On October 26-28, 2011, speakers from around the world and from all disciplines converged on the Lucretius and Modernity Conference, the Annual Ranieri Colloquium on Ancient Studies. Co-sponsored principally by the Department of Comparative Literature and the Center for Ancient Studies, and additionally by the Humanities Initiative, the Gallatin School of Individualized Study, the Medieval and Renaissance Center, Poetics and Theory, Classics, English, French, and Philosophy, Lucretius and Modernity featured three days of talks about the Roman poet Lucretius and his relationship, however problematic or debated, to modernity.

Jacques Lezra began the conference by musing on the tricky nature of the “and” linking “Lucretius and Modernity.” Papers such as Phil Mitsis’s “How Modern is the Question of the Freedom of the Will?” and Joseph Farrell’s “Lucretius and the Symptomology of Modernism” provocatively took up the question of what was at stake in attempting to consider Lucretius as modern.

Other papers considered the connections between Lucretius and modern scientific practices. David Konstan argued that Lucretius’s notions of infinity actually correspond to modern scientific thought in his “Lucretius the Physicist and Modern Science” and Jerry Passannante’s paper “Newton’s Swerve” reviewed the seventeenth century reception of Epicureanism in order to cast new light on Sir Isaac Newton’s discussion of the Lucretian “swerve” in his scientific thought.

The influence of the Lucretian tradition on philosophical modernity was another pressing topic for many speakers. In the opening keynote, “Lucretius and the Speculative Sciences of Origins”, Catherine Wilson reconsidered Lucretius and the Epicurean tradition to posit a new way of considering the narrative we tell about Kant’s philosophical career and his transition from anthropology to critical philosophy. Katja Vogt considered Lucretius’s argument for the “truth” of sense perception from a modern analytical standpoint in her “All Sense Perceptions Are True: Epicurean responses to Skepticism and Relativism.”

Poetics and Theory: Anachronic Shakespeare and Flirtations

Housed within the Department since the 2010-2011 academic year, the Poetics and Theory Certificate Program reached new heights of intensity and activity in 2011-2012, culminating in a veritable theoretical frenzy in this year’s spring term, encompassing the major international conference Anachronic Shakespeare, a workshop entitled Flirtations: Rhetoric and Aesthetics This Side of Seduction, as well as a slew of other lectures and seminars (some co-sponsored by Comp Lit itself) from speakers such as Shira Wolosky, Dirk Quadflieg, Kiara Kordela, and Katrin Truedst.

Co-directed by Anselm Haverkamp of the English department and our own Jacques Lezra with generous help from Martin Harries (also of English), the Poetics and Theory Program takes an approach to theory that is both historical and transdisciplinary, aiming at once to work through the distinctly literary prehistory of contemporary theory in rhetoric and aesthetics and to instigate encounters between literary studies and other theoretically oriented disciplines. The Program has three components: the actual certificate program, involving both core and cross-listed courses; events including lectures, workshops, and an annual conference usually tied to the theme of one of the core courses; a monthly reading group.
Yves-Charles Zarka in his “The Aleatory: Lucretius and Some Modern Authors” posited Lucretius as the father of an aleatory tradition of philosophy other than that sketched by Louis Althusser in his late work. Other conference speakers focused on the influence of Lucretius on specific modern philosophers. Both Brooke Holmes and Warren Montag offered readings of Deleuze’s essay on Lucretian naturalism, with Holmes’s “The Evolution of Lucretius” focusing on the revisions Deleuze made to the essay over time, and Montag’s “From Clinamen to Conatus: Deleuze, Lucretius, Spinoza” filtering his reading through Deleuze’s interpretation of Spinoza. Jacques Lezra’s “On the Nature of Marx’s Things” examined a passing reference to Lucretius in one of Marx’s early notebooks, and Alain Gigandet analyzed the form and content of Leo Strauss’ analysis of Lucretius in his “Notes on Leo Strauss’ Notes on Lucretius.”

