

Comparative Literature AT UWM

Letter from the Coordinator

Dear Friends of Comparative Literature:

This year brings many changes to the Program of Comparative Literature at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The greatest difference is that this fall, for



the first time in thirty years, Michael Fountain is not teaching any classes. We feel his absence deeply but certainly wish him well in his retirement!

Other significant changes include the fact that Peter

Paik is not teaching in the program this year either, as he is spending the year on a Fulbright fellowship in South Korea. Caroline Seymour-Jorn has stepped into the position of Chair of the Department of French, Italian, and Comparative Literature after serving for three years as the Program Coordinator for Comparative Literature. Thank you for your service, Caroline!

We have welcomed a new graduate teaching assistant to the program as well, and I have taken on the role of Program Coordinator and look forward to working with our students, alumni, and community supporters in a new and different capacity in the coming years.

Our newsletter this fall contains more information on these events and other program news. Please enjoy, and don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions!

Sincerely,

Kristin E. Pitt
Associate Professor and Program Coordinator
Comparative Literature

A Celebration of Michael Fountain

Father Michael Fountain, a senior lecturer in Comparative Literature who influenced thousands of students since he began teaching here in 1982, retired on May 19, 2013. The Comparative Literature Program would like to honor Fr. Fountain and recognize the tremendous contributions he has made to our program across more than three decades by sharing a few memories, thoughts, and other testimonials from former students and colleagues whose lives he touched so profoundly.



Thank you from all of us, Michael!

Michael was one of the greatest parts of my experience at UW-Milwaukee. I've never met anyone as genuinely kind nor as entirely human. He is a monument to patience, tolerance, and understanding. I am forever indebted to his tireless cheer and support during the challenges of graduate life. *David Reher, MA '11*

I would simply like to tell Michael thank you for the influence he has had in my college and personal life and that he is in my prayers. *David Schiff, BA '13*

Thank you not only for your generosity over the years in sharing your expertise, ideas, teaching methods, and different approaches with students, but also for all the times you were able to instruct through the complexity of the university process, provide moral support, and life suggestions. Thank you for making the university world "larger and better." You will be missed but not forgotten. *Simonetta Milli Konewko, Assistant Professor of Italian*

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Michael Fountain *continued from page 1*

When I heard that Professor Michael Fountain was retiring, I started to think about not only how long I have known him, but also how much he has taught me. Although his classes were about literature, there is so much that I learned about humanism through his teachings. Michael's courses focused on how people relate to themselves, to each other, to art, their social and historical contexts, and about finding courage within yourself in the face of injustice.

Michael's love for literature, languages, history, and humanity deeply affected me in a positive way. Like most students in their undergraduate careers, I was searching for both my identity and my role in society, and Michael's teaching helped me remember that people are fundamentally good. I think Michael helped all of his students on this path.

I wish Michael a happy retirement, but above all, I wish him a healthy and satisfying life, surrounded by the love of family and friends. Michael, thank you for everything you have done for me and everything you have taught me. I will miss you here at FICL and, along with your other students, remember your teachings fondly.

Carlotta Generali, BA '11

When I knew that Michael Fountain would retire earlier this year, I began to reflect on the lessons he taught me. While gaining my undergraduate degree in Comparative Literature, Michael was, as he was to so many others, my advisor, advocate, and mentor. He was, and remains to this day, a constant voice of assurance. Most importantly, though, he was my teacher. In front of a class Michael becomes something awesome. He is funny, caring, and guiding. His method is studied and subtle, and he leads with a deft touch. He understands that a teacher has a different sort of power and responsibility than that of a scholar, and the classroom should never be secondary. Feeling his considerate discussions lead me from knowledge to wisdom was intoxicating, and is something I know I will not feel anywhere again. He taught me, over what now seems too few years, that all literature – not just the great works – contains useful and educational human experience. We use these stories' lessons to better ourselves and society. Michael's lectures and our personal conversations on humanism, existentialism, and morality showed me the road to goodness, and will lead me the rest of my life. I feel privileged to have been his student and, though I know his legacy at UWM will not fade, lucky to have been there. *Charles Hosale, BA '11*



Faculty and staff from the Department of French, Italian, and Comparative Literature circa 2008. Michael Fountain is 4th from the left in the back row.

Michael Fountain is one of those few people whose presence radically influenced the trajectory of my life, one of those of whom I can say, "If I hadn't met him, then x wouldn't have happened, which would mean that y wouldn't have happened, etc." In 2002, after attempting coursework at MATC and failing rather miserably, I applied to UW-Milwaukee and was admitted on academic probation. During a discussion of recommended instructors, my adviser spoke of Michael Fountain as "he's, well I can't quite describe him, but he has a sort of following." Deferring to her authority, I signed up for one of his many courses on the Jewish Holocaust, this one on children. I hung on every iota of knowledge that seeped from his unassuming being and shy mouth. We began conversing after class. Every class. I was hooked.

