citations for exceptional work in comparative literature were awarded to Sarah Park, who also received Honors for her thesis entitled “The New Translation of Hong Gil-Dong: A Tale of Cultural Displacement and Replacement.” Warm congratulations also to Christine Chung, whose COM 4 essay on “Trauma as Inheritance in ‘Momik,’” written for Celine Piser’s class, won this year’s departmental Amy Lee Prize. We also thank Fabian Rodriguez for his good work as our department’s Undergraduate Peer Advisor during 2015-16. We welcome Breanna Schenkhuizen in her new role as Peer Advisor for 2016-17.

### Taylor Cunningham

I graduated from UC Davis this year, and am now working in sales at a technology company in Alameda. I decided to major in Comparative Literature because it fit well with my Italian major, and I like the breadth of topics that it covers. My overall experience at UCD was mixed – I got lost in the Viticulture and Enology major but really appreciated the focused attention from advisors and professors in Comparative Literature and Italian majors. My advice would be to build relationships with your professors as much as you can because they are there to help you!

### Johnny Kuang

I recently graduated from Cornell Law School with a Juris Doctor degree. I will be practicing in the Mergers & Acquisitions group at Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton, a law firm in New York City starting in September.

I was initially an engineering major but discovered that I loved the comparative literature courses and language offerings at UC Davis. Comparative literature offered me the flexibility to prepare for graduate school and pursue my diverse interests across different departments. I took many courses in anthropology, food science, Chinese, French, English, Chemical Engineering and other departments as well.

I enjoyed my time at UC Davis and was involved in many student organizations. I joined a national fraternity my freshman year, a pre-law organization my junior year, and worked several jobs throughout my time at Davis. I even worked at the ASUCD coffee house at some point.

Given the flexible major requirements of a Comparative Literature degree, it is important to either pursue a second major, a minor, or your interests in other departments. College is a time to figure out your future goals and develop marketable skills in an area of interest. Although I was unsure about

attending law school while I was at UC Davis, taking a diverse range of courses and building up work experience outside of the field allowed me to leverage my liberal arts degree to obtain positions that often hire STEM and business-oriented majors.

**Christina Novakov-Ritchey** (class of 2013)

I just completed my first year in UCLA's World Arts and Culture Ph.D. program, where I study knowledge exchanges between contemporary performance artists and rural ritual practitioners in the Balkans. This summer I am spending two months in Serbia conducting research for my dissertation. In addition I continue to build my own performance art practice under the tutelage of Guillermo Gomez-Pena, Julie Tolentino, and Franko B.

I chose to major in Comp Lit at UC Davis, because the department gave me the freedom to construct my own program of study and demonstrated a commitment to bringing a wide diversity of voices to the table. I came in with a passion for world literature and critical deconstruction of language, and the Comp Lit department gave me the tools I needed to succeed in that endeavor. On a more personal level, I was drawn to the program through the brilliance of my undergraduate advisor, Noha Radwan, whose passion for decolonial theory introduced me to literary criticism's capacity for social and intellectual transformation.

My experience at UC Davis was one of the best times of my life. I was intellectually stimulated, supported by the community of students, staff and professors, and given the resources I needed to succeed in my own journey. My time at UC Davis was extremely politically charged during the Occupy Wall Street movement, and I am still so struck by the solidarity of my academic community, which taught us how to integrate our

intellectual pursuits with the larger socio-political needs of our communities.

My advice to incoming Comp Lit students would be to engage deeply with your work – if you are taking a course, dedicate yourself to having a dialogue with the materials. The passion that emerges from that depth will foster beautiful conversations between you and your professors that will change who you are. Even though the quarter system can feel like a race, take the time to slow down, take care of yourself, and orient your focus towards your passions. Some of the best parts about being a Comp Lit student are the flexibility and self-determination afforded to you – take advantage of that and craft your studies in a way that will feed you... you never know where you will end up.

**Sarah Park**

A week after graduating, I jumped into a teaching credential/M.Ed. program in Los Angeles. The program matches residents with a mentor teacher, with whom I teach using various co-teaching models. I began teaching 7th/8th grade math this August, and also took summer courses at the University of the Pacific. It's been a very eventful, productive, and educational experience: I can't believe I graduated from UC Davis only two months ago!

I've always been fascinated by a wide array of disciplines – Soil Science and Landscape Architecture being perhaps the more obscure classes I took at UC Davis -- but I chose Comparative Literature as my major because of my strong interest in seeing how culture, society, human thought and languages all connect at the nexus we call literature. The Spanish language component of my major also played a major role in my decision to study abroad in Nicaragua and Cuba where I

conducted independent studies on Creole oral cultures and bilingual education.

