Intersections

New York University

Department of Comparative Literature

Spring 2014

PUNK ROCKS
AT NYU!

ACLA'14
CAPITALS

ACLA insert pp. 5 & 6

Berlin, 1989
Scholars Discuss New Publications at Humanities Initiative Book Launch

by Elizabeth Benninger and Agata Tumilowicz

On September 11, 2013, the Humanities Initiative at NYU and the Department of Comparative Literature hosted “Great New Books in the Humanities: New Directions in Comparative Literature.” The event, adeptly and humorously moderated by our own Jacques Lezra, featured four panelists, each of whom briefly discussed their recently published books: John Hamilton, Professor of Comparative Literature and German at Harvard University; Thomas Keenan, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at Bard College; Stathis Gourgouris, Professor of Classics, English, and Comparative Literature at Columbia University; and Emily Apter, Professor of French and Comparative Literature here at NYU.

After brief opening remarks from Jane Tylus, Faculty Director of the Humanities Initiative, and moderator Jacques Lezra, John Hamilton began the panel presentations with a discussion of his new book Security: Politics, Humanity, and the Philology of Care. Hamilton said that his original interest in writing on the notion of “security” stemmed from the ubiquity (and perhaps even overuse or abuse) of the term in our contemporary society. Selecting philology as a “careful” method through which to approach such a widely-used term, Hamilton’s project traces the history of the word “security,” which Hamilton himself described as “a long tradition where the meaning of the term oscillates and complicates.” Appealing to the etymology of the term, Hamilton provided one definition of “security” as “removed from care” — a meaning, he claimed, which could imply being carefree, but also implicitly careless. It is this lack or absence of care associated with “security” and the “corollary political issues” of apathy, indifference, and negligence which most concerned Hamilton. As he said, “With care gone, we may be secure, but we are no longer concerned for each other.”

The next presenter was Thomas Keenan, co-editor with Tirdad Zolghadr of the new volume The Human Snapshot.

John Hamilton begins with a discussion about “security.”

This book was originally conceived of at a conference on photography and human rights co-hosted by The Curatorial Studies Center at Bard and the Human Rights Project at Bard. Citing the “intimacy” between the discourses of photography and human rights during the twentieth century, Keenan explained that the essays collected in The Human Snapshot explored and engaged in current debates surrounding the legacies of universalism and humanism (as well as their critiques) in the academy and beyond. Indeed, contributors to the volume included not only critics and academics but curators, artists, activists, and NGO representatives as well, which Keenan took as an “example or symptom” of the widespread and diverse nature of fields in which the relationship between photography and human rights are debated.

(continued on page 7)

a PROGRAM report

by Carlin Wing

This fall kicked off the second year of PROGRAM, a collaborative, interdisciplinary event series organized by graduate students within the departments of Media, Culture, and Communication, Comparative Literature, English and Cinema Studies. The series explores the cultural, historical, aesthetic, and political impact of software and programming logic. This fall we presented two events:

- Infrastructure Aesthetics and New Media Archives. For Infrastructure Aesthetics, Chicago-based artist and filmmaker Deborah Stratman first discussed her project Power/Exchange (2003), which explores power and telecommunication transmission corridors via a visitor operated radio tower in Wendover, Utah, and then screened her film In Order Not To Be Here (2002). In the film, long night shots of mall parking lots and gated communities make visible how a fear of violence and desire for control is embedded in suburban architecture and infrastructure.

- For New | Media Archives, Lori Emerson, head of the Media Archaeology Lab at the University of Bolder, and Ben Fino-Radin, Digital Repository Manager at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, spoke about the challenges of preserving obsolete technologies and displaying art made for obsolete systems. Emerson described how the Media Archaeology Lab works as a community-driven, living archive, while Fino-Radin addressed the task of preservation for born-digital objects. We have one final event coming up this spring: a conversation on the burgeoning field of Software Studies between Noah Wardrip-Fruin, Lev Manovich, and Matthew Fuller.

All three of these scholars work at the intersection of the humanities and computing and we look forward to hearing them discuss software has become a lens for viewing emerging practices in media and literature. The series is open to the public, and is intended to facilitate dialogue on the intersections of all of our fields. Come join us!

