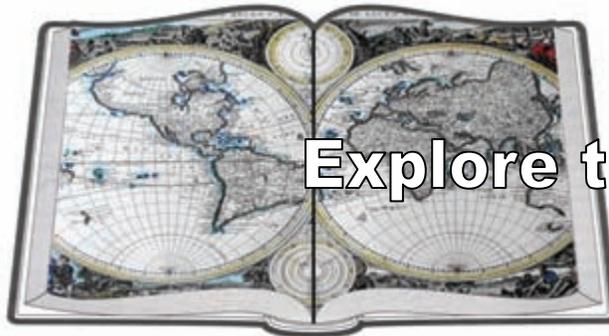


Friends of Comparative Literature



Explore the World

Woman

Hira Bansode
(1939-, leading writer of the Dalit movement in India)

She, the river,
said to him, the sea:

All my life
I've been dissolving myself
and flowing towards you
for your sake
in the end it was I
who turned into the sea
a woman's gift
is as large as the sky
but you went on
worshipping yourself
you never thought
of becoming a river
and merging
with me

Translated from the Marathi
by Vinay Dharwadkar

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News from the Coordinator Jian Xu

I would think of 2007 as a year of continual growth and maturation after a period of rapid expansion. Although there has been no dramatic increase in curriculum and enrollments as in the past two years, there are very positive developments in faculty research and scholarship that are sure signs of a healthy, sustained progress. The faculty has been more productive than ever in publishing and presenting their works in conferences (see Faculty Notes and Kristin's article). Two faculty members, Michelle Bolduc and Caroline Seymour-Jorn, have both been named fellow for 2007-2008 by the Center for 21st Century Studies, which is rare even at the departmental level. The result of the faculty's scholarly endeavors will no doubt seep into their teaching and reach the students. I would like to mention that in 2007 four graduate students, Nathalie Ségeral, Tuya Shagdar, Katherine Wilson, and Peng Yu, have successfully completed their studies and graduated from our program. Also in 2007 Peter Paik and Jian Xu have been promoted to the associate rank. New to Comparative Literature is our Conversation over Lunch series, the first of which, moderated by Kristin Pitt, held in early October, focused on the politics of book banning. The next, moderated by Peter Paik, taking place on November 13, was titled "Representation of the Divine in the Graphic Novel." These are all signs of our program's growing strength, for which we are thankful to the continued support of our alumni and friends.



Select Spring 2008 Course Offerings

230 Literature and Religion: Threatened Families: The Nazi Years

What is the relationship between society and the family? Is family a miniature society in which parents plant seeds of values, behavior and beliefs that will bear fruit in the larger society? What happens when the family and the society are in conflict? The Nazis could not leave the nurturing of the youth in the hands of the parents but had to take over the influence of the family so as to keep total control of the society they were forming. Often the family roles were reversed; youth were often spying on their parents and reporting anything against the regime to the authorities. Youth were, consequently, often the cause of parents being arrested. Another reversal came often when parents were unable to provide basic needs for their children: food, protection and health and the children became smugglers and care-givers for their parents. Under conditions of poverty and war, family life is stressful and often brakes down leaving scars that last many generations.

From Milwaukee to Mexico: Comparative Border Crossings

Surrounded on all sides by mountains, including the snow-capped Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl volcanoes, the central Mexican city of Puebla is a picturesque home to more than 1.5 million people. Founded in 1531, the central city has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its abundant Spanish colonial architecture, including a baroque cathedral built in the 16th and 17th centuries; in addition to its architecture and geography, the city is known for its arts and crafts, including the colorful yellow and blue Talavera pottery, and for its cuisine, most notably for the spicy *mole* sauce of ground cocoa, nuts, and chilies rumored to have been created there. This past April, the city was also host to the 2007 annual meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA), organized around the theme of "Trans, Pan, Inter: Cultures in Contact," and three UWM professors of Comparative Literature traveled south to take advantage of the intellectual, cultural, and culinary opportunities provided by Puebla.



Michelle and Kristin at the 1730 Spanish colonial church of San Francisco de Acatepec, with its colorful façade of Talavera ceramic tiles.

