

# Comparative Literature AT UWM

## Letter from the Coordinator

Dear Friends of Comparative Literature:

This was a difficult and mournful spring for Comparative Literature at UWM, as we lost both Rachel Skalitzky, Associate Professor Emerita, and Father Michael Fountain, Senior Lecturer Emeritus, in late spring.



Rachel retired in 2003 and Michael in 2013, but both still maintained an active presence around the 7th floor of Curtin Hall until shortly before their deaths. Though we miss them both deeply, we remain tremendously grateful for their lasting contributions to Comparative Literature at

UWM and for the profound impact that both Michael and Rachel had on so many students and colleagues throughout their careers. In this newsletter, we share with you the eulogies that Roy Swanson, Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature and close colleague and friend of both Rachel and Roy, gave at their funerals.

In more cheerful news, our faculty, staff, and students have been busy this year with a wide range of scholarly, pedagogical, and community projects. A few highlights include Professor Peter Paik, who has returned from a productive year in South Korea on a Fulbright fellowship; Professor Caroline Seymour-Jorn, who is examining the role of art in the Egyptian revolution; and Christina Beebe, our teaching assistant since Fall 2013, who plans to graduate this December, having earned an MA in Language, Literature, and Translation, with concentrations in both Comparative Literature and Spanish, as well as a graduate certificate in Museum Studies. Read more about our recent news and upcoming events in the pages that follow!

Warm regards,

Kristin E. Pitt

Associate Professor and Program Coordinator,  
Comparative Literature

## In memoriam:

### Rachel Skalitzky, 1937-2014

Rachel Skalitzky, Associate Professor Emerita of Comparative Literature, passed away on April 1, 2014.

She was a valued colleague, an influential teacher, a thoughtful scholar, and a tireless contributor to the workings of UWM. Service positions included Chair of the Department of French, Italian, and Comparative Literature; first long-term Director of the Center for Women's Studies; and long-time member of both the Faculty Senate and University Committee. Roy Swanson, Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature, gave the eulogy at the Mass of Christian Burial for her on April 8, 2014 and has been kind enough to allow us to reprint it here.



Roy Swanson and Rachel Skalitzky

Rachel and I shared a predilection for accuracy in composition; so I must begin by correcting two typographical mishaps in her newspaper obituary. Rachel celebrated her 77th birthday in February, her age should not be listed as 78. The odd phrase "an Eened associate professor" should read "a tenured associate professor."

Ernie and Betty Skalitzky, to whom it was incumbent upon me to offer comfort and consolation, took it upon themselves to help me adjust to the

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immeasurable loss of their gracious sister. I shall never forget their kindness.

Rachel was my friend, colleague, and research partner for more than forty years. Our interest in classical rhetoric, religion, and gender studies grew into an ideal academic compatibility.

Her distinguished directorship of the Women's Studies program at UWM coincided with my investigations into the cosmic Female Force as manifest in religion and as a component of Comparative Mythology.

As a scholar, I have never been more than mediocre, but Rachel always imbued me with the feeling that I was a genius. As an inquirer into the nature of religion, I have been circumspect and uncertain, but Rachel, through her experience as a nun, her staunch Roman Catholicism, and her disciplined intellect, as well as, and chiefly, by her own example, brought me to an understanding of religious faith.

One day, after I had expressed my disappointment at some material loss, Rachel said, "Nothing is forever." I said, "What about faith, hope, and love?" She said, "Those are not things." She explained that those are eternal spiritual states never denied to any person who has adequately predisposed herself or himself to their reception. I then profited from her suggestion that I re-read *First Corinthians* and *Hebrews* very carefully.

We translated *I Corinthians* 13:13 in this way: "Abiding forever are faith, hope, love—precisely these three; and of these the greatest is love." And we rendered *Hebrews* 11:1 as Faith IS the Being of what is hoped for, the ground of unseen realities." The first word of this verse is Ἔστιν (IS); for the Greek reader, this initial position denotes consummate emphasis.