Although I teach middle school math, I am finding how important literacy is in *all* subjects. As youths transition from learning to read to reading to learn, relaying reading and writing skills becomes critical in the STEM fields. I therefore find that my background in Comparative Literature is central to my development as a mathematics teacher.

As someone who has officially changed her major four to five times and ran a proverbial victory lap as a super senior (i.e. fifth year), I am grateful for the variety of programs I've participated in. Although I may have taken the long road to where I am today, I believe that my experience has allowed me to enjoy much of what UC Davis has to offer.

Find a social cause you feel passionate about, and find a group on campus that serves those needs (or create one!). And for more practical advice, consult your professors, TAs and advisors as often as you can.

### **Caitlyn Tremblay**

Since graduating from UCD I've been working on a small-scale organic farm in Davis. However, I'm currently preparing to move to upstate New York and work for a small food non-profit as a farm-to-school

coordinator. A love of literature and thoughtful discussion, which I found in CompLit classes, inspired me to join the major. I also wanted to learn something new and challenging, which I found in the form of studying Arabic language and literature with the incredible Noha Radwan, Shayma Hassouna, Amanda Batarseh and others. It was the caliber of these classes, the intellectual challenge and personal growth they offered, that made the major such a positive experience for me.

I loved attending UCD. My freshman year was difficult, but that was mostly due to the shock of living in a new place away from my family. I soon became involved in various organizations and networks, integrated in a rich community of thinkers, doers, and good company. Davis afforded me an incredibly diverse and enriching experience, and I'm so glad I attended college here.

Explore! Take classes that interest you, and don't let that interest stay limited inside the major. There are so many ways Comp Lit connects to the world and other disciplines, through language, critical thinking skills, and more. Make these connections: study abroad, take different kinds of classes, start conversations. It will make your experience all the richer!

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## Graduate News

We welcome two new graduate students, Samantha Erigio and Emily Liao, to the department. Samantha holds a McNair Scholars Fellowship and Emily a Provost's Fellowship. Michael Graziano, Elisabeth Lore, and Natalie Strobach filed their dissertations in Fall 2015. Megan Ammirati, Cloe-Mai Le Gall-Scoville, and Zhen Zhang each received a UC Davis Provost's Dissertation Fellowship. Cloe-Mai Le Gall-Scoville also received a dissertation fellowship from the American Association of University Women (AAUW). Kevin Smith received a four month residency fellowship at the Academy of Korean Studies in Seoul for Winter 2017. James Straub will be working in Berlin for two quarters with support from UC Davis and the Erasmus + International Mobility Agreement between the University of California and the FU Berlin. Chris Tong (Ph.D. 2012) was appointed to a tenure-track position at the University of Maryland,



Baltimore County and Josh Waggoner (Ph.D. 2012) as a Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Tampa. Elizabeth Wing (Ph.D. 2008) was appointed to a tenure-track position at Las Positas College, CA.

**Megan Ammirati** completed her Fulbright Fellowship at Nanjing University. She published “Hong Shen and the ‘Natural Death’ of Female Impersonation: Rethinking the History of Gender-Appropriate Performance in huaju,” *Modern Chinese Literatures and Cultures* (Fall 2015), and has a forthcoming review of *Onnagata: A Labyrinth of Gendering in Kabuki Theater in American Society for Theatre Research*, 58 (2017).

**Amanda Batarseh** spent the fall and winter quarters in Bethlehem, Palestine, conducting research on contemporary Palestinian writing, particularly relative to the novel in the post-’67 and post-Oslo eras. In this time, she conducted interviews with four Palestinian authors regarding writing and publishing in Palestine-Israel, attended a conference at Bir Zeit University on Walter Benjamin (*Benjamin in Palestine: On the Place and Non-Place of Radical Thought*), and collected resources (primarily printed novels) that are difficult to access from the United States.

**David Dayton** presented papers titled “Translating Between Minority and Indigeneity: Chinese Ethnic Minority Literature’s Participation in Global Indigenous Writing” at the 2016 MLA, “Between the ‘Mother Tongue’ and ‘Traversing the Lips’: Tracing the Translative Practice of Poets Gebu and Jimu Langge” at the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association, and “On Translating the Chinese Stories of the Bilingual Uyghur Writer Alat Asem” at the the UC Davis East Asian Studies Graduate Student Symposium.

**Leonardo Giorgetti** participated in a panel at the annual conference of the Renaissance Society of America 2016 with a paper titled “‘Fra doglie, e digiun, pianti, e sospiri’: Lucrezia Marinella’s Four Sonnets on Catherine of Siena ‘piagata da Christo’.”