Finally, another set of papers tracked Lucretius into still more genres of writing and thought. Philip Hardie catalogued references to Lucretius in early modern poems based on the seven days of creation described in Genesis in his “Lucretius and Renaissance Hexemeral Epic.” Anne Deneyes-Tunney in her “Lucretius and French Libertinism in the 18th Century” described an erotic novel that featured, among other characters, talking bijou (you had to be there to know what that stands for). Thomas Kavagnagh’s “Epicoereanism Across the Revolution” posited the Epicurean tradition as the philosophical backbone of a book on gastronomy, and read it as offering an alternative political ideal of “pleasure” over the dominant ideal of “happiness” based on Rousseau’s thought.

Although this article has divided the papers schematically in an attempt to show the range of topics and approaches covered at the conference, each paper, like Lucretius’s poem, swerved across disciplinary boundaries as well. A conference volume is in the works, so the papers presented may yet avoid the fall straight into the void of oblivion.

Liza Blake is a fifth-year graduate student in English, writing a dissertation on early modern literary physics.
Revolution has been a word on everyone’s tongue the past year as the Occupy movement swept the United States and revolutions sparked across the globe. For Professor Kristin Ross, these movements are, once again, providing a new lens through which to view revolutions of the past.

Kristin Ross started her university career at the University of California: Santa Cruz, an environment which reflected the most idyllic side of the nineteen seventies. There were no grades, no tuition and meals were made from student-run gardens. Here, Ross tells me, she first discovered her interest in French studies, though it would be several years before she would get the opportunity to travel to France.

When Ross began graduate school in 1976, she says, “it was a strange time to go into French studies.” Having now visited France and been inspired to study the Paris Commune, her pursuits ran contrary to the counterrevolutionary climate of the time.

At this time, the revolutionary fervor, underlined by the protests of May 1968, had given way to the de-Marxification of France. Ross describes her determination to study France’s past, which many were actively trying to erase, as “going against the grain.” However, examining the Paris Commune in the wake of May ’68 seemed to be the natural thing to do for Ross, who described the two events as “bookends to the French Empire.” Not only did they roughly mark the beginning and end of revolution in France, but their similarities create what Ross refers to as an “imperial frame.” The Commune fascinated and inspired the people surrounding the May ’68 movement with its analogous ideals. They were able to see the Commune through a different lens than before because of their present comparable experience. As Prof. Ross explains, “moments in the past can be completely hidden or of no interest until certain transversals exist so that people become connected to them in some way.”

In light of the uprisings and Occupy movement of 2011, this phenomenon is happening again. The Commune can once more be relevant in a light that would not have been considered in the past. Ross says that by viewing it “through the frame and interests of the present” certain contemporary themes like internationalism and the importance of education become visible in the Commune that would not have been visible before.

Viewing the past through the present proves that history never stops being relevant. I stop myself at quipping that history repeats itself, but perhaps the past can indicate patterns for the future because Prof. Ross grins knowingly as she tells me, “I think we’ll see an interesting spring.”

Lauren Bird is a senior majoring in Comparative Literature. She hopes to one day work in new media and content creation.

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Recent Graduate Student Placement

- Dror Abend-David: lecturer at the Dept. of Languages, Literatures and Cultures at the University of Florida
- Sage Anderson: fellow in the Doctoral Program (Graduiertenkolleg) Lebensformen und Lebenswissen, directed jointly by the Universität Potsdam and the Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder)
- Magali Armillas-Tiseyra: Assistant Professor of World Literature in the English Department at the University of Mississippi
- Ipek Celik: a one-year, renewable position in the Humanities at Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey
- Robyn Creswell: Assistant Professor in Comp Lit at Brown University
- Xiang He (Ellen): Assistant Professor of Chinese Literature and Culture, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at University of New Mexico
- Daniel Hoffman-Schwartz: Humanities Instructor at Bogazici University in Istanbul
- Micaela Kramer: Assistant Professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies at Rutgers (Newark)
- Aaron Love: English department, Houston Community College
- Erica Weitzman: post-doc at the Graduiertenkolleg “Das Reale in der Jultur der Moderne,” Konstanz University
- Pu Wang: Assistant Professor in Chinese Literature, Language, and Culture at Brandeis University
Mellon Dissertation Seminar “The Problem of Translation”