Carlin Wing is an artist and a doctoral candidate in the Department of Media, Culture, and Communication at NYU, where she works on material technology, performance, and sport. Her dissertation proposes a media theory of bounce. She has been a visiting lecturer at Vanderbilt University, Watkins College of Art and Design, and Harvard University.
Comparative Literature and Latin American Speaker Series

In the 2013-4 academic year, the Department of Comparative Literature, in conjunction with the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, hosted a series of lectures on Comparative Literature and Latin America. The speaking series featured some of the most theoretically sophisticated scholars working on Latin American literature today in the North American academy. It began with Erin Graff Zivin in September. Graff Zivin, who received a PhD from the NYU Department of Spanish and Portuguese in 2004 is, as Jacques Lezra put it in his opening remarks, “de la casa.” The lecture, titled “Misunderstanding Literature,” was framed as an investigation of Jacques Derrida’s work on what might be termed the logic of the secret. Above all through a close reading of Juan José Saer’s 1983 novel El entenado (translated into English as The Witness), Graff Zivin argued that the “secret” cannot simply pre-exist its moment of extraction but that it is in fact shaped by those who suspect and accuse the secret-holder of possessing it. Also participating in the lecture series were Jon Beasley-Murray who lectured on post-hegemony and Alberto Moreiras on what he termed “tercer espacio” or “third space.”

We print Jacques Lezra’s introduction to the Comparative Literature and Latin America series here as he imagines a very different Comp Lit world.

- Daniel Howell, Comp Lit PhD candidate

Jacques’ Intro: “What if Erich Auerbach had gone in X or Y direction, rather than to Istanbul?”

Many greetings, and welcome to the first in a series of talks and seminars on Comparative Literature and Latin America that we will hold this year. I’d like to thank the co-sponsor of this event, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, for their support—and also the collective Crítica Latinoamericana—Rocio, Carlos, Olga, Kevin and others—for their extraordinary enthusiasm and insight in pulling the series together, which we hope will continue next year, and which will have a sort of live afterlife online, as the core of a forum on the topic of the “Politics of Theory and Latin America” hosted at the website of Crítica Latinoamericana. Tonight’s speaker, Erin Graff Zivin, will lead a seminar-discussion tomorrow evening, treating two essays we have precirculated.

I’m going to allow myself just two words on the subject of this lecture series before briefly introducing Erin Graff Zivin. In a general sense, anything that pulls together the words “Comparative Literature,” the word “and,” and any other words, ranging from “the world,” through to “commodity fetishism,” “hip dysplasia,” “invertebrate zoology,” to “Latin America” might be said to fall under the rubric of the hypothetical question, “What if Erich Auerbach had gone in X or Y direction, rather than to Istanbul?” Of course when we say “Erich Auerbach” we’re employing the grossest sort of personifying metonym, and we mean something like “enlightened elite European intellectual culture on the run from the disasters in Spain, in Italy, in Germany, had gone all the way south, to Cape Town, for instance! What about if it had headed for Calcutta? What if it, he, Erich Auerbach, had gone to medical school, what if he, it, had gone from the study of aesthetic phenomena to the study of political-economic phenomena? What if Erich Auerbach, what if secular, enlightened European culture, had turned West instead of East? Of course, in many respects it did just that, on the shoulders of the great cloud of emigrants who moved across the Atlantic, and landed in Havana, in New York, or in Mexico City, or in Buenos Aires. How would Comparative Literature have changed, would it even exist, how would we think of “comparison” today, if the answer to any of these questions had been different from what it is? Almost everything is wrong about this sort of counter-factual, fantastic way of asking questions, but not this: subjunctive historiography can show us the biases we inhabit, their ideological frame, their contingency. If Auerbach had turned West rather than East and made his way to Latin America he might have written quite a different book. What would it have meant for him to encounter the particular literatures and cultures of Latin America, as they existed in the late 1930’s and early 1940’s? I don’t mean this trivially: Latin America has a peculiar way of not-being itself, of not being “Latin America,” of being simultaneously aggregated and disaggregated, linguistically, ethnically, politically and culturally, that would I think have shaken the core concepts of Auerbach’s project, and of Comparativism more broadly. Mimesis, the notion of “the real,” the notion that a set of cultural traditions can be brought under the covers of a book, bound with love or force, as Dante’s Paradiso almost says, into one volume or under one concept of representation—these would I think have shifted dramatically.

I’d like to think that what we are setting on stage now, here, is the ground for a reflection on what it means to “compare.” We can, I think, agree to characterize as a fantasy—a great, determining, transcendent fantasy—the idea that “comparison” can be undertaken from a neutral position, on the basis of a rule, on general grounds to which the comparands assent in fact or implicitly.

“What if Erich Auerbach had gone to medical school! Or Calcutta! Or Buenos Aires!”