**Cloe-Mai Le Gall-Scoville** undertook research on Claire de Duras at the Maison de Chateaubriand south of Paris in April and May. She helped organize the Medieval Association of the Pacific’s 2016 conference at UC Davis. Cloe also published “A More than Masculine Courage’: Idealism and Social Protest in *Indiana* and *Jane Eyre*,” in *Commemorating Charlotte Bronte: Time, Space, and Place*, ed. Diane Long Hoeveler (New York: Routledge, 2016), and presented papers titled “Thérèse and Nina: Mixed-Race Heroines in Realism and Naturalism,” at the 2015 Pacific and Ancient Modern Literature Association Convention and “The Scene of Colonialism: Performing Hybridity in Lady Morgan’s *The Missionary*,” at the 2016 British Women Writer’s Conference.

**Sayyeda Zehra Razvi** presented a paper titled “The Cosmopolitan Story of a Vernacular Novel: Intizar Husain’s *Basti* in Urdu/Hindi/English” at the 2016 ACLA.

**Amy Riddle** has a chapter on “Petrofiction and Political Economy in the Age of Late Fossil Capital” in collection titled *Materialism and the Critique of Energy*, forthcoming 2017.

**Navid Saberi-Najafi** published “Suhrawardi’s *Epistle of the Bird*: A New Reading,” *Michigan Academician*, 43 (2016), and has a chapter titled “Abu’l-Raja Chachi Khumraki and the Simurgh’s Mysticojurisprudential Dimension,” in *Trades, Talents, Guilds, and Specialists: Getting Things Done in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Bradley D. Ryner, *Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, vol. 21, edited by Bradley D. Ryner, forthcoming from Brepols.

**Sean Sell’s** *Chiapas Maya Awakening: Contemporary Poems and Short Stories* is forthcoming from Oklahoma University Press in 2017. Sean presented papers titled “Fresh Season’s Fruit on an Old Tree: Translating Contemporary Maya-language Poetry from Chiapas” at the 2016 MLA Convention, “Words Rise Up: The Zapatistas and Contemporary Mayan Literature” at the 5th Annual UC Davis Native American Studies Graduate Student Symposium in May 2016, and “The Maya Cosmovision in Contemporary Indigenous Fiction from Chiapas, Mexico” at the Third Annual UC Davis Symposium on Language Research, May 2016.

**Kevin Smith** presented papers titled “Boots, Soiling My Dream’s White Page: Militarization and Japan’s Total Empire in Yi Sang’s Bilingual Poetry,” at the *NextGen Korean Studies Scholars (NEKST) 4th International Conference*, University of Michigan, May 2016; “Beyond Male or Female: Queer Military Time in the Bilingual Poetry of Yi Sang,” at *(Un)Bound Horizons: Flights, Faults, Ruptures, and Rhythms of Interdisciplinary Humanities*, the Third Annual Interdisciplinary Humanities Graduate Student Conference, University of California, Merced, April 2016; “Militarized

Nature: Pak Mogwöl and the Poetics of Natural Destruction,” at *Boundaries/Crossings: Art, Culture, Politics, and the Environment in Asia*, Bard College, April 2016; “Minjung as an Unfinished Project: A Non-Teleological Reading of Shin Hak-chul’s ‘History of Modern Korea’ Painting Series,” at *Historians Without Borders, History Without Limits*, UC Davis Graduate History Conference, April 2016; and “Minjung as an Unfinished Project: A Non-Teleological Reading of Shin Hak-chul’s ‘History of Modern Korea’ Painting Series,” at the *Korean Literature Association (KLA) Conference*, Duke University, November 2016.

**James Straub** presented “Being in Time, Being Out of Time in German and Austrian Literature and Film” at the 2015 PAMLA conference.

**Tori White** presented papers titled “The Non-Human Knight in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Yvain, Le Chevalier au Lion*,” at the 2015 Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association, “Brienne the Beauty and the Tradition of Chivalric Romance,” at the 2016 meeting of the *Medieval Association of the Pacific*, and “(Ab)using Petrarch: The English Petrarchan Lexicon,” at the 2016 Shakespeare Association of America Seminar on *Shakespeare and the Dictionary*.

**Deborah Young** presented “Narrative Form as Dream-work in Kafka’s *The Castle*,” at the Institute on Culture and Society at Georgetown University in June 2015.

**Zhen Zhang** participated in a seminar with Gayatri Spivak on “Why Marx Today?” in the Institute for Critical Social Inquiry (ICSI) at the New School for Social Research in New York, June 2016. Zhen also

participated in a summer school at the Free University of Berlin on the topic of “East Asia and the West: The Question of Anthropological Constants” in July and August 6, 2016.