While I was a student at Vienna University, the “Übersetzer- und Dolmetschinstiut” was translated into a “Zentrum für Translationswissenschaft.” The translation of the institute’s name from the German “Übersetzer” into the Latin (and at the same time English) “Translation” signified a major change in the approach to the field of “Übersetzungs- wissenschaft”: the much broader term “Translation” opened up new spaces, not only in Austria but across Europe and the US, to redirect academic and institutional thinking about processes of translation: from a simple and relatively unproblematic rendering of words from one language to another to the understanding of the complexities of translation as a daily practice and as philosophical thinking. To trace the changes and transformations that occur when words are exchanged, substituted, added, or excised, to think about the cognitive process as a translational process in its own right, and to reflect upon “untranslatability,” was the focus of the Mellon Dissertation Seminar titled “The Problem of Translation,” organized by Professors Emily Apter and Jacques Lezra from July 1st to August 1st 2011 at NYU’s Humanities Initiative.

The topics and readings of the seminar were divided into seven thematic sessions and ranged from the question of veiling and unveiling in Plato, to the relationship between the analyt and the analysand in Freud, to the logic of linguistic transformation in Wittgenstein. The seminar consisted of fifteen advanced doctoral students, whose work—whether in the interdisciplinary field of translation studies within Comparative Literature, in different language departments, or in related fields such as architecture—requires the daily use and intimate knowledge of different languages, from English to Chinese, from French to Urdu, from Italian to Gikuyu. The seminar was divided into morning and afternoon sessions. The morning sessions were dedicated to close reading and discussion of canonical texts on translation theory (Benjamin, Derrida, and Weber) as well as texts that disclosed their impact on translation studies only as the readings unfolded (Plato, Petrarch, and Celan). The afternoon sessions had two parts. In the first half, seminar participants discussed and gave fruitful feedback on ongoing students’ projects, while the second half of the afternoon sessions (in the words of the syllabus) “extended discussions of the readings into seminars with guest speakers,” who offered new perspectives on the topic. Guest speakers included external scholars and translators such as Gayatri Spivak, Bruno Bosteels, Lydia Davis, and Peter Cole, as well as NYU professors Jane Tylus, Mary Louise Pratt, and Richard Sieburth.

Personally, the Mellon Translation Seminar helped me not only to strengthen the theoretical framework of my dissertation, but also to rethink my own discipline, Comparative Literature, in a new light and timely manner: as translation studies is being shaped as a new academic discipline and as we all enter the job market. The strength of the seminar was to raise our awareness that with the word “translation” we enter not only a labyrinthine system of languages but also the untranslatable machine of philosophical indeterminacy, language politics, and the Anglophone imperium. Translation processes resist a transparent rendering of words, notions, and concepts; they are surprisingly protean and interdisciplinary; and they upset and disrupt. The Mellon Seminar on “The Problem of Translation” ultimately showed that translation resists both easy categorization and disciplinary institutionalization as “translation studies.” It remains a “problem”—what translated back into the ancient Greek verb “pro-ballein” actually quite accurately describes the practice of translation itself: a necessary trajectory of obstacles and falls, of stumbling blocks and accidents that trip us up and throw us forward.

Katharina Piechocki is currently finishing her dissertation on “Cartographic Humanism: Defining Early Modern Europe, 1450-1550.”

Comparative Literature Undergraduate Flight Plan

With the encouragement and support of chair Jacques Lezra and Director of Undergraduate Studies Cristina Vatulescu, Undergrad involvement in the department “took off” 3 years ago— and our Undergrads are still flying high! Energized and creative, they organize singular scholarly activities. Eager and curious, they work directly with Comp Lit faculty on research and academic projects. Our Undergrads have now joined our faculty and grads at the center of things. Their formula for success? Department + Undergrads = positive symbiosis.