Over the coming years, Michael generously – without any strings, or even hesitation – worked with me through several independent studies, the most meaningful of which was on St. Francis of Assisi. We read through the earliest biographies of *il poverello*'s life, and the double interaction with both Michael and St. Francis led me to ask this cloaked Franciscan if anyone still did the sorts of things Francis did, if anyone was still doing these things today. Michael Fountain matter of factly sent me over to St. Ben's, a community meal run by the Capuchin Franciscans. I began volunteering every week, began meeting homeless people and dining with them, taking long bus rides with them and, in winter of 2004, inspired by Fountain and Francis, inviting a schizophrenic woman to come live in my roommate and my apartment. After undergraduate, I did a year of service through Capcorps, the Capuchin form of Americorps, and Michael made the meals – gourmet, though somehow not at all showy or pretentious – for our orientation. As I embarked on full-time service work I saw Michael less and less, but he'd still have me over for a homemade breakfast at his house on Palmer. He'd speak of Kafka as he shaved potatoes for hash browns, and Chesterton as he applied spices from this massive jar that he must have stolen from a hobbit hole. Even then I would tell him – though I did not see things as keenly as I do now – how profound was his presence in my life, how formative was every experience with every homeless person and every student at the Capuchin Franciscan high school where I was then teaching. And then we met again, Michael and I, as I was graced with a Teaching Assistantship in Comparative Literature, and my first job was to record Michael's every CompLit 133: Contemporary Imagination in Literature and the Arts lecture, transcribe each lecture, and help morph the course from its traditional classroom format to one suited to the Great Online Realm. Wait, you say. Record Michael Fountain's every lecture, you say, gasping, knowing well the effect this sort of thing would have on a shy man's ability to be at ease. But he pushed on, and even turned me into a big joke, telling students that he was on probation and so I needed to record his every word, telling me to include in my transcription every "mistake" he made. It was sheer joy to work with him. And I was even more filled with that joy when, after he had just been given indefinite status (his qualifications, ridiculously abundant as they were, missed the requisites of an official "tenure" status), Michael Fountain sat on my dissertation panel. Naturally, the one section of the dissertation he rooted for was the one everyone else on the panel found problematic. There at the beginning of my time at UWM in 2002, he was there as I finished my PhD in 2011. And he is. Thank you Michael, for being-there. *Joshua Hren, BA '05, PhD '12*

"... one's own memory still remains quite safe, untouched, you remember what you yourself have seen and heard in a different way to how you remember books or films, but the difference is less marked when it comes to what others have seen and heard and witnessed and known and then told us about. And then, of course, there are the things you invent." *A Heart So White*, Javier Marías.

I first knew Michael Fountain through my mother, Bette, before I started working in the department of French, Italian, and Comparative Literature. She, along with a number of other over-60 women, took courses taught by him at Cardinal Stritch. They were intrigued by Michael's religious status, and called him Father Michael. But because he is a Capuchin brother, I secretly believed he wanted to be called Michael or Mike.

I worked with Michael for twelve years. And unless it was Good Friday, or the Friday before Thanksgiving, I saw him every day. Mornings began with coffee and the news. He sat at the front desk with his coffee; I sat at my desk with my coffee. We would talk about the politicians who didn't legislate, educators who didn't educate, children who didn't play, mothers and fathers who didn't parent, judges who didn't do justice, and doctors whose Hippocratic oath was to dollars and not people. Within minutes, we would stop, breathe a sigh, relieved we wouldn't have to talk more, at least not until the next morning, about what we would admit, in the end, wasn't news at all.

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Michael Fountain *continued from page 3*

We talked about plants. The otherworldly succulent I noticed in the window of the flower shop I pass by on my way to work, the red hibiscus in Ester's front yard, trumpet flowers and hummingbirds, and how the Swiss chard and tomatoes were coming along in his garden on Palmer Street.

We talked about movies and books, poetry, and music. Which movie to show, Billy Budd or To Kill a Mockingbird? Which poet to publish in the newsletter, Neruda or Ginsberg? And if Neruda, would it have to be one of his love poems? If Ginsberg, what about his harsh, sometimes vulgar descriptions of our culture? And opera, Verdi or Wagner?

We talked about food, the family farm, his mother, and his sisters. Michael would bring in cookies, cakes, brownies, and strudels, made from his mother's recipes. He would tell about how he learned to make them, the special touches his mother taught him. During canning season, we could expect salsa and kraut, and jams from his garden.