In 2015, **Ted Geier** (Ph.D. 2015) was appointed to an Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship for the Rice Seminars on “After Biopolitics” at Rice University. He offers the following account of his experience:

By very good fortune, I had somewhere to go last year after I finished my doctorate, and that somewhere was a full time job. This is, of course, not always the case. My particular somewhere happened to be Houston. This is, of course, not always one’s first choice. Having grown up in Northern California, lived in Oregon, traipsed around various National Parks and wild parts of the western USA, travelled a bit of Europe and such, and briefly tried on Minneapolis for size, I would have rightly been grouped among such ones.

It certainly helped to be heading to Rice University to work with some of the central figures in my fields of nineteenth-century British literature, film, critical theory, and Eco- and Animal Studies. Having said that, I was prepared for anything at all, anywhere at all, and my one-year fellowship required that I maintain that openness – I was back on the job market just about as soon as I arrived.

The year was invigorating and wondrous beyond all my initial dreams. I was down the hall from my boss, one of my favorite thinkers, Cary Wolfe, and I was upstairs from one of my most important mentors, Tim Morton, and I was part of a year-long special research seminar funded by the Mellon Foundation, “After Biopolitics.” My next-door office neighbor, although he doesn’t much care for offices, was one of the most elegant film theorists and American Studies thinkers

around, my friend Gregg Flaxman, and I was a day-in, day-out office occupier along with two brilliant and good shiny new PhDs, Alex Tarr from Berkeley Geography and Rex Troumbley from Hawai’i Political Science. My weeks were routinely punctuated by work and exchanges with Germanists, Philosophers, and Classicists in the Rice Faculty Philosophy Workshop I was invited to join, with Cymene Howe and the Anthropologists in the Center for Energy and Environmental Research in the Human Sciences, and with Tracy Volz and the superb Program in Writing and Communication. I collaborated with the Film Program on screenings, teaching, and coffee – coffee was very important.

I mention all of them not *only* to be a name-droppy bore but because this was in fact the most essential aspect of the year’s work: comparative literature is so often also the work of comparative studies well beyond literature (if there is such a beyond). Being put into a collaborative, dynamic, multi-disciplinary environment thriving on every register of my primary literary fields and all of the theoretical and interdisciplinary areas I’ve been tracking down over the long years of undergraduate, in-between, and graduate school, and doing so with the degree done and my own work in the mix of professional exchanges, was an impossible reward and a constant inspiration. It led to further opportunities I hadn’t even thought of before arrival, and it gave me important, lasting friendships that thrive as well – perhaps better – away from campus business as they do in weekly meetings. These are essential discoveries and projects for professional life. Work is work, and there will be work. We have chosen what, in theory, is still pretty good work. But work cannot be all, and it if must be, there must be more. Rice gave me

more, and now I know more about how to design my future professional life.

I'd heard from faculty at Davis of the virtues of the postdoc, and it was all true. I've published not one but (almost) two books, I made more contacts than I can count, I taught new self-designed courses I'd always wanted to, I had sparkling freedoms to pursue this, that, and the other around the world at conferences and such, and I even had some healthcare. While we all lament the state of the field, the profession, the nation, and life itself, it's a guilty pleasure to find a little success now and then perhaps. This time in a smaller research setting turned out to be a very good way to regroup after the doctorate and to fend off some of that negative reality. It's surprising how much energy one can expel on all of that and how much more one can get done – with joy and passion – with just a year to oneself and a room of one's own.

Houston sort of sticks to you eventually, and my regular swims in the floodwaters were

tempered by not just the food and the trembling spectacle of The Energy Capital of the World, but by Rice's charming campus life and tight-knit residential community of exceptional undergraduates. Ah, another "guilty pleasure": Tiny classes and the choice of whether to teach or not to teach one semester (I taught – two classes and 40 students in one year is mere child's play to the UC Davis Comp Lit product, right?). One makes do in Texas, and many love it deeply, deeply.