Much of the work that researchers of comparative literature perform is done in isolation: in the library, at the archives, in front of a computer screen. Academic conferences provide a welcome opportunity for collective discussion and analysis, and the meetings of the ACLA provide a unique opportunity for detailed and extensive conversations, as they are organized around repeating seminars rather than brief panel presentations. In Puebla, Michelle Bolduc participated in a seminar entitled "Transcultural Medievalism or Cultural Heritage and Modern Society," presenting an analysis of Marcel Carné's 1942 film *Les Visiteurs du soir* in her paper, "The Middle Ages in Film: History, Memory, and Nation." Peter Paik's paper, "Repeating Hobbes: Decadence, Disorder, and Protection," argued for the relevance of the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes in confronting the breakdown of political order in an age of multinational capitalism and religious sectarianism as part of the seminar "Cultural Theory after 9/11: Cultures in Contact." In "'No Corpse To Bury': Narrating Duvalier's Haiti from Brooklyn," Kristin Pitt discussed the difficulties of describing experiences of torture, authoritarian violence and exile through her analysis of Edwidge Danticat's 2004 collection *The Dew Breaker* in a seminar called "Race, Class and Gender: Conflict Zones and Contact Zones in U. S. and Latin American Women's Discourse of the 20th Century."



Peter in the courtyard of a church in Cholula.

Between participating their own seminars and attending many other talks and seminars, all three faculty members made sure to take advantage of the conference's location to try a variety of *moles* and other local dishes, walk around the historic central city, visit museums and markets, and travel to nearby sites of interest, including the ruins of pre-Columbian pyramids dating to the 2nd century BCE and unique Spanish colonial churches. It was a valuable experience not soon to be forgotten!

ACLA 2007 online: To view the conference program, read the complete text of the three plenary addresses, and access Reed Johnson's story on the meeting in the *Los Angeles Times*, go to <http://acla2007.complit.ucla.edu/>

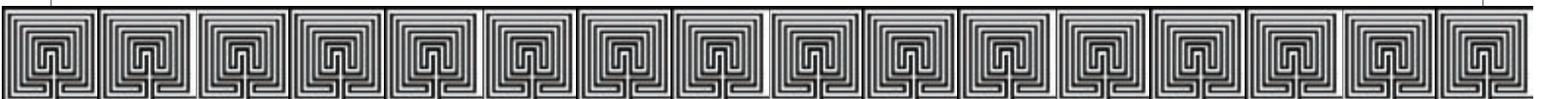
Kristin Pitt

Spotlight: Caroline Seymour-Jorn

This past spring I took a research trip to Cairo, Egypt, to finish research for my book project: Cultural Criticism in Egyptian Women's Writing, which explores the narrative and other strategies dominant in the short stories and novels of five Cairene women writers whose work began to appear in the 1970s. This book explores the critical middle ground between old-fashioned approaches to literature as reflections of the author's psychosocial self and the post-modern position that assumes the 'death of the author'. The text thus combines literary with ethnographic analysis to analyze the wide range of female emotional, intellectual, family and professional experience that these authors portray as they describe and challenge gender, religious and political ideologies in Egypt.



In my research and teaching, I take an anthropological approach to literature. My approach is anthropological in that it regards literature as both emanating from the social process and as contributing to it in the form of cultural critique. I argue that the works of the 1970s writers constitute a coherent universe of discourse because they share a constellation of motivations and themes, and because the authors all clearly position themselves as critics of various elements of society. Analysis of the writing reflects each author's engagement with her social world and also her insights, as an educated and sensitive member of society, into cultural ideologies, social, economic and political trends, and how these impact on the lives of individuals. From a literary perspective, I examine the specific ways in which women use writing strategies to challenge these social ideologies and categories. I explore the various ways in which they call upon Arabic narrative and oral traditions, ancient Egyptian cosmology and Quranic and extra-Quranic religious texts as they characterize both female and male protagonists. Several chapters are devoted to writers who are fully engaged in what Egyptian literary critic Idwar Al-Kharrat (1994) has called "cross genre writing", writing that straddles the elliptical, suggestive language of poetry and the narrative style of prose fiction.



Check us out on the
web!

<http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/FICL/CompLit/index.html>

Select Spring 2008 Course Offerings Continued

360 Seminar in Literature and Cultural Experience: Narratives of Torture

What constitutes "torture"? How do we define it, legally, politically, or ethically? How do we convey experiences of torture? As Elaine Scarry has argued in *The Body in Pain*, human linguistic expression is frequently inadequate for representing any form of bodily pain; in the context of torture, the difficulties of verbal representation are directly related to challenges of political representation. This course examines fictional and non-fictional narratives of politically-motivated torture represented in international literature and film of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in order to explore the verbal and aesthetic possibilities of representing the physical and psychological experience of torture, including the inevitable shortcomings and gaps within narratives of torture as well as the possibilities for conveying such experiences and the ethics of doing so.