(continued on page 4)
Jacques continued...

Poetics and Theory

The Program in Poetics and Theory (P&T), housed by the Department of Comparative Literature since the Fall of 2011, provides an institutional framework for an approach to theoretical concerns in the humanities across the disciplines at NYU. P&T consists mainly of three parts: a reading group that includes both graduate students and faculty members; a yearly schedule of lectures, seminars, and conferences; and a certificate program that offers a course of study tracing the relation between literature and philosophy from the ancient study of poetics and rhetoric to contemporary theoretical debates. Alongside a campus visit by the accomplished philosopher and translator David Farrell Krell, which included a lecture, a seminar, and a public reading of his own literary work, over the past sixty or so years. I don’t exactly mean to compare small things to large by placing Latin America, a continent of impossibilities and untranslatabilities, on the same plate as the minor subdiscipline of Comparative Literature—or yes, I do.

“Small” and “large” are not useful sorts of terms here. What the series we have devised would like us to think about is just this: what does the defective concept of “Latin America” do when it is brought into contact with the defective notion of “comparison”? Of “literature”? What are the consequences, for each of those terms, for “comparison,” for “literature,” for “Latin America,” of banging these concepts against one another? What is the form of thought—as theory, as philosophy—that I’m calling “banging these concepts together”? Finally, to what practices—new practices, in the disciplinary and perhaps in the political-institutional domain—does this banging-together, this thinking-together, of Latin Americanism’s disaggregation and comparison’s drive to produce common concepts? To what practices can it lead?

Lisa Robertson (in collaboration with The Organism for Poetic Research). Having worked arduously through major texts by both Spinoza and Hegel over the previous two years, this year’s P&T reading group shifted its direction to the twentieth-century poetry and philosophy. Joined by some fresh faces, as well as the core group of faculty and graduate students, the intention of the reading group was to prepare for David Farrell Krell’s visit through a close reading of a range of texts relating to the unlikely question of sexual difference in the work of Martin Heidegger. Fueled by wine and cheese, the reading group tackled one by one each of Jacques Derrida’s three published essays on the theme of Geschlecht (translatable as, at once, gender, generation, and genealogy) in Heidegger, accompanied by selected readings from Heidegger’s early and late writings, as well as the poetry of Georg Trakl.

Krell’s talk, “The Four Generations of Derrida’s ‘Geschlecht,’” drew great interest from an audience representing humanities departments across NYU as well as other local universities. The lecture was followed by a seminar with the P&T reading group led by Professor Krell, which, in turn, was followed by a reading and discussion of one of his short stories - in the words of the author himself, “the most evil” short story that he has ever written. The visit of Dimitris Vardoulakis was yet another site for fruitful investigation of the relation between literature and philosophy. His lecture - titled “How does Michael K Resist Sovereign Power?” - considered current discussions of the notions of sovereignty and violence through the prism of J.M. Coetzee’s novel Life & Times of Michael K. In addition, P&T co-sponsored, in collaboration with The Organism for Poetic Research (OPR), a graduate working group in the Department of English, a lecture by the Canadian poet Lisa Robertson and the publication of her essay “Thinking Space,” on the poetics of Kepler’s astronomical research into the elliptical nature of planetary orbits.

If you are interested in the Program in Poetics and Theory - lectures, reading group, and certificate - be sure to visit www.poeticsandtheory.wordpress.com for up-to-date information, and add your name to our email list.

Siarhei Biareishyk is a third-year Ph.D. student interested in the relationship between literature, philosophy, and psychoanalysis.

We would like to acknowledge the outstanding efforts of our ACLA conference organizers

Ozen Nergis Dolcerocca, Kevin Goldstein, and Sonia Werner.

NYU Punks
This March the Department of Comparative Literature welcomed thirty-five hundred scholars from across the globe to Washington Square for the annual American Comparative Literature Association Conference (ACLA), whose theme this year was Capitals. The convention could not have been the unprecedented success it was without the staggering efforts of the team of graduate students, undergrads, administrators, and faculty from the Comp Lit Department, as well as several friends and allies from the Spanish Department, the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, and the Gallatin School of Individualized Studies—not to mention the ACLA’s off-site coordinators. With nearly three hundred and fifty panels, three plenary events, two book fairs, an art exhibition, and a concert, Capitals was the largest ACLA conference in the association’s history—a stunning, stunningly difficult achievement for our small department.