There is more to say about the work I was a part of and continue to do in my own publications and in collaborative settings, but mostly I find myself seeing how all of the time and work at Davis led to the possibilities I am now taking advantage of. This includes, indeed, long-term employment beyond the postdoc as I begin a job as an Assistant Professor with an online university. This was not at all an idea I had when I started grad school, largely because I'd never seen a job list

### Graduate Speaker Series 2015-16

#### November 4

"Austerity Literature: Roberto Bolaño and the Anti-professional Reading Strategy"  
Pat Cabell

#### December 1

"Translating Between Minority and Indigeneity: Chinese Ethnic Minority Literature's Participation in Global Indigenous Writing"  
David Dayton

#### January 20

"Boots, Soiling My Dream's White Page: Militarization and Japan's Total Empire in Yi Sang's Bilingual Poetry"  
Kevin Smith

#### March 2

"'Quelqu'un de nos colonies': Claire de Duras' Critical Narrators in *Ourika* and *Le pariah*"  
Cloe-Mai Le Gall-Scoville

#### April 27

"'Among Pains, Fasts, Tears and Sights': Lucrezia Marinella's Four Sonnets on Catherine of Siena 'wounded by Christ' (*Sacred Rhymes*, 1603)"  
Leonardo Giorgetti



and had no clue about how ubiquitous the online learning community was – every major university, Harvard or UC, is jumping on board and using the same exact Learning Management Systems. But thanks to my UC Davis and Rice experiences, I know it has potential. My Rice colleagues took me for many celebratory meals upon the news – we all celebrate with reckless abandon when one of us gets a job these days, a happy misfortune but still one to plan on and revel in deeply when the time comes. There’s still plenty of work to do the next day.

In the meantime, with my wife, Dr. Rachel Taylor Geier, DMA in Flute and Music History, I will be living in the house we bought on the Oregon Coast about 5 minutes from where we got married and where there is no university. I’ll give a lecture at Washington State University, based on my book, on the invitation of a colleague who put

together the conference panel that took some of a dissertation chapter to a broader audience in my field and led to the invitation to propose it as a book. That’s a one-day drive through lovely country, with friends, family, or both at all stops including near Washington State, then back to the beach. I’ll be at a few conferences around the country, and then will return to write up a storm in my quiet little beach community throughout the year. I’ll be back in Davis for Spring to teach more American Studies – one class on the research into neoliberalism I have been doing at Rice and before/after, another on Animal Studies – so I’ll see all of my old friends a bit and keep my classroom chops fresh. Then I’ll return again to the quiet sea air and empty rustic beaches again. Remote work has its perks, and the room of my own for this year and beyond has cool breezes, seagulls, and wavesounds. Beats Houston. Sorry, not sorry.

## Faculty News

**Gail Finney** convened a seminar on “Trauma in Recent Cinema” at the 2016 meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA), and gave a talk titled “Greek Tragedy as a Paradigm for Family Trauma Cinema” for the 2016 convention of the International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA).

**Kari Lokke** presented a paper on Mary Shelley’s *Valperga* and George Eliot’s *Romola* at the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Women Writers Conference in June 2016 at the University of Georgia. She published “Radical Spirituality and Reason in Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,” *Feminist Moments*, ed. Susan Bruce and Katherine Smits (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); “Letitia Landon’s ‘The

Fairy of the Fountains’ and Gothic Narrative,” *Pedagogy* 16:2 (April 2016); “The

Tenant of Wildfell Hall,” in *Blackwell Companion to the Brontës*, ed. Diane Hoeveler and Deborah Morse (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2016); and, co-authored with Cloe Le Gall-Scoville, “A More than Masculine Courage’: Idealism and Social Protest in *Indiana* and *Jane Eyre*,” in *Commemorating Charlotte Brontë: Time, Space and Place*, ed. Diane Long Hoeveler and Deborah Denenholz Morse (London: Routledge, 2016).

**Linda Matheson** presented a paper titled “A Historical and Semiotic Analysis of Clothing in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*” at *A Global Middle Ages*, the 50th anniversary and annual meeting of the *Medieval Association of the Pacific*.

**Sheldon Lu** published a new book in Chinese titled *Image, Literature, Theory: Re-visioning Chinese Modernity* (Beijing: United Artists Press, 2016).

Sheldon gave invited lectures and papers at Nanyang Technology University, Singapore, Stockholm University, Beijing University, Beijing Film Academy, Nanjing University, Nanjing Academy of Art, the University of Macau, Lingnan University, Hong Kong, the Shanghai Theater Academy, and the 2016 meeting of the Association for Asian Studies. In 2015-16, he published:

“Is Chinese-language Film Studies ‘Chinese’ or ‘Western?’” *Contemporary Cinema* (Beijing) no. 12 (2015)

“Ecocinema and Chinese-language Documentary,” *Research in Film* (Shanghai Theater Academy), no. 3 (2015)

“The Postsocialist Working Class: Male Heroes in Jia Zhangke’s Films,” in *Changing Chinese Masculinities: From Imperial Pillars of State to Global Real Men*, ed. Kam Louie (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2016)

**Noha Radwan** was honored as a Chancellor’s Fellow. She will hold the title for five years. “Considered to be one of the rising and important scholars in modern Arabic literature studies, Professor Radwan has developed a formidable reputation in her field,” wrote Dean Susan Kaiser, and described her further as “a scholar working in the forefront of an area of intense current importance.”