Hope is a prelude to faith, a stepping-stone to faith. It can be disappointed, if what we want does not materialize; but it can always be renewed. It can always help to keep us going. Faith cannot be disappointed, so long as we have it. We can lose faith, but so long as we have it, we cannot lose. It is the ὑπόστασις, the substance, the being of hopes. Faith gives us the full spiritual experience of what we hoped for—a new house, a victory for our team—whether or not our loan is approved, whether or not the game is lost or rained out. In turn, faith is the path to the greatest of all spiritual states, ἀγάπη (love), ultimately the love of God, who is Love itself. It is not surprising that the person who has faith is given to smiling. And anyone who approached Rachel would be the object of her radiant smile.

Persons who served her in stores and restaurants were rewarded by her smile; and, if the service were at all extended beyond a few minutes, Rachel would learn their names and initiate a personal acquaintance. The quality of Rachel's congeniality was, I think, something other than charisma. The charismatic person exudes leadership. Rachel gave you the feeling that you were a leader, that you exceeded your own self-estimate and were entitled to self-esteem. I have come to call this quality "presence." There are people who, by their very presence, improve your state of mind and enhance your sense of well-being. William Wordsworth, in his "Tintern Abbey" poem gives a tentatively religious expression to his love of nature. He predisposes himself to faith in the goodness of Nature, which instills in him a love of Being. He says, "I have / Felt a presence that disturbs me with the joy / Of elevated thoughts." At one time I thought it grandiose to relate this joy to Rachel's effect upon my own sensibility. But I came to understand Wordsworth better and to realize that, in the context of faith, hope, and love, the relationship was merely a matter of degree. In Rachel's presence, and witnessing the reality of her faith, I was moved by "the joy of elevated thoughts."

Rachel was fond of red roses. She regularly kept one in a bud vase on her kitchen table. She tended it as

ritually as she burned Advent candles during the Christmas season. I knew better than to ask her what she liked so much about red roses. But again Wordsworth filled me in:

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,  
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys and fears,  
To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

A rose is a thing; and no thing is forever. Like hope, however, a rose can be renewed by replacement. What a rose symbolizes can be forever; and, if it symbolizes love, which indeed it does in many instances, then we can have faith in Love. And faith and love are not things. I can't say that these were Rachel's actual contemplations upon the rose; but I can say that these were the elevated thoughts to which Rachel's presence moved me.

As we studied rhetoric, religion, and literature, we concluded that religion is a form of The Word that the writer of John said "was being in the beginning"; that the recognition of the power of words and the proper orchestration of this power is holiness; and that all truly great literature is essentially holy. A word is a thing; and, as Martin Heidegger says, a word gives a thing its thingness; but, as a rose can symbolize love, so a word, or words, can symbolize The Word which was being in the presence of God and, as the writer of John says, is God.

Inspired by Rachel's faith, I shall continue with our work, hoping to complete it, but satisfied that, in faith, my sustained attempt to achieve its completion will be enough to fill my heart.

I'll close with some words from the book of Numbers, which in my opinion are the most beautiful words ever written. They express the hope and evince the faith that the addressee will be in the presence of God. I address them here to my dear friend, Rachel:

May the Lord bless you and keep you;  
may the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;  
may the Lord lift up his countenance upon you  
and give you peace.

## ***Yousuf Mamoon - 2014 RASCL Scholarship Recipient***

Congratulations to Yousuf Mamoon, winner of the 2014 Roy Arthur Swanson Merit Scholarship in Comparative Literature! Yousuf is currently a senior majoring in Comparative Literature and English. Growing up, his family



travelled around the globe extensively. Through these travels, Yousuf discovered his passion for cultures and societies. With this passion, he decided to enroll as a Comparative Literature student where he is able to study foreign countries and gain insights into various perspectives through literature, film, and art.

Yousuf has read a multitude of transnational texts, ranging from *The Stranger* by Albert Camus to *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, which has piqued his interests in varying ideologies and cultures. Yousuf plans on attending graduate school and eventually becoming a politician; the knowledge he has gained through the Comparative Literature program continues to provide him with an understanding of foreign cultures and should ultimately allow him to excel in foreign affairs.

## *In memoriam, Michael Fountain (1944-2014)*

Capuchin Friar Michael Fountain, Senior Lecturer Emeritus of Comparative Literature at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, passed away on May 6, 2014, following a lengthy battle with cancer.