533 Seminar in Trends in Modern Literature: Journeys, Migrations and Exiles: The Novel Around the Arab World

This course will introduce students to important trends in the development of the Arabic novel. We will explore the beginnings of the genre as it emerged in the early 20th century, and then we will examine important examples of the novel from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Iraq, Palestine and Syria. We will explore major themes within novels written by both male and female writers. We will also make use of the texts to discuss the complex dynamic between Arab and Middle Eastern nationalisms, feminisms and other ideological movements. Finally, we will pay close attention to the development of narrative strategy, writing technique, and experimentalism in the Arabic novel.

Faculty Notes

Michelle Bolduc's article, "Naming Names: Matfre Ermengaud's Use of Troubadour Quotations," appeared this fall in *Tenso, Bulletin de la société Guilhem IX*. As a 2007-2008 fellow at the Center for 21st-Century Studies, she is beginning research on her second book, which explores how the alterity of past sources of knowledge is negotiated in the production and reception of medieval manuscripts.

Peter Paik gave a talk titled: "Superheroes as Revolutionaries: An Encounter Between Utopia and Political Theology" at the Society for the Utopian Studies conference in Toronto on October 5. He gave another talk for the Annual Meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association titled "Repeating Hobbes: Disorder, Decadence, and Protection." He is currently finishing up a book project, "From Utopia to Apocalypse: On Political Theology and Science Fiction."

Robin Pickering-Iazzi's new book, *Mafia and Outlaw Stories from Italian Life and Literature*, is in press and will come out in January of 2008.

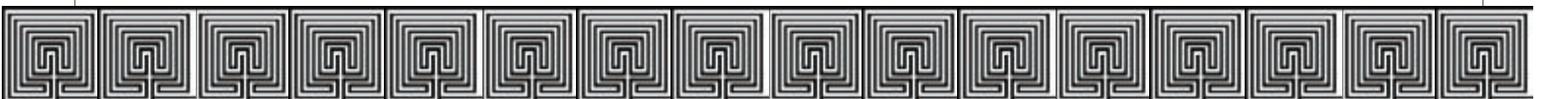
Kristin Pitt's article "Resisting Colony and Nation: Challenging History in Maryse Condé's 'Moi, Tituba, Sorcière... Noire de Salem'" appears in *Atenea: A Bilingual Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 27.1 (June 2007). She also gave two conference papers, one titled "'No Corpse To Bury': Narrating Duvalier's Haiti from Brooklyn" at the American Comparative Literature Association 2007 in April, 2007; the other "Reclaiming the National Narrative: Luisa Valenzuela's 'Cambio de armas'" at the North Central Council of Latin Americanists 2007 Conference at University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire in October, 2007. For the trip to ACLA she also won the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies Faculty Travel Award. In addition, she also received a Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies Course Development Grant to develop a course and syllabus for Comparative Literature 365, Literature and Culture of the Americas: Comparative Caribbeans.

Caroline Seymour-Jorn is working on her book *Cultural Criticism in Egyptian Women's Writing*. (See "Spotlight on Caroline" on page 3 for a description of her book)

Rachel Skalitzky is continuing her research on Rhetorical Figuration with Roy Swanson.

Roy Swanson has published an article on Lagerkvist's "Barabbas" in Salem Press's *Christian Literature* and a poem, "Parable of a Sower," in *Centres of Expression* (London, 2007)—he is also working on a review for *The James Joyce Literary Supplement*, and his book *Blue Margin* will appear in 2008.

Jian Xu's paper "Subjectivity and Class Consciousness in Hong Ying's Autobiographical Novel *The Hungry Daughter*" is forthcoming in a special collection on contemporary Chinese literature in *The Journal of Contemporary China* 17.54 (2008). He is also completing a book manuscript on the representation of underclass suffering in contemporary Chinese literature and film.