**Sven-Erik Rose** received the Association of Jewish Studies’ Jordan Schnitzer Book Award for Philosophy and Jewish Thought for his *Jewish Philosophical Politics in Germany*,

**2016 ALAN TEMPLETON LECTURE**

**HAUN SAUSSY**  
UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

**TRANSLATION THEORY FROM A SOMEWHAT CHINESE POINT OF VIEW**

TUESDAY, MAY 3  
4:00 PM LECTURE FOLLOWED BY RECEPTION  
MULTIPURPOSE ROOM, STUDENT COMMUNITY CENTER

THE ALAN TEMPLETON ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS AND LETTERS SUPPORTS THE INTELLECTUAL AND ACADEMIC VISION OF THE UC DAVIS LANGUAGES & LITERATURES DEPARTMENTS

In May 2016, Professor Haun Saussy of the University of Chicago delivered the 2016 Alan Templeton lecture hosted by the Department.

*1789-1848* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis: University Press, 2014). His book was featured in a recent podcast interview available at <http://tinyurl.com/z4bujzn>. Sven-Erik received a DAAD grant to participate in a Faculty Summer Seminar on “Germans, Jews, and the Collapse of the Secular Future” led by Jonathan Boyarin at Cornell University. He gave invited lectures on hunger in the Nazi ghettos at the Richard S. Dinner Center for Jewish Studies at UC Berkeley and at Johns Hopkins University, and on Heideggerian ontology and the Holocaust in Piotr Rawicz’s *Le Sang du ciel* at the University of Minnesota. He presented papers titled “Jews, Liberals, &