Father Fountain's Comparative Literature courses were deeply significant and meaningful to multiple generations of students at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where he taught for three decades while also serving within the Capuchin Franciscan Order. The Fall 2013 issue of the Comparative Literature newsletter, available on the program website, includes several pages of tributes from his former students and colleagues on the occasion of retirement.

Roy Swanson, Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature, gave the eulogy at the Liturgy of Christian Burial for him on May 12, 2014 and has been kind enough to allow us to reprint it here.



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Sophocles has Oedipus assure his children that one force dispels distress in life and that that force is love. This doctrine, iterated in the books of *Ruth* and *John* and other great works of literature, has informed the life of my friend and fellow teacher, Fr. Michael Fountain.

When I first met him, he was assisting Mrs. Esther Ansfield in her heavily attended course on the Nazi Holocaust. Eventually he succeeded Esther in offering the course and built up an impressive following, contributing greatly to the propagation at UWM of a moral current that actively eschewed anti-Semitism, racism, and intolerance as antitheses to love.

Wearing a yarmulka in addition to his priestly garments, he delivered a moving and eloquent eulogy at Esther's funeral; and thereat was born my wish that he would one day be my eulogist. Ironically, hap, or chance, has made me one of his eulogists. The honor is inestimable, as was the honor of his attending my classes and sharing my interest in Existentialism.

Fr. Fountain, as a Senior Lecturer in Comparative Literature, worked Existentialism, not only into the context of his lectures on the Holocaust, but also into his counseling of the hundreds of students who sought him out for the advice he willingly and constantly provided. Personal responsibility, the refusal to rely on excuses, the courage to pursue one's spiritual intimations, and, above all, the understanding that love is unilateral and not dependent upon requital – these were the tenets that strengthened the two generations of UWM students that benefitted from his teaching and counsel.

He surprised me one day, during one of our many conversations, with a *protasis* so startling that I failed to recall its *apodosis*. He said, "If there is a God...." Why, I wondered, would a priest come up with an if-clause like that. But I recalled that that is precisely how great teachers arouse slumbering intellects. That is the nature of the Eastern Koan. That is the pedagogy of Franz Kafka's "Legend of the Doorkeeper." That is why the Sphinx posed riddles. That is how staunchly Catholic Graham Greene adduced imperfection as a human clue to the power and the glory of divine perfection. As I've said, I forgot the apodosis; but the reflection that the protasis energized in me led me to conclude that posing the if-clause was ultimately tantamount to saying "If there is such a thing as a cumulus cloud...." Or to following "Dionysius the Areopagite" in his superessential ascent to the radiance of the Divine Darkness.

Teaching, both ecclesiastical and secular, was Fr. Fountain's way of giving; and giving was, for him, a manifestation of love. He made it clear to a gathering honoring him upon his retirement that, professionally, his guiding principle had always been love. "Giving" and "taking" are antonyms; but they can be rendered synonymous by the prefix "care-." Caregiving and caretaking are both altruistic.



*Friar Michael Fountain leading service*

The cynic says, "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach." The serene teacher changes the second clause to "...those who care, teach." What his many students especially admired about Fr. Fountain was his capacity for caring and for instilling in them, by his own example, a sense of caring – caring derivative, not from indignation, but from compassion.

Enrollment in his courses was consistently large. He placed no caps upon the numbers who signed up for his courses; he was not perturbed when those numbers exceeded sixty and approached one hundred. What perturbed him was his departure from the classroom necessitated by a terminal illness. Perturbed, not by the illness, which he resisted with Existentialistic heroism, but by the departure. Yet, even during the last weeks of his life, he managed to fashion a series of edifying lectures for a group of grateful listeners. Chaucer's description of his Clerk of Oxenford coincides with the character of Fr. Fountain:

Sownynge in moral vertu was his speche,  
And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.

It is as a teacher that I most revere him. He probingly called the attention of his students to Pär Lagerkvist and Albert Camus, two writers who believed that God existed but did not care about humanity. Both writers assert, however, that love is the motive force by which humanity justifies its own existence and that caring is the seed of love. Fr. Fountain asked students to speculate upon the notion that humans must find divinity within themselves by doing for themselves what conventional believers were content to expect God to do for them: to care about each other to the point of loving individuals as individuals and loving the whole of humanity as the crucible of divinity. This is another way of saying "If there is a God." One can then conclude that the Kingdom of God is to be found within the self. If God were not to care, it would be all the more important that humans do care and that humans, by caring, direct to God the love that needs no requital. Fr. Fountain presented this Existentialist hypothesis, not as doctrine, but as a means of thinking about God and of releasing the self from the incarceration of convention.