The conference began on Thursday, March 20, when our own Jacques Lezra and the President of the ACLA, Eric Hayot, welcomed participants at a wine and cheese reception in Kimmel’s Eisner & Lubin Auditorium. Historically this event draws no more than four hundred people—and though our team was prepared to field a crowd double this size—the fact that nearly fifteen hundred participants queued up in front of Kimmel was a surprise to everyone involved. Thankfully the balmy weather and the sweet sounds of jazz emanating from Washington Square Park soothed the crowd as our fearless Registration Committee and several impromptu volunteers rose to the occasion and kept the lines moving until they disappeared.

Meanwhile, just across the street at Bobst, other participants attended the opening night of GoNightclubbing, a multimedia installation curated by Pat Ivers and Emily Armstrong at the Fales Library and Special Collections. The exhibition paid tribute to the infamous nightclub of the 80s, The Danceteria Video Lounge, and featured the work of some of the world’s earliest VJs, as well as music from The Dead Boys, Iggy Pop and Richard Hell, and artists such as Keith Haring and John Sex. The exhibition helped fulfill one of the central aims of the graduate student organizers, which was to engage and involve the local NYC community in the events of ACLA as much as possible. Thus, in addition the ACLA’s traditional book exhibition, which involves scholarly journals and university presses, on Saturday March 22, our participants had the opportunity to attend a local and independent book fair in 19 University Place, which featured a garran of local presses and bookstores including McNally Jackson Books, Ugly Duckling Press, Swill Children, Verso Books, and Cicada Press.

Later in the evening, Professor Ulrich Baer welcomed conference participants at the Keynote Address, which featured Judith Butler’s introductory speech in which he reminded the audience of the significance of Butler’s thought—both within and beyond the academy. Lezra heralded Butler as a thinker whose prolific body of scholarship has resisted disciplinary taxonomies as much as it has irrevocably transformed the “grounds” of thought, irrevocably opening up and transforming categories such as “gender,” “sex,” “performance,” “family,” and “act,” so central to what Lezra called the “production of thought.” Butler addressed an audience of 950 at the Skirball Center for the Performing Arts on the subject of “Capital/Punishment.” She began by tracing the etymology of the word “capital” and its relationship to the “head” [caput], “counting” and “chantel” before focusing on the topic of “capital punishment,” which she discussed by drawing on the work of a variety of contemporary thinkers including Herbert Marcuse, Jacques Derrida, and Angela Davis. Butler’s critical rigor, lucidity, and contagious charm held the audience for well over an hour, as she brought the conference’s theme into conversation with subjects relevant to contemporary scholarship and its place amid current political debate.

Saturday was more somber for some participants. Hundreds of people assembled in the Grand Hall of the Global Center for Academic & Spiritual Life in order to celebrate the life and work of Helen Tartar, who died tragically on March 2. Tartar’s official title, Editorial Director of the Fordham University Press, says nothing of the mark she left on so many scholars at NYU and beyond: her dedication to the work of young scholars, her steadfast promotion of continental philosophy and literary theory, and her meticulous and masterfully editing of the books that fill our shelves—all speak of her generosity, intelligence and sensitivity.

Forty years after punk rock was born in the dive country-and-bluegrass bar on the Bowery named CBGB + OM-FUG, NYU/ACLA marked punk’s anniversary with a “Punk @ 40” plenary. It was a bit of good fortune that the Fales Collection at the Bobst Library was planning already to commemorate the occasion; the ACLA Convention made this celebration its own—Punk Capitals! Marvin Taylor, the Director of the Fales Library, brought together a combination of artists, musicians, and scholars that many described as “an event of a life time.” The event began with a poignant tribute to José Muñoz by our own Professor Ana Dopico. An interview followed: Brandon Stosuy, editor at Pitchfork, interviewed Richard Hell, one of punk’s founding fathers. The event took place at the Great Hall of the Cooper Union. Hell discussed his recently published autobiography I Dreamed I Was a Very Clean Tramp, the various influences on his work as a musician, the bands he played in (Neon Boys, Television, The Voidoids, The Heartbreakers), CBGB, heroin, and the New York Punk scene generally. The Punk Plenary culminated when four women assumed the stage of Cooper Union’s Great Hall: Vivien Goldman (London-born, Queens-based writer, educator, broadcaster and post-punk musician), Kathleen Hanna (musician and founder of Riot grrrl, a feminist punk rock group and movement), Tamar-kali (Brooklyn-based musician and favorite of the New York City punk scene), and Moderator-Terminator, Hostess-with the Mostest, Professor Avital Ronell, whose contagious and scintillating wit knit the event together for participants and audience alike.