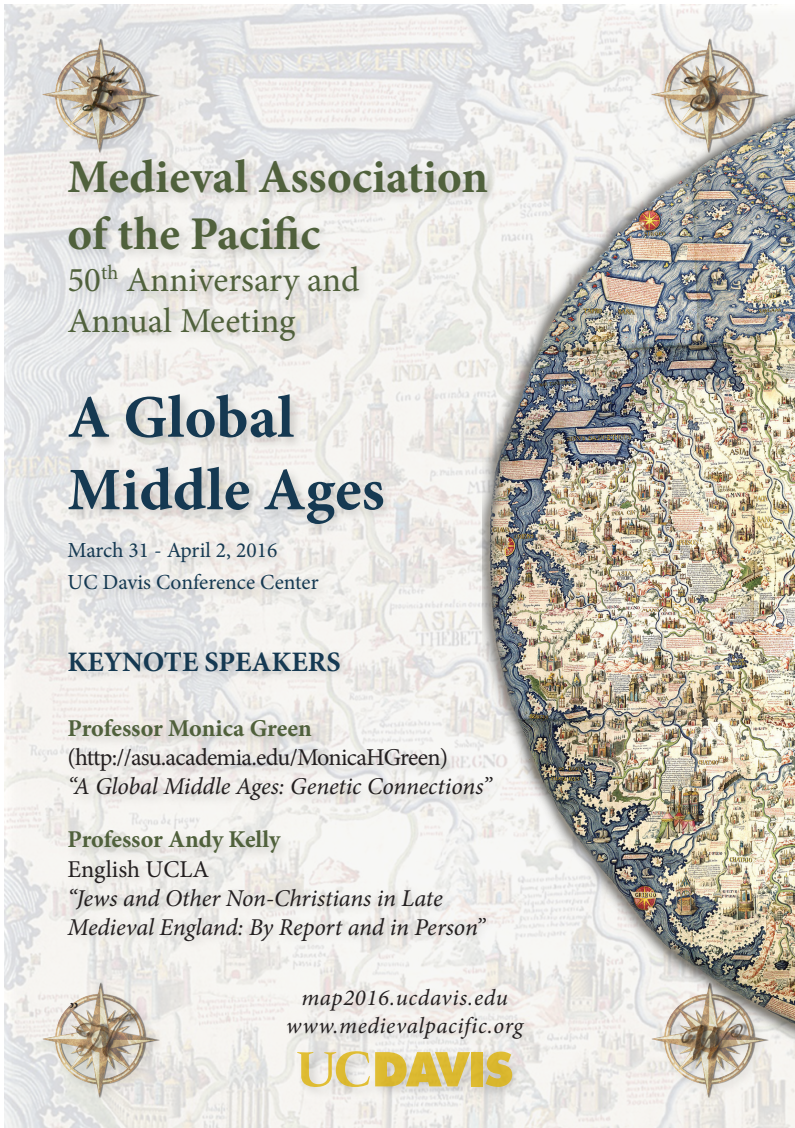


the Volk: On the Popularity of Berthold Auerbach's *Schwarzwälder Dorfgeschichten*" at the 2015 GSA, "Writing Hunger in the Nazi Ghettos: Leyb Goldin's 'Chronicle of a Single Day' and Oskar Rosenfeld's 'Golem und Hunger,'" at the Duke German Jewish Studies Workshop, and "Heine, Jewishness, and Masculinity," at the 2015 meeting of the Modern Language Association (MLA). His "Wissenschaft des Judentums, Freedom, and Hegel's State," *AJS Perspectives: The Magazine of the Association for Jewish Studies. The Freedom Issue* is forthcoming this fall.

**Cheri Ross** received the Outstanding University Honors Program Faculty Member award for 2015-16. This award for being "a great teacher, leader and mentor" is based on student votes and is awarded to one faculty member each year. She also took over TA and AI supervision from Brenda Schildgen in 2016-17, along with continuing to serve as the Undergraduate Advisor for Comparative Literature.

**Seth Schein** published *Homeric Epic and its Reception: Interpretive Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); "The Language of Wisdom in Sophokles' *Philoktetes* and Euripides' *Bacchae*," in *Wisdom and Folly in Euripides*, ed. P. Kyriakou and A. Rengakos (New York: de Gruyter: 2016); "War, What is it Good For?" in Homer's *Iliad* and Four Reception," in *Our Ancient Wars: Rethinking War through the Classics*, ed. V. Caston and S.-M. Weineck (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 2016); and "The Interpretation of Iliad 1.1-2: Language, Meter, Style, and Myth," *Gaia* 18 (2015). He gave a

talk titled "A Cognitive Approach to Genre, Generic Expectations, and the Interpretation of Attic Tragedy" at *Minds on Stage: Cognitive Approaches to Greek Tragedy*, a conference held at the University of Leiden. In October 2015, Seth led workshops on his in-progress commentary on the first book of Homer's *Iliad* at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, the University of Chicago, and Northwestern University, and in January/February 2016, he taught a freshman seminar on Homer's *Iliad* at UC Berkeley.



**Medieval Association  
of the Pacific**  
50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and  
Annual Meeting

**A Global  
Middle Ages**

March 31 - April 2, 2016  
UC Davis Conference Center

**KEYNOTE SPEAKERS**

**Professor Monica Green**  
(<http://asu.academia.edu/MonicaHGreen>)  
"A Global Middle Ages: Genetic Connections"

**Professor Andy Kelly**  
English UCLA  
"Jews and Other Non-Christians in Late  
Medieval England: By Report and in Person"

[map2016.ucdavis.edu](http://map2016.ucdavis.edu)  
[www.medievalpacific.org](http://www.medievalpacific.org)

**UC DAVIS**



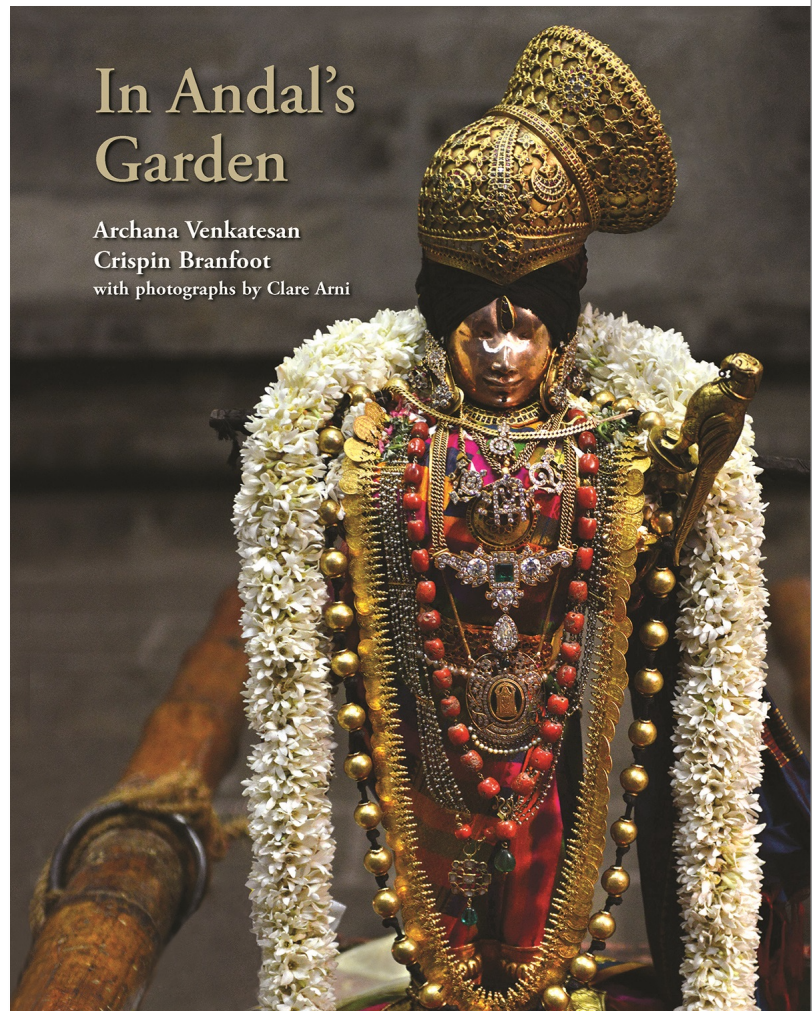
**Brenda Deen Schildgen** served as Chair of the Letters and Science Executive Committee. With Claire Waters (English) she co-organized *A Global Middle Ages*, the 50th anniversary and annual meeting of the *Medieval Association of the Pacific*.