Convention divides and transforms religion into ideological cults. Fr. Fountain taught the way of caring and loving as the direction of unity. In concert with his Capuchin priesthood he contributed his time and efforts to the Wisconsin Society for Jewish Learning. One can emphasize the word "learning" here and see a priest wearing a yarmulka as an emblem of the oneness of love.

Requited love is, of course, an occasion for joy; but unrequited love should not be a cause for disappointment. Loving is its own reward, and it generates requital, even, as Lagerkvist intimates in "The Eternal Smile," in a withdrawn and apathetic God. The love that Fr. Fountain had for his parishioners, students, friends, and colleagues has been massively requited. Benefitting from the gift of his teaching, we can all say, "If there is a God, one of God's eminent emissaries is, as he identified himself at Esther Ansfield's funeral, Esther's 'priest friend' – Fr. Michael Fountain.

He has been, and continues to be, the priest friend of all of us.

## Faculty and Staff News

**Drago Momcilovic** presented his paper “Balkan Traumas: Cartographies of Ruin, Retreat and Rumination in Balkan Holocaust Literature” at the American Comparative Literature Association meeting in March 2014.



Peter Paik

**Peter Paik** spent the 2013-2014 year in South Korea on a Fulbright Fellowship. He submitted two essays to forthcoming volumes: “Apocalypse of the Therapeutic: *The Cabin in the Woods* and the Death of Mimetic Desire” in *Mimesis, Movies, and Media: Violence, Desire, and the Sacred, Volume 3* (ed. S. Cowdell, C. Fleming, and J. Hodge, Bloomsbury Academic, 2015) and “Between Love and the Moral Law: The Fatal Mother in Park Chan-wook’s *Sympathy for Lady Vengeance*” in *World Cinemas/Global Networks* (ed. E. Gorfinkel and T. Williams, Rutgers UP, 2016).

He also gave several invited lectures: “Between Love and the Moral Law: The Fatal Mother in South Korean Cinema” at the Cultural Studies Colloquium of Kyung Hee University in May 2014; “The Apocalyptic Turn in American Culture” in the American Culture Lecture Series of Sogang University in May 2014; “Poetry without Recollection: The Time-Image in South Korean Cinema” at both the English and Comparative Literature Colloquium of Seoul National University in May 2014 and the Cinema and Media Studies Colloquium of Chung-Ang University in April 2014; “How Inhuman is the Posthuman? Reflections on Theoretical Misanthropy” in both the Distinguished Lecturer Series of the Department of English at Yonsei University in April 2014 and the English Department Colloquium of Ewha Womans University in March 2014; and “The Master Who Mistook Himself for a Monster:

*Oldboy* and the Artifice of History” at the University of California-Berkeley’s Center for Korean Studies

in September 2013. In addition, he gave two papers at the MLA Convention in January 2014: “Torture as Initiatory Ordeal in *V for Vendetta* and *Y: The Last Man*” and “The Time-Image without Thought: Deleuze and the Crisis in Contemporary Art Cinema.”

**Kristin Pitt** will present her paper “Nurturing Haiti: Edwidge Danticat’s *Claire of the Sea Light*” at the 4th International Conference on Caribbean Studies in November 2014.

**Matthew Russell** was awarded an Undergraduate Overseas Research grant during Summer 2014. Along with J. Meuninck-Ganger and D. Bowen, he traveled to London to research creating an online digital repository and recreation of illustrator Gustave Dore’s *London: A Pilgrimage* (1868).



Caroline Seymour-Jorn

**Caroline Seymour-Jorn** co-authored the essay “Diverse Muslims in a Racialized Landscape: Race, Ethnicity, Islamophobia, and Urban Space in Milwaukee, WI” with K. Sziarto and A. M. Mansson McGinty, published in the *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* (2014). Her essay “Youth Culture in the

Arab World: Explorations through Literature in Translation” is forthcoming in *Teaching Modern Arabic Literature in Translation* (ed. M. Hartman, Modern Language Association).