And nothing could trump the grand finale of the conference. Following the panel, guests were invited to attend a punk show at Judson Church on Washington Square South, a venue with deep ties to New York’s avant-garde. Proceeds from the concert, featuring the So So Glos, Arm Candy, and Household, benefited Silent Barn, a performing arts venue in Bushwick which hosts a residency program for artists of all ages.

Kevin Goldstein is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at New York University. His research interests include the literature of the Americas, disability studies, late style, and cognitive approaches to literature.

Ozen Nergis is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at NYU. She is writing her dissertation on theories and politics of time in the early twentieth century. She is currently a visiting scholar at the University of Paris, Sorbonne-Nouvelle.

Sonia Werner is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Comparative Literature and Writer-in-Residence at the Jordan Center for the Advanced Study of Russia.

Ana Dopico opened the Punk Capitals Plenary with a tribute to José Muñoz, and Avital Ronell moderated the Punk panel.
Our ACLA Grad Student Team
Scholars Discuss New Publications continued....

By revisiting the 505 photos from this exhibition in an attempt to begin to understand how photography came to be a privileged vehicle through which to communicate about humanity, Apter began—fed by Jacques Lezra.

... and triggered promotion, and faculty searches. Susan has tracked more than 25 accounts and budgets of the departmental graduate student parties. She has overseen the bearable speakers, guests, helping to host prospective graduate and undergraduate student parties to make things happen.

Administrators, graduate students and undergraduates (in light of present debates, Stathis Gourgouris followed with a discussion of his latest work, Lessons in Secular Criticism. Many of the essays in this volume were originally delivered as the Sydney State Library Lectures in Philosophy and Society in Australia, a series of public lectures which are also broadcast on Australian radio. Interestingly, Gourgouris claimed that it was precisely the immediacy and accessibility demanded by such lectures which shaped much of the book, as he said the occasion created an “impetus for a different kind of writing” which was disengaged as much as possible from typical scholarly conventions demanded by academia.

Gourgouris chose “secular criticism” (the term originally being Edward Said’s) as his topic in an attempt to overcome what he perceived as a sociological or culturalist bias in contemporary debates over “the secular” and to reconfigure how to understand secularism through a literary perspective. He was also very invested in considering secularism outside of the religious sphere, that is, outside of a religious/secular binary. For Gourgouris, a key feature of “the secular” is poiesis, which he defined in this context as the “radical creative capacity of humanity or of society to alter itself, to alter their conditions.” In the spirit of the public nature of the original lectures, Gourgouris highlighted his belief that, “The secularism debate fails if it remains an entirely scholarly issue,” and emphasized the need for such debates to engage directly with the political space and outside of institutional presences.

The evening ended with a presentation from Emily Apter on her recently-released Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability. Apter began her comments by situating her work among that of her fellow comparatists and pointed out their shared contributions to changing the face of the field. In crystallizing the origin of her new book, Apter emphasized that her inspiration stemmed from the ambitious project she had undertaken with Barbara Cassin, Etienne Balibar, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood, namely, the work of translating and editing Barbara Cassin’s Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles, which is scheduled to come out in February 2014. Through this stimulating project, which tackles the problematics of the translation of philosophical terms, Apter’s own work became imbued with the idea (and possibility) of translating the untranslatable. Drawing on the work of Barbara Cassin and Samuel Weber, among others, Apter expanded upon the concepts of translatability and untranslatability. Polemicizing with David Bellos, for whom everything is effable in translation, Apter argued for a notion of “the untranslatable” not in terms of “pure difference... but as a linguistic form of creative failure.” In closing her remarks, Apter cited her book’s “potential contribution to forms of literary comparatism that recognize the importance of nontranslatability, mistranslation, incomparability, and untranslatability.”

The presentations were followed by a lively question-and-answer session and a reception so that the audience could celebrate the publication of these fascinating new works with the panelists. Videos of each of the panelists’ talks are available on the Comparative Literature department website as well as the Humanities Initiative website for anyone interested in hearing more from these amazing scholars.

Elizabeth Benninger is a second-year PhD student focusing on 19th and 20th century literatures in Spanish and Arabic. Agata Tumilowicz is a second-year PhD student in Comparative Literature. Her research focuses on Polish and French literature and theater as well as the intersection of art and politics in urban environments.

Emily Apter presented on the idea of translating the untranslatable.