Senior Honors Thesis Seminar – Professor Vatulescu guided 9 seniors through this two-term, two-reader process this year. With research topics varying from adultery to United States Borders to South Park and Aristophanes, these exceptional young scholars explored the many comparative crannies of Comp Lit.

BRIO, the Comp Lit Literary Journal – Soliciting submissions from as near as the NYU German Department (on the other side of the floor) and as far as Douroud University (Iran), Editor-in-Chief Roxana Souroudi and her editorial crew treated us to a small miracle: this year: For the first time in the four years of BRIO, they published both a fall and spring edition. Kudos (!) to our miracle-working Undergrads Roxana Souroudi, Nafeesa Dawoodbhoy, Coralie Harmache, Emma Hohenstein, Megan Myscofski, and Lauren Valenza.

The Comp Lit Undergrad Major’s Choice Lecture – Nafeesa Dawoodbhoy stepped up for this, too, piloting the third year of this annual event. The choice of a high profile speaker (Judith Butler in 2010, Laurence Rickels in 2011) and organization of the event are in the hands of Comp Lit Undergrads. The “Choice” this year was renowned post-colonialist, literary critic and theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who spoke on “Comparative Literature and the Subaltern” at her lecture in Silver Center on April 5.

A good year for all. Congratulations and many thanks to our high-flying Undergrads!
How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Academia

My first exposure to academic life outside of NYU inspired one of the most valuable and enduring lessons I learned from my advisors: toward the end of my coursework for the PhD I attended a graduate student conference at Stanford University. There I met and discussed my work with peers from a variety of institutions for the first time, and several students inquired about the Comp Lit program at NYU. “How big is your department?” was the question I received most frequently. Comparing us with NYU departments such as English or American Studies—my only frame of reference at the time—I said that we were rather small; the year I was admitted only about a dozen students had begun with me. This usually prompted an exclamation of bewilderment from my interlocutor, who typically came from a comp lit program, not a department, and who was often one of only two or three students admitted in a given academic class.

When I returned to New York I met with my dissertation director, to whom I confessed my confusion toward the experience I had just endured, and my newfound uncertainty over the wisdom of having affiliated with what I now feared was a Brod格林根 institution. He replied to my concerns with characteristic wisdom, explaining that Walter Benjamin had already confronted the problem I was encountering; if the work of art in an age of mechanical reproduction has lost its aura, how can we as scholars preserve our intellectual aura in an era of institutional anonymity? His answer was correspondingly elegant: “You retain your aura by writing a great dissertation, and receiving enthusiastic letters of recommendation from the people on your committee. This lesson resonated with me once I finally defended my dissertation, in August 2003, and began making my way through the academic job market. The first station on this journey brought me from New York to Indiana University, where not coincidentally a number of professors with whom I had studied had earned their PhD. Having at least ensured the distinctiveness of my aura by writing a dissertation that compared the development of modern prose genres in 19th Century Yiddish and 20th Century African literatures, I was now administering a global literature curriculum in the Department of Comparative Literature at Bloomington, and training grad students—little younger than myself—in literary pedagogy. While confronting the challenges of supervising nine instructors and approximately 350 students, I was also preparing for a tenure-track position in the department, calling for a specialist in post-colonial African literature.

A funny thing happened then, or as one might express my relative confidence at the path I had chosen in Yiddish, Der mensh trakht un Got lakht (“When man thinks, God laughs”). The scholar whom I discussed my work with peers at Stanford University had second thoughts about her decision to leave Bloomington, and since she had not formally resigned her position there, but had only taken an indefinite leave (a strategy you might consider emulating when the prospect develops in your career) the university had essentially no choice but to return the position to her. As the Chair of the department put it to me at the time, I was welcome to continue directing the global literature program, but any prospect of a tenure-track position there would be postponed indefinitely. And I’d probably have to share an office with the returning scholar. (“Are you going to finish that sandwich?”) So at the beginning of my second semester in Indiana, four events occurred in approximately ten days: I interviewed for a tenure-track job; I learned that my wife, a graduate of the PhD program in Yiddish at Columbia (you see, I married up!), was pregnant; I found out that I would not receive the tenure-track position; and I received notice that I had been admitted to a post-doctoral fellowship in Jewish Studies—to which I had applied in a single evening, as an afterthought to my otherwise exclusive focus on the now-vanished position in Bloomington—at the University of Pennsylvania.