**Jocelyn Sharlet** organized a new Persian language program at UC Davis to launch this fall. With Suad Joseph and Ali Anooshahr, she secured the Bita Dayabari gift for a chair in Persian language and literature at UC Davis. She published the entry on “Adab” for the *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, 2nd edn (New York: Macmillan Reference, 2016) and, forthcoming, “Educated Slave Women and Gift Culture” in *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History*, ed. Matthew Gordon and Kathryn Hain with Oxford University Press, “What do Men Want? Chaste Lovers, Umayyad Rulers and Abbasid Writers,” in *Courts and Performance in the Pre-modern Middle East*, ed. Maurice Pomerantz and Evelyn Birge Vitz with New York University Press, and “Arabic Praise Poems,” for Oxford Bibliographies in Islamic Studies. She presented a paper titled “Elegance, Eloquence and Obscenity in the Life and Work of ‘Inan j. Abu Khalid al-Natifi, Poet and Slave, d. 841” at the 2015 meeting of the Middle East Studies Association.

**Michiko Suzuki** published “The Translation of Edward Carpenter’s *The Intermediate Sex* in Early Twentieth-Century Japan,” in *Sexology and Translation: Cultural and Scientific Encounters Across the Modern World*, ed. Heike Bauer (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015). She presented a paper titled “Decoding the Visual

Experience of Kimono in the Cinematic Representations of *Sasameyuki* (1950 and 1983)” at the annual meeting of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies and gave talks at Indiana University and Michigan State University.

**Archana Venkatesan** and Crispin Branfoot (SOAS, London) published their book *In Andal's Garden: Art, Ornament and Devotion in Srivilliputtur* (Marg 2015) on the famous Andal Temple in Srivilliputtur, South India. The book explores Andal’s temple, her visualization in painting, sculpture, festival ritual and performance, and the history and sacred landscape of southern Tamil Nadu under the Pandya and later Nayaka kings of Madurai. In combining architectural, literary



and theological perspectives, the authors offer new, interdisciplinary ways of seeing the temple as a living, changing and dynamic space. Archana was an invited speaker at the Jaipur Literature Festival.

**Stefan H. Uhlig** published “Goethe’s Figurative Method,” in *The Oxford Handbook of European Romanticism*, ed. Paul Hamilton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). He participated in a three-day seminar on *(Re)tracing Cosmopolitanism* at the 2015 meeting of the German Studies Association (GSA), and presented position papers on the near-disappearance of comparative work on European Romanticism at the 2015 meeting of the North American Association for the Study of Romanticism (NASSR) and the 2016 meeting of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS). He gave papers titled “Adam Smith against Interpretation” at the 2016 NASSR and “Translating Form” at the 2016 GSA, and organized panels on *Arabian Nights* and *Romantic Persuasion* for the 2016 NASSR and, with Chunjie Zhang, on *Goethe, Worlds, and Literatures* for the 2016 GSA. In September, he took over from Brenda Schildgen as the graduate advisor for Comparative Literature.

Department of Comparative Literature • University of California, Davis  
One Shields Avenue, Davis CA, 95616

Phone: (530) 752-1219 • Website: <https://complit.ucdavis.edu>

Please contact Cheri Ross at [cross@ucdavis.edu](mailto:cross@ucdavis.edu) with information or suggestions for future newsletters.