Remarks from Katherine Wilson, Our First Teaching Assistant



Katherine Wilson is the first teaching assistantship in our program. I asked her to tell us about her experience of being a TA in Comparative Literature. The following is the gist of what she told me: "As a Comparative Literature TA, I feel the experience has been a great asset in the growth of my own studies as a graduate student. I stand in the unique position between the lead professor and the students. I teach a position that has yielded many insights in the process of teaching. I consider what comprises a good teacher and what the role of a professor should be. I recall the 'guide on the side or a sage on the stage' conflict that was discussed while getting my B.S.E. in English teaching. These past teaching experiences lead me naturally to contrast the teaching of high school with the teaching of college. As I lead four discussion sections of Comp Lit 230: Images of Life Under the Nazis, I have become more aware of the challenges and opportunities involved with teaching at this level. Since I desire to be a professor upon earning my Ph.D., this experience in the classroom is invaluable. I encourage the students to question the purpose and goal of their learning as I question my own teaching methodologies. As a TA, I did not come into the class as an expert on the Holocaust, but as I begin my tenth year studying literature at the university level, I am prepared to assist my students in

synthesizing and critiquing the literature of this time period. My goal is to promote critical and comparative thinking in the classroom and I consider the discipline of Comparative Literature a productive platform from which to conduct such an endeavor."

The 2007 Winners of the Roy Arthur Swanson Scholarship in Comparative Literature (RASCL)

News from the RASCL scholarship awardees, Jessica Olson and Yana Yevsiyevich:

Jessica Olson, a junior majoring in Comparative Literature, writes, "The RASCL scholarship has helped cover the cost of my books, and it put a dent in my loans, which is wonderful. Of all the scholarships out there this is the one that I was eligible for. So many scholarships have such strict requirements just to apply that I haven't been able to get any financial aid outside of Stafford loans. Comparative Literature is very important in regards to a greater understanding of humanity, and it is inspiring and strengthening to know that there are people who support these studies and the individuals working to expand their minds and hearts. I genuinely appreciate this scholarship not only for its financial benefit but because of its support of this kind of learning and experience."

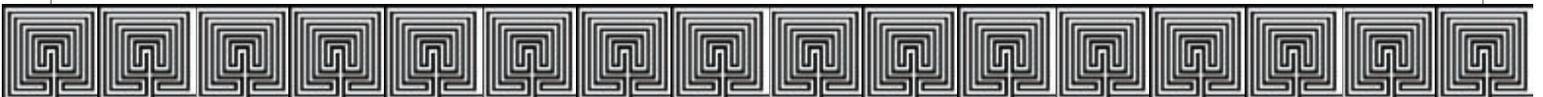
And Yana, who has returned to UWM from a year studying abroad in England, writes, "In my essay application for the Roy Swanson Merit Scholarship, I wrote that the scholarship would not only aid in financing the completion of my undergraduate studies, but that it would 'single-handedly discredit any further family arguments that studying Comparative Literature is unrewarding and, in so doing, will effectively solidify my position as the child who screams, "I told you so".' Indeed, receiving the scholarship certainly alleviated a substantial financial burden, one that is felt by many undergraduates, and it allowed me to focus more profoundly on my scholastic research. For instance, I was able to purchase a desperately needed laptop computer, which is vital to my research and writing process. Perhaps more importantly, however, receiving the scholarship afforded me the opportunity to see a great swelling of family pride. Hence, I am most grateful for the Merit Scholarship not only because it relieved a considerable amount of financial frustration, but also because it gave me greater confidence in continuing my scholastic pursuits." And parodying a well-known advertisement, Yana concludes: "Donating money to the Roy Arthur Swanson Merit Scholarship: \$500. Knowing that the scholarship will give a deserving undergraduate a sense of pride and confidence: Priceless."



Profile of an Alumni: Lacy Challe

Jay: Lacy, what have you been doing since your graduation?

Lacy: Since graduating from the Comparative Literature program in 2006, I've been quite busy. I spent the summer settling into Green Bay, getting married, and starting a new full time job as an office coordinator. I was fortunate enough to spend my honeymoon in Costa Rica, where I was able to experience their spectacular natural surroundings and wildlife. This fall I've started taking classes towards my Master's degree in Library and Information Science through U.W. Milwaukee's distance education program, and I have been studying Spanish.





Yes, I want to support UWM's Comparative Literature Program with my tax-deductible contribution.

My gift for the Roy Arthur Swanson Comparative Literature Scholarship Fund is:
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q Enclosed is my check payable to: UWM Foundation.

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