In ten days, my life and career detoured approximately 180 degrees from the trajectory I had begun pursuing with my PhD; instead of a comparative literature scholar with a focus on African literature and a side-interest in Yiddish, I had become, overnight, a Yiddish scholar with training in comparative literature and a side-interest in African Studies. During the year I spent at Penn, I learned a new academic geography, a new professional discourse, and a new hierarchy of scholars as well as institutions to study and make contact with. While making the acquaintance of my newborn daughter and deferring my father-in-law’s questions about how I would support my family, I was at work most days and nights reading the collected

(Marc cont. on next page)
writings of the classic Yiddish authors Isaac Leib Peretz and Sholem Aleichem. And I was cultivating a new aura.

I pursued a number of prospects for the future during that year in Philadelphia, the most likely of which was a temporary instructorship—at some point in an undefined future to become a tenure-track position—in Yiddish at the Johns Hopkins University. Only a year after Indiana, I was reluctant to accept another offer framed as “come for the visiting position, stay for the tenure-track one,” so I kept at the search. Serendipitously, my wife was offered a renewable lectureship teaching Yiddish language at Harvard, to which I had applied for a second research fellowship in Jewish Studies. Doubtless by complete coincidence, the same committee that had awarded my wife her position found in their limitless wisdom to grant my fellowship as well, so for the fourth time in less than two years, we set out for a new address and a new institutional affiliation.

At Harvard, my wife and I luxuriated in the irony that my research fellowship, for which the duties consisted of attending a single (catered!) weekly seminar where fellows presented their research, paid better than her teaching obligations as a language preceptor; although that year remains our most lucrative to date, most of our wages were consumed by the only grocery store within walking distance of our apartment: Whole Foods! Nonetheless, the experience reinforced both the scholarly commitments and the professional associations I had made at Penn: all of the jobs I applied for that year directly engaged modern Jewish literature, and the four conferences in which I participated all provided me a forum to discuss my work on Yiddish modernism. Most significantly, that visiting post at Johns Hopkins did indeed ripen into a tenure-track position, so three years to the day after defending my dissertation I arrived in Baltimore to begin the first permanent job I had held since starting graduate school 12 years before; two years after becoming a parent, eight years after getting married, 17 years after graduating college, 21 years after drinking my first legal beer, I was finally an adult.

At Hopkins, my career has come full circle in a sense: although I am officially the “Yiddish guy” in the German section of the Department of German and Romance Languages, both the Yiddish curriculum specifically and the Jewish Studies program generally are so new that I have yet to teach a course exclusively about Yiddish in the Yiddish language. Instead, I have drawn upon my training in comparative literature, although the term “comparative literature” exists nowhere in the contemporary Hopkins curriculum. My undergraduate lecture courses tend to focus on general themes in modern Jewish culture such as Zionism, the Holocaust, immigration to America, or Jewish Humor (perhaps the most popular undergraduate course ever taught in the German program at Hopkins!). My graduate seminars typically focus on a theoretical problem in modern literature, such as “the subject-object relation in experimental fiction,” “comedy, tragedy, and the space between,” or “peripheral modernism.” In all of my courses, I make an effort to sell Yiddish to students “under the table,” but I also pursue the inextricable arguments that Yiddish can only be understood comparatively with other literary traditions, while the inclusion of Yiddish in a global understanding of modernism illuminates our understanding of the global as well as the modern.