On days when a man or woman had been executed, we would talk about right and wrong, life and death. Where does our individual responsibility lie? Both of us fiercely against capital punishment, we would find comfort in our pain.

Talking with Michael reminds me of my childhood. Me and a friend, lying stretched out in a tall grassy field, hidden away from adult life, looking up into the sky, and sharing our thoughts, hopes, dreams, and secrets. I miss him. *Jenny Peshut, Program Assistant, Department of French, Italian, and Comparative Literature*

Fr. Fountain does more than Dante could
to teach the nature of the Good.

Dante shows Divine Love to be the motive force of all creation; but he sits in judgment where he should call for grace. Fr. Fountain leaves judgment to God and devotes himself, in his inspired teaching (from which his retirement is only nominal) and unconditional friendship, to the true love, the love that seeks only acceptance, and nothing else, least of all, requital. In my case, however, as in that of many – very many – others, requital is instantaneous. I am profoundly grateful to be a friend and colleague of Fr. Michael Fountain, an exemplar of Grace.

From Dante, I turn to Wordsworth.

Love had he found in huts where poor men lie;
His only teachers had been rocks and rills,
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills.

Roy Arthur Swanson, Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature

Paik Awarded Fulbright Fellowship



Peter Paik, Associate Professor, Comparative Literature

I am spending the 2013-14 academic year in South Korea, where I am researching a book on the new South Korean cinema.

South Korean filmmakers such as Park Chan-wook, Lee Chang-dong, Pak Chan-ok, Na Hong-jin, and Bong Joon-ho have won prizes at international film festivals, while South Korea has become one of a handful of nations where films made within the country attract larger

audiences than those produced by Hollywood.

My research will examine the historical conditions behind the emergence of the new South Korean cinema and the ways in which South Korean films reflect the dynamic and unsettled character of South Korean society, which has gone from being one of the world's poorest countries during the 1950s and 60s to one of the globe's leading high-tech economies. My study explores how South Korean cinema deals with the traumas of Korea's modern history, such as the Korean War, the military dictatorship of Park Chung-hee (which was also responsible for the modernization of the country), the struggle for democracy, and the Asian financial crisis. I'm also considering the ways in which South Korean culture compels us to reconsider the relations, divergences, and points of incommensurability between democracy, modernity, capitalism, and the premodern past.



A scene from *Oldboy* (2003), directed by Park Chan-wook

Christina Beebe - Our New TA

Comparative Literature welcomes Christina Beebe to our instructional staff this fall as a teaching assistant.

She's a graduate student in the MALLT (MA in Language, Literature, and Translation) program, pursuing a double concentration in Comparative Literature and Spanish, as well as a Museum Studies certificate.

Before coming to UWM, she earned a BA from Iowa State University in Spanish and Anthropology.

Last summer, she was awarded a Graduate Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) fellowship to study Mixtec in Oaxaca, Mexico, which tied in well with her focus on Latin American literature and culture, although her academic interests are wide-ranging: she also enjoys studying Golden Age Spanish literature, and her favorite work from that period is the picaresque novel *Lazarillo de Tormes*. Another favorite Spanish-language work of hers is *Industrias y andanzas de Alfanhuí* (1951) by Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio, which contains elements of the picaresque as well as magical realism.

In Museum Studies she is currently working on a collections project researching Peruvian textiles, an area she focused heavily on as an undergraduate in Anthropology. She is also doing a research internship this semester at Milwaukee's North Point Lighthouse. Regarding her study of Comparative Literature, Christina writes:

"I love Comparative Literature as it allows me to examine literature from many cultures and to read translated texts not usually included in the Western cannon. I am particularly interested in fictional worlds and how they make an impact on the 'real' world and vice-versa."

As you can imagine, her diverse areas of academic expertise and interest make Christina a valuable resource for our students and a tremendous addition to our teaching staff.

Welcome, Christina!



Christina Beebe

Faculty and Staff News

Drago Momcilovic published “Silence Upon Silence: The Ethics of Secrecy in Pirandello’s *Right You Are (If You Think So)*” in *Genre: International and Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature and the Arts* 33 (January 2013).