Susan

by Jacques Lezra

Cries of dismay and disbelief have rung loudly through our floor. Susan Protheroe, who has held our small community together since 1997, is retiring. Susan has been Comparative Literature’s Department Administrator for seventeen years. She’s helped a succession of Chairs, Directors of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies, Graduate Administrators, graduate students and undergraduates to make things happen—calmly, carefully, happily, with an irresistible combination of efficiency, foresight and good nature. Susan has budgeted, accounted, designed posters, gathered, cared, counseled, guarded and eased things for us all these years. She was first to arrive at all our events, and the last to leave them—welcoming unbearable and bearable speakers, guests, helping to host prospective graduate student parties. She has overseen the more than 25 accounts and budgets of the department, and shepherded everything administrative through the NYU bureaucracy, including tenure, promotion, and tenure, the annual budget, and triggered the financial aid of all our grads, encouraged and supported undergraduate involvement in the department, scrounged for elusive teaching positions for our grads, and arranged the Comp Lit summer session. She leaves us for a spawing kind of vacation where she will enjoy beach, sun and pleasant weather far from the stress and madness of 19 University Place. We won’t be the same without her—she’s made NYU Comp Lit more than anyone else. Bidding her ‘Bon voyage!’ is sweet and bitter—she’ll have great, restful times, but we will sorely miss her. Susan, fair winds to you!

by Kristin Ross

We in Comparative Literature have always prided ourselves on the quality of our graduate program and the very positive impression it seems to have made on those outside the University, from prospective graduate students to distinguished faculty from other institutions. We all know that Susan Protheroe has done more than just enhance this impression—it is far more accurate to say that she is the cornerstone for a complex and dynamic web of faculty and student activity, a presence on whom we all rely for her integrity and expertise. She is also someone with whom one looks forward to consulting daily on all manner of issues, a friendly and intelligent colleague with a fabulous sense of humor and a much-appreciated sense of allegiance to the department.

Comparative Literature is a department made up of a core of full-time faculty and a majority of faculty with joint appointments in other departments. This fact, as well as our requirement that graduate students and undergraduates coordinate a curriculum with other departments (mostly the national literatures and, very often, substantial fields such as history, philosophy, women’s studies, and film) makes the work of curricular coordination extraordinarily complex. In addition, most of our graduate students are placed in TA-ships in other departments or in MAP. Aside from our own departmental procedures, Ms. Protheroe has had to familiarize herself with those of other departments as well as University regulations governing graduate student affairs to ensure the institutional viability of students’ intellectual ambitions and teaching possibilities and facilitate their progress within and between departments. She has done a matchless job and we all rely on her expertise as well as the strength of the contacts she has made throughout the University. Not surprisingly, this kind of maneuvering requires exceptional tact and intelligence so that our students’ interests can be promoted without disregarding the unique cultures all departments establish in the course of their operations.

That our graduate students, undergraduates, and faculty must also learn to work within and between departments makes the job of advising them one that requires a special degree of sensitivity, as well as the knowledge of departmental cultures I have alluded to. (continued on page 8)
Susan continued

In this regard, too, Ms. Protheroe has established herself as an irreplaceable resource and we have heard only praise of the effectiveness of her counsel and effectiveness from all three constituencies. It is worth noting that the ambience or make-up of Comparative Literature—our faculty, our graduate student body, and many of our undergraduates—is an international one, and that Ms. Protheroe’s coordination of the department often involves the problems that inevitably arise from this circumstance, ranging from visa and funding issues to more personal crises having to do with culture shock and difficulties finding a place in the University and larger communities.

Her professional integrity is never impaired by the compassionate service she has provided our students and faculty. Faculty graduate and undergraduate advisors must grapple with the difficulties of counseling students who work in several departments and national cultures simultaneously, and in this respect we, too, are the grateful recipients of Ms. Protheroe’s counsel.

Susan Protheroe and The Undergraduate Program
by Cristina Vatulescu, Tycho Horan & Guillian Piñon

Like most of us in Comparative Literature, the authors of this article often encounter each other, and the university at large, via Susan Protheroe. When serving as DUS, Cristina composed multiscreen emails bursting at the seams with deadlines, requirements, and more or less friendly reminders. But since these messages thankfully go to undergraduates well informed about events and opportunities within Comp Lit and from other departments, which students feel is tremendously favorable for their intellectual interests. For students as for faculty, Susan’s work has provided both a nodal center and the most human of interfaces connecting us to each other, to the university, and to the outside world: via her witty emails, via her voice on the phone, poised to solve any crisis at the hurried other end of the line, and via her creative posters. One of our consolations now that Susan is getting ready to retire to her Marina is that she is leaving us the seminar room chock full of the fabulous posters that she created for the events she helped organize through the years. A visual record of department history, the posters are a bit of a mirror stage prop, too. Through her posters, as through her indefatigable work and tactful presence, Susan has managed to make us look sharper and more together than we may have otherwise remembered ourselves.