Beyond the inescapable irony that my theory of international modernism based on peripherality, diaspora, and contingency has been articulated during a period of what one can only hope to be exceptional personal dislocation and professional uncertainty, my protracted experience on the job market has impressed a number of lessons on me, some of which perhaps bear repeating: (1) the absence of a tenure-track job does not mean the absence of a future in academia; (2) our training as comparatists actually provides us with more than a single professional resource for finding work; (3) a well-placed postdoc might actually be a better career decision than a tenure-track job directly following graduate school; (4) be nice to everyone you meet at conferences and always open your home to visiting scholars, because you never know when or under what circumstances your path might cross theirs in the future; (5) all knowledge is useful; (6) every experience en route to a permanent position provides another opportunity to cultivate your aura.

Recent Graduate Student Awards

Magali Armillas-Tiseyra: Managing Editor of the journal e-misférica (bi-annual peer reviewed online journal) run by the Hemispheric Institute for Performance and Politics

Michiel Bot: 2011-12 Penfield Fellowship

Lori Cole: Andrew Sauter Fellowship

Robyn Creswell: Cullman Center Fellowship at the NYPL, http://www.nypl.org/locations/tid/36/node/29210

Patrick Gallagher & Lori Cole: 2011 Anais Nin Memorial Fellowship

Bilal Hashmi: Fall 2011, Visiting Graduate Student Fellow with the Global Research Institute at NYU London

Micaela Kramer & Pu Wang: 2011-2012 Dean’s Dissertation

Sonia Werner: 2012-2013 Dean’s Dissertation
**Alumni News 2011-2012**

**Stan Benfell** (PhD 1994) published *The Biblical Dante* (University of Toronto Press, 2011).


**Gabrielle Civil** (PhD 2000) is a tenured associate professor of English, Women's Studies and Critical Studies of Race & Ethnicity at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, MN where she started in Fall 2000 after defending her dissertation in the Comparative Literature department earlier that spring. She is working on several projects, including her long-percolating manuscript "Swallow the Fish: Black Feminist Performance Art." In December 2011, she premiered her performance art work "Fugue," a meditation on the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, at the Five Miles Gallery in Brooklyn as part of ArtQuake through the Haiti Cultural Exchange. She recently returned from Cormier, Haiti where she worked for 10 days with Ayiti Resurrect—a grassroots collective dedicated to transforming trauma into healing post earthquake. In the small rural community, she co-facilitated a poetry, storytelling, performance workshop and helped translate a community chakra meditation into Haitian Kreyol.


**Shari Huhndorf** (PhD 1996) is now a Full Professor in Ethnic Studies at UC Berkeley.

**Rosamond S. King** (PhD 2001) is currently completing a Woodrow Wilson Career Enhancement Fellowship. Last year she was part of The Distinguished Lectures in Caribbean Studies Series at Rutgers New Brunswick and the Keynote Speaker for the First Annual Caribbean Women Writers Conference at Medgar Evers College.

**Susan Matthias** (PhD 2006) was awarded the NYU-SCPS Teaching Excellence Award in February 2012. She has been on the faculty of NYU-SCPS’s Humanities and Performing Arts division since 2007. Her specialty is classical literature, and during the past few years she has been teaching a three-semester sequence of courses on ancient epic: the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and the *Aeneid*.

**Robert McKee Irwin** (PhD 1999) is the Chair of the Graduate Group in Cultural Studies at University of California, Davis. He published, with coauthor Maricruz Castro Ricalde, *El cine mexicano “se impone”: mercados internacionales y penetración cultural en la época dorada* (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México).

**Fernando Perez** (PhD 2009) is working at Universidad Alberto Hurtado, in Santiago, Chile, in the language, the literature, and the art departments. He is also the director of the interdisciplinary MA in Image Studies.

**Christopher Vitale** (PhD 2007) is Assistant Professor of Media Studies at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY, where he teaches everything from film and media theory to literature to queer studies. His first book, *Networkologies: A New Philosophy of Networks for a Hyperconnected Age, Vol 1: From Diagram to World*, will be published by Zer0 books in Spring 2012. Segments of this work in progress have appeared in a series of articles in *Speculations: The Journal of Speculative Realism*, and along with mini-articles on many topics on his blog, *Networkologies*, at: networkologies.wordpress.com.