Peter Paik attended the ACL(x) conference in September, 2013, where he gave a paper, “The Inhuman in Posthumanism: Notes Toward a Tragic Environmentalism,” for the session dedicated to “Comparative Literature and the Environmental Humanities.” ACL(x) is an experimental conference sponsored by the American Comparative Literature Association

Kristin Pitt published “Discovery and Conquest Through a Poststructural and Postcolonial Lens: Clarice Lispector’s *A maçã no escuro*” in *Luso-Brazilian Review* 50.1 (Summer 2013) and presented two talks at recent conferences: “Peace and Terror: *Sin Nombre* and the Journey to the Border” at the Wisconsin Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies’ “Borders, Boundaries, and Peace” conference in March and “No Woman’s Land: Dispossession and Disposability on the U.S./Mexico Border” at the Midwest Modern Language Association 2013 conference in November. She will give a colloquium at UWM on the same research as the second conference paper on December 4: “Stories That Are Hard To Tell: Ambiguous Borders, Disappearing Women, and Narratives of Murder on the U.S./Mexico Border,” as part of the LACUSL Speaker Series and MALLT Colloquium Series.

Caroline Seymour-Jorn has published three co-authored articles in 2013: “Diverse Muslims in a Racialized Landscape: Race, Ethnicity, Islamophobia and Urban Space in Milwaukee, Wisc.,” forthcoming in the *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*; “Researching Within and Against Islamophobia: A Collaboration Project with Muslim Communities,” co-authored with Anna Mansson McGinty and Kristin Sziarto in *Social and Cultural Geography* 14.1; and “The Muslim Milwaukee Project: Muslims Negotiating Racial and Ethnic Categories,” co-authored with Anna Mansson McGinty and Kristin Sziarto in *The Wisconsin Geographer* Vol 25. She also participated in a roundtable discussion on the Arab Spring and presented a paper on Egyptian writer Miral al-Tahawy at the Middle East Studies Association in Denver, Colorado.

Demetrius Williams co-edited a volume entitled *Onesimus Our Brother: Reading Religion, Race and Slavery in Philemon* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012) with James A. Noel and Matthew V. Johnson. His essay “‘No Longer as a Slave’: ‘Reading’ the Interpretation History of Paul’s Epistle to Philemon” appears in that collection, and his article “African American Approaches: Re-humanizing the Reader against Racism and Reading Through Experience” was published in the volume *Studying Paul’s Letters: Contemporary Perspectives and Methods* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), edited by Joseph Marchal.

Keep in Touch!



Are there events in the community, alumni achievements, or other news that you think we should know about? Do you know someone who would like to receive this newsletter but didn’t receive it in the mail? Please send us an email at comp-lit@uwm.edu to keep us informed.



Are you on Facebook? Please “like” the Comparative Literature at UWM page <https://www.facebook.com/ComparativeLiteratureUWM>.



You can find more information about the Comparative Literature Program at UWM, including copies of this and previous newsletters, at our website complit.uwm.edu.

We look forward to hearing from you and perhaps seeing you at upcoming events!

Department News Clippings

Spring 2014 Courses

UWinteriM and spring semester are just around the corner! If you're interested in taking a Comp Lit class during the spring or UWinteriM sessions or just want to see what's going on in our courses, you can find detailed course descriptions at <http://www4.uwm.edu/letsci/ficl/complit/courses.cfm>. We'd love to see you in the classroom!

Upcoming Event

The Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latino (LACUSL) Speaker Series and the Master of Arts in Language, Literature, and Translation (MALLT) Colloquium Series present "Stories That Are Hard To Tell: Ambiguous Borders, Disappearing Women, and Narratives of Murder on the U.S./Mexico Border." Kristin E. Pitt, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, will be the presenter.

Co-sponsored by the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, the Center for International Education, and the Master of Arts in Language, Literature, and Translation.

Wednesday, December 4, 2013

3:30 pm

Lapham 260

Free and open to the public



Pink crosses mark the place where eight women were found murdered in Ciudad Juarez.

Timothy Frohmader is the 2013 RASCL Scholarship Recipient



Congratulations to Timothy Frohmader, winner of the 2013 Roy Arthur Swanson Merit Scholarship in Comparative Literature. Tell us about your studies, Tim!

I am currently a double major in Biological Sciences and Conservation and Environmental Sciences, as well as a minor in Comparative Literature, and will be graduating in the spring of 2014. After graduation, I plan on pursuing graduate school in marine biology or limnology.

My favorite book to read would have to be *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexander Dumas, and my favorite film is a toss-up between Reservoir Dogs and Pulp Fiction, both by Quentin Tarantino.

I decided to minor in Comp Lit because I'm an avid reader and figured a minor would be a great addition to my college resume. Along with my desire to read, I'd also like to thank former professor Michael Fountain, for not only having intriguing, thought-provoking classes, but also encouraging me to go on the minor route. I highly recommend majoring or minoring in Comp Lit because, depending on the classes you choose to take, you can experience a broad spectrum of literature different from your usual comfort zone.

College of Letters & Science
Comparative Literature Program
P.O. Box 413
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