Susan cares deeply for the students in ways that go above and beyond the call of duty. We owe a lot to Susan when it comes to one of our department’s great graduate achievements—the continuing existence of our high quality undergraduate journal Brio. She has motivated the students to embark on this ambitious and time-consuming journey and then to stay on course, by recruiting students, putting them in touch with previous magazine editors, and helping them with the logistics of running a literary journal. Besides encouraging their work for Brio, Susan has also empowered undergraduates by giving them the chance to write, edit, and produce our departmental newsletter, whose publication she oversees. As a result, students feel that Susan has constantly been a unique and friendly source, not only of connection, but also of encouragement for undergraduates, promoting their involvement in Comp Lit that is beneficial to their academic ambitions.

As we have rightly become accustomed to doing, before we exit the stage we want to thank Susan: for this newsletter, this kind of collaboration between undergraduates and faculty, and ultimately this kind of department, would not have been possible without her.

Susan Protheroe and The Undergraduate Program
by Cristina Vatulescu, Tycho Horan & Guillian Piñon

Graduate Student Awards 2012-2013 & 2013-2014

Sage Anderson: fellow in the Doctoral Program (Graduiertenkolleg) Lebensformen und Lebenswissen, directed jointly by the Universität Potsdam and the Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder).


Nienke Boer: 2012 GSAS Robert Holmes Travel/Research Award for African Scholarship


Ozen Nergis Dolcerocca: 2013 Dean’s Outstanding Teaching Award.

Brian Droitcour: 2012 GSAS summer predoctoral fellowship

Brian Droitcour & Cecilia Moss: Humanities Initiative Grant-in-Aid in support of event series “Program: Media & Literature”

Bilal Hashmi: 2014 Dean’s Dissertation Fellowship and the 2013 Anais Nin Fellowship

Daniel Howell: Summer 2012 FLAS Fellowship

Em Larsen: 2014 Center for Arabic Study Abroad Fellowship

Lucy Ives: 2013 Penfield Fellowship

Anastasiya Osipova: 2013 Dean’s Dissertation Fellowship

Sonia Werner: 2013-2014 Dean’s Outstanding Graduate Student Teaching Award in the Humanities

Alumni News

Dror Abend-David (PhD 2001) published an article titled “Shakespeare, Nicole Kidman and Contemporary Translation Theory” in Forum: International Journal of Interpretation and Translation and a book chapter titled “The Disintegration of the Box: Narrativity, Performance and Translation in Television Commercials.” His edited collection Media and Translation: An Interdisciplinary Approach is coming out in June 2014 with Bloomsbury Publishing. His biographical entry on Sholom Aleykhem came out in the Encyclopedia of Jewish Folklore, and he has been invited to submit entries on The Merchant of Venice and the Yiddish Theater to the Cambridge World Shakespeare Encyclopedia and The Shakespeare Encyclopedia. He has recently been invited to deliver a lecture at Trinity College in Dublin about Hebrew and Yiddish Translations of Shakespeare’s work, and received Course Development grant from the Center of European Studies at the University of Florida to create a new course in Yiddish language and culture.

Magali Armsillas-Tiseyra (PhD 2012) is currently an Assistant Prof at the University of Mississippi, and she will also be a Residential Fellow at the University of Pittsburgh Humanities Center next year (2014-2015).

Maria Blanco (PhD 2007) is currently a University Lecturer in Spanish American Literature and Santander Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford.

Michiel Bot (PhD 2013) is currently a Hannah Arendt Center postdoctoral fellow at Bard College.

Lori Cole (PhD 2012) has been the Charlotte Zysman Postdoctoral Fellow in the Humanities and a Lecturer in Fine Arts at Brandeis University.

Robyn Creswell (PhD 2011) is currently an Assistant Professor of Comparative Literature at Brown and the poetry editor of The Paris Review. He was awarded the 2013 Roger Shattuck Prize for Criticism.
**Emily Apter** *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (Verso Books, 2013)

In the place of “World Literature”—a dominant paradigm in the humanities, one grounded in market-driven notions of readabil-

ity and universal appeal—Apter proposes a plurality of “world literatures” oriented around philosophical concepts and geopoliti-

cal pressure points. The history and theory of the language that constructs World Literature is critically examined with a spe-

cial focus on Weltliteratur, literary world systems, narrative ecosystems, language borders and checkpoints, theologies of trans-

lation, and planetary devolution in a book set to revolutionize the discipline of comparative literature.