**Jason Weiss** (PhD 1998) has a forthcoming book entitled *Always in Trouble: An Oral History of ESP-Disk, the Most Outrageous Record Label in America* (Wesleyan, 2012). Additional work by Weiss can be found at: itinerariesofahummingbird.com
New Faculty: Jay Garcia

Garcia earned his bachelor’s degree in Michigan’s Program of American Culture and went on to earn his PhD in American Studies from Yale.

At Yale, Garcia honed his research concentrations, becoming intrigued by the origins of American Studies itself as well as by the idea of analyzing not just the published works of an author, but the multitude of other texts from his or her life that have been left behind and preserved in archives. In this pursuit to study not merely the “final form... but also all of the things around it,” Garcia spent many hours poring over one of the most famous collections housed at Yale, the Richard Wright Papers.

Richard Wright became a prominent feature of Garcia’s dissertation and still embodies much of Garcia’s thinking on American Studies and literature. Living in and writing about the early to mid-twentieth century, Wright’s work coincides with the emergence of the American Studies discipline. Having far-reaching social and political impacts, Wright’s texts also encompass the interdisciplinary nature of the field. This is something Garcia points out, American Studies shares with Comparative Literature.

Garcia says that in the past few decades, scholars of American Literature have increasingly approached the study from a global context, which lends to additional cross over between the fields. What is even more compelling for both disciplines, says Garcia, is that we have a new period to look back on from our position in the twenty-first century. “In a way, we’re invited to rethink the whole of twentieth century literature.” It adds another layer to the many through which Garcia conducts his research, viewing as complete a picture as possible while dissecting every strand.

For the spring, Garcia’s focus returns to Richard Wright as he teaches a Topics course on Richard Wright’s Books. He asks his students to look at Wright’s oeuvre from an international perspective as well as to analyze not just his published works, but also the books that influenced him and which he in turn influenced. Garcia tells me that he also hopes to pull from the archival materials he has saved on Richard Wright from his time at Yale, complementing the course with rare documents like Wright’s unpublished drafts and letters. The real bonus to the course, however, is living in New York City, walking the streets that paved modern American history, that welcomed immigrants from around the world and where Wright himself lived for many years. After all, Garcia says with a grin, Wright may be most often associated with Chicago, but “a good deal of Native Son was written in Brooklyn.”

Garcia’s new book published by Johns Hopkins University Press

Update from the Comparatorium

The Comparative Literature Colloquium, organized by graduate students and active since 2007, is in the middle of a transitional season. Conceived as a platform for faculty and students to present current projects, the colloquium has served as a valuable forum for meeting and discussion over the past five years. This year’s season opened auspiciously on September 16th, with a talk by Professor Richard Sieburth (Departments of Comparative Literature and French), entitled “The Poetics of Futurity: On Translating Nostradamus.” Speaking at Deutsches Haus to a large crowd, Professor Sieburth discussed his new complete verse translation of the Prophecies of Nostradamus, forthcoming this summer from Penguin Classics. He introduced the portentous 16th-century magnum opus through themes of conjunction and procession, rhyme and rhythm, past and future, événement et évènement, dwelling on the translator’s vexed confrontation with poetic surplus in language and meaning. Since September, the Colloquium has not reconvened; this hiatus has been temporary and circumstantial, but does indicate a need for increased participation in the organizing committee. Those interested should email Sage Anderson (sage.anderson@nyu.edu), or attend a planning meeting – or Colloquium on the Colloquium – to be scheduled before the end of the spring semester. Meanwhile, the department can look forward to the return of the colloquium in April, with a talk by Associate Professor Jay Garcia, who joined the faculty in Fall, 2011. The talk, “Richard Wright’s Comic Corrective,” will take place April 27th.
As Emanuela Bianchi sips tea at Newsbar, she contemplates what she would say to Aristotle if he were sitting across from her. "One part of me thinks I should ask him if he has any conception of the amount of pain, suffering, and horror that his works would lead to in subsequent millennia," she says, but then clarifies "But on the other hand it's not really fair to hold him personally accountable for the uses to which his work has been put."