**Demetrius Williams** has an article, “Acts as a History of the Early Church,” forthcoming in *Fortress Commentary on the New Testament*; his essay “Jesus and the Samaritan Woman; Taking Risks, Reversing Expectations and Crossing Boundaries at the Well,” for a forthcoming volume on minoritized biblical criticism, is in process.

## Upcoming Events

**Drago Momcilovic** will be presenting a paper entitled “Anthems of the Disempowered: Anglo-European Music and Chilean Cultural Memory after Pinochet” as a talk jointly sponsored by the Latin American, Caribbean, and U.S. Latin@ (LACUSL) Speaker Series and the MA in Language, Literature, and Translation (MALLT) Colloquium Series. This free event is on Wednesday, November 5, at 3:30 pm in the American Geographical Society Library (third floor of UWM Libraries).

More information is available at <http://www4.uwm.edu/lacusl/speakerseries/>



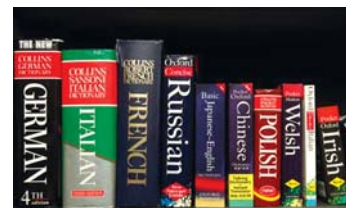
A scene from the film “Tony Manero”



**Caroline Seymour-Jorn** will be giving a talk entitled “The Egyptian Revolution and the Arts” on Friday, November 7, at 3:00 pm in Sabin G90. The event is sponsored by the Department of Anthropology and is free and open to the public.

“**Global Connections: Applying Cultural and Language Dexterity in Work and in Life**” is a panel discussion of four professionals hosted by UWM’s international languages and cultures programs on Tuesday, November 18, at 3:00 pm in Curtin Hall, Room 175. Panelists include:

- Carmel A. Capati, JD, Wisconsin Court Interpreter Program Manager
- Austin Krough, Global Public Affairs Specialist, Johnson Controls
- Craig Loomis, MBA, Global Product Manager, Ultrasound Business, GE Healthcare
- Kim Omachinski, Immigration Coordinator, Center for International Education, UWM



## 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 isn’t on our mailing list? Please send us an email at [comp-lit@uwm.edu](mailto:comp-lit@uwm.edu) and let us know.



We’re on Facebook as “Comparative Literature at UWM,” [facebook.com/ComparativeLiteratureUWM](https://www.facebook.com/ComparativeLiteratureUWM). We’d love you to “like” us!



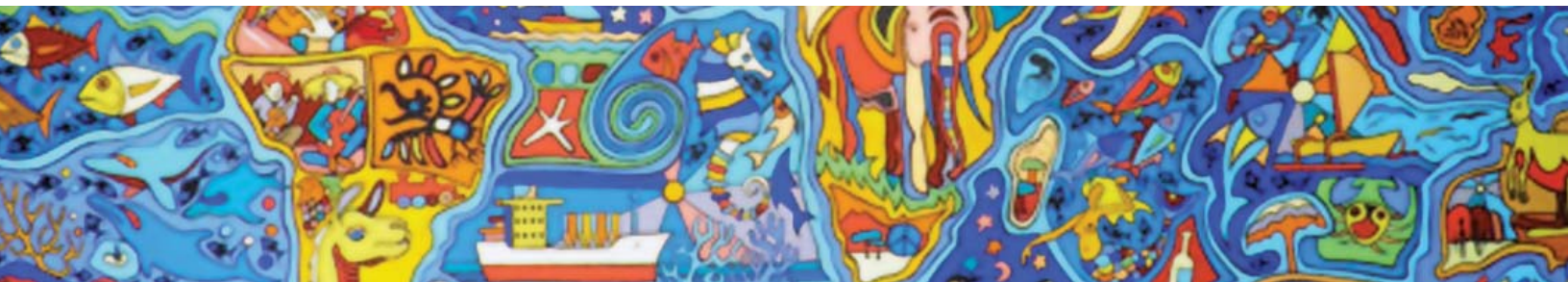
We tweet as @CompLitUWM; follow our Twitter feed for Comparative Literature news in 140 characters or less.



You can find more information about the Comparative Literature Program at UWM, including copies of this and previous newsletters as well as detailed course descriptions for UWinteriM and Spring 2015 courses, at our website: [complit.uwm.edu](http://complit.uwm.edu).



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