**Barbara Cassin**, editor; *Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood, translation editors* *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (Princeton University Press, 2014)

This is an encyclopedic dictionary of close to 400 important philosophical, literary, and political terms and concepts that defy easy—or any—translation from one language and culture to another. Drawn from more than a dozen languages, terms such as Dasein (German), pravda (Russian), saudade (Portuguese), and stato (Italian) are thoroughly examined in all their cross-

linguistic and cross-cultural complexities. Spanning the classical, medieval, early modern, modern, and contemporary periods,

these are terms that influence thinking across the humanities. The entries, written by more than 150 distinguished scholars,

describe the origins and meanings of each term, the history and context of its usage, its translations into other languages, and its

use in notable texts. The dictionary also includes essays on the special characteristics of particular languages—English, French,

German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

**Hala Halim** *Alexandrian Cosmopolitanism: An Archive* (Fordham University Press, 2013)

Halim presents a comparative study of literary representations, addressing poetry, fiction, guidebooks, and operettas, among

other genres. She reappraises three writers—C. P. Cavafy, E. M. Forster, and Lawrence Durrell—who she maintains have been cast as the canon of Alexandria. Attending to issues of genre, gender, ethnicity, and class, she refutes the view that these writ-

ers’ representations are largely congruent and uncovers a variety of positions ranging from Orientalist to anticolonial. The book

then turns to Bernard de Zogheb, a virtually unpublished writer, and elicits his camp parodies of elite Levantine mores in oper-

ettas, one of which centers on Cavafy. Drawing on Arabic critical and historical texts, as well as contemporary writers’ and

filmmakers’ engagement with the canonical triumvirate, Halim orchestrates an Egyptian dialogue with the European representa-

tions.

**Kristin Ross** *Translated into French, Rimbaud, la commune de Paris et l’invention de l’histoire spatiale* (Les Prairies Ordinaires, 2013)

Central to her analysis of the Commune as a social space and oppositional culture is a close textual reading of Arthur Rima-

bud’s poetry. His poems—a common thread running through the book—are one set of documents among many in Ross’s rec-

reation of the Communard experience. Rimbaud, Paul Lafargue, and the social geographer Élisée Reclus serve as emblematic

figures moving within and on the periphery of the Commune; in their resistance to the logic and economy of the capitalist con-

ception of work, in their challenge to work itself as a term of identity, all three posed a threat to the existing order. Ross looks

at these and other emancipatory notions as aspects of Communard life, each with an analogous strategy in Rimbaud’s poetry.

Applying contemporary theory, to a wealth of little-known archival material, she has written a fresh, persuasive, and original

book.


The mysterious quatrains of the sixteenth-century French astrologer Nostradamus have long proved captivating for their pre-

dictions. Nostradamus has been credited with anticipating the Great Fire of London, the rise of Adolf Hitler, and the September

11 terrorist attacks. Today, as the world grapples with financial meltdowns, global terrorism, and environmental disasters—as well as the Mayan prediction of the apocalypse on December 21, 2012—his prophecies of doom have assumed heightened rele-

vance.

How has The Prophecies outlasted most books from the Renaissance? This edition considers its legacy in terms of the poetics of the quatrains, published here in a brilliant new translation by Richard Sieburth and with introductory material and notes map-

ping the cultural, political, and historical forces that resonate throughout Nostradamus’s epic, giving it its visionary power.

**Cristina Vatulescu** *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times* (Stanford University Press, 2013)

The documents emerging from the secret police archives of the former Soviet bloc have caused scandal after scandal, compro-

mising revered cultural figures and abruptly ending political careers. Police Aesthetics offers a revealing and responsible approach to such materials. Taking advantage of the partial opening of the secret police archives in Russia and Romania, Vatulescu focuses on their most infamous holdings—the personal files—as well as on movies the police sponsored, scripted, or authored.

Through the archives, she gains new insights into the writing of literature and raises new questions about the ethics of reading. She shows how police files and films influenced literature and cinema, from autobiographies to novels, from high-culture classics to avant-garde experiments and popular blockbusters. In so doing, she opens a fresh chapter in the heated debate about the relationship between culture and politics in twentieth-century police states.