Although she's never had tea with him, Bianchi has spent a lot of time with Aristotle. Her dissertation *The Feminine Symptom: Aleatory Matter in the Aristotelian Cosmos*, which she is currently working on publishing, gives a new reading of Aristotle's natural philosophy, and works to show precisely how and why Aristotle's philosophical position has been so destructive especially with respect to gender.

But Bianchi didn't start out interested in Aristotle. In fact, she got her undergraduate degree from the University of Sussex in a program called Human Sciences, which dealt primarily with the nature versus nurture question. She continued at the University of Sussex getting her MA in Philosophy. There she grew intrigued reading deconstructionists like Derrida. She can't think of the right word to describe her fascination with Derrida at the time, but finally concedes that "obsessed" might be correct. She also describes this period as a "lively" and "exciting" time in the debates about feminist theory and gender identity. These debates lead her down the path to her dissertation topic.

After Sussex, she came to do her PhD at the New School, intending to write about the problem of teleology and deconstruction. However, because teleology was such an Aristotelian idea, she started reading Aristotle. "The first thing that struck me about (him) was how his ideas about sex and gender were intertwined with his physics and his metaphysics and the teleology at large," says Bianchi. So that became her dissertation.

After working at Haverford College as a Visiting Assistant Professor and at The University of North Carolina-Charlotte, she returns to New York to teach in the Comparative Literature program here at NYU. A lot has changed since she went to school here in the nineties. She still says she prefers New York to Chicago style pizza. However, one of her favorite staples, DOJO, just isn't as good as she remembers it.

Although Bianchi is usually very pensive about her answers, when I ask her "Old Times Square or New Times Square?" she instantly answers "Old Times Square" and laughs. "If you read Samuel Delany's book *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* that will tell you all you need to know about (the difference)," she says.

For pleasure reads Bianchi is a big Samuel Delany fan and also a fan of Sci-Fi in general. She tried to be purely indulgent and read *A Game of Thrones*, but she felt bogged down by the strict patriarchal systems at play in the series and stopped.

In terms of philosophical books that Bianchi recommends, she doesn't want to be too constricting. "The book that is going to be really philosophically important to a person is going to be the book they read in the moment that they're ready to read it," she says.

Currently, Bianchi is researching kinship in ancient literature. This spring she is also teaching a class called "Classical Literature and Philosophy: Gender and Genre." She relishes in having the chance to (and the challenge of) adding more literature and literary theory to accommodate comparative literature students.

Even though she will not teach a graduate class until next fall, she laughs when I ask her if she has any advice for dissertation writers and says, "The only good dissertation is a done dissertation."

As for working at New York University Bianchi is excited to be part of a literature department, because she feels that it is "sort of a crucible for many kinds of theoretical approaches." She is also thrilled to work in such an expansive and open program. And of course she loves working with students.

"Engaging with students is just the highlight of my week," she says warmly, taking a final sip of her tea.

Sarah Caldwell is a senior majoring in Comparative Literature. She hopes to write for TV and also work in journalism.

### 2 Important Events: Grad and Undergrad

These 2 *Important Events* were held after our critical (!) Newsletter deadlines. Unfortunately, at this late date, we can’t afford them the text and space they deserve, but would like to briefly draw your attention to these successful events of our grads and undergrads.

This year’s *Graduate Student Conference “On Limits,”* featured A. Kiarina Kordela of Macalester College, whose talk addressed “Gaze, or, The Limit to Boundary.” Kudos to 1st year grad organizers!

Post-colonialist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak highlighted this year’s *Undergraduate Major’s Choice Lecture* with her talk titled “Comparative Literature and the Subaltern.” Kudos to UG organizer Nafeesa Dawoodbhoy!