

# Comparative Literature Newsletter

## Notes from the Chair



Charles Ross, Director

It has been a busy couple of years since the last newsletter. Comparative Literature continues its traditional mission, providing a liaison between the departments English and Foreign Languages and Literatures.

In these pages we're going to highlight the dissertations that our students have produced. Many centered on relatively recent literature and feminist criticism, but that doesn't mean we haven't been elsewhere in the world. We have worked hard at co-sponsoring talks and events and look forward to more participation with History, Philosophy, and Visual and Performing Arts.

I've been at Purdue for thirty-two years now, enough time to lose my youthful glow and start to worry about things. Is there a vast conspiracy, I sometimes wonder, hiding the good things? I managed to get through college without reading Hemingway, a crime in itself. Robert Ringel, an audiologist and from Provost of Purdue University under President Beering, believed that a university cannot be truly great without the great liberal arts program. Today students are told to volunteer. They are told to be leaders (over 800 of them at last count, one for each student organization. RAA.) They are given one book to read. But there are hundreds to read, a whole world of understanding. There is nothing wrong with spending time, lots of it, alone with a book.

I was recently reading Nuala O'Faolain's autobiography *Are You Somebody?* where she, an Irish woman, recalls how reading gave her life a purpose:

When I was a teacher I had to avoid quoting something because they moved me so deeply I was afraid I'd cry in front of the students. The big speeches in *King Lear* did that, and the end of *The Tempest*. And "Death be not proud," and "So we'll go no more a-roving." And Keats's wonderful letters. I think classic literature is deservedly so-called. I might never had read *Phèdre* or "Dejection: An Ode" or *Samson Agonistes* or *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* or Pope or Hopkins or Ben Jonson but that there were prescribed 'texts.' I don't have

any objection to the art made by dead white males. Far from it: The thought that I might have missed this literature—that I might have been born later, when it was decided it was too difficult for young people—fills me with horror. I never think of gender when I'm reading. If questions about it force themselves on me, I have to come out of reading, into this world.

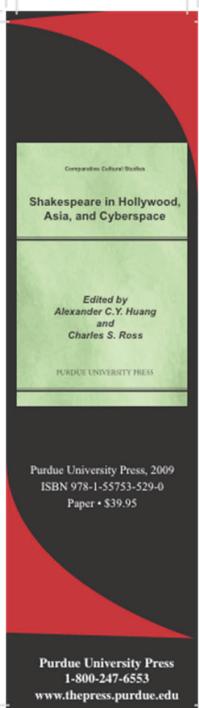
As Vladimir Nabokov liked to say, we need both the passion of science and the precision of poetry.

Charles Ross  
Director, Comparative Literature Program



Peirui Su on the Great Wall, Summer 2009

## Comparative Literature Publications



***Shakespeare in Asia, Hollywood, and Cyberspace,*  
edited by Alexander C. Y. Huang and Charles  
Ross.**

This collection of essays features papers written for World Shakespeare on Film, a Purdue University Comparative Literature seminar given in 2002 to which have been added contributions from around the world, collected by Alex Huang of Pennsylvania State University, which discuss Shakespeare in Japan, China, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaya, and Okinawa. It includes essays by top Shakespeare scholars such as David Bevington of the University of Chicago, Peter Holland of Notre Dame University, John Burt of the University of Florida, Christy Desmet and Sujata Iyengar of the University of Georgia, Elizabeth Wichmann-Walczak of the University of Hawaii, and Masae Suzuki of Kyoto Sangyo University, Japan. Topics range from Beijing Opera to on-line video games.

"Alex Huang and Charles Ross have produced a superb and illuminating collection, highly original in its understanding of the cultural flows connecting Hollywood and Asia in the digital age. Asian Shakespeare productions are now among the most compelling in the world and are rapidly changing the paradigms of global culture. Fascinating, erudite, and methodologically diverse, the essays in *Shakespeare in Asia, and Cyberspace* are an essential guide to immense changes."

Peter Donaldson, MIT, author of *Shakespearean Films / Shakespearean Directors*



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## Spotlight on Martina Jauch

In this newsletter we want to salute Martina Jauch for serving as social chairman for Comparative Literature. Among other jobs, including acting as liaison to Classics, Martina organized week lunches for graduates and, for the first time, undergraduate majors.



The monthly lunches: Peirui Su, Liang Lu and Ying Liang.



Martina helping publicize Comparative Literature at the President's Council.



More monthly lunches: Angelica Duran and Howard Mancing.

## Comparative Literature Events



Professor Jing Tsu

In March 2008, Professor Weiwei Song, in conjunction with Asian Studies, organized a talk by Professor Jing Tsu of Yale University Titled "Sound and Script in Modern Chinese Literature."



Professor Andrew Plaks

On February 23, 2009, Andrew H. Plaks, Professor Emeritus of East Asian Studies and Comparative Literature, Princeton University, spoke on "Hongloumeng (Dream of the Red Chamber) and the 'Qishu' Genre of Classic Chinese Fiction."



Steven Ritz-Barr and the Faust &amp; Literatures.

On February 23, 2009, Steven Ritz-Barr, a film producer and puppet artist from Los Angeles, showed the puppets and the film titled "Faust" in which they starred. Professor Beate Allert organized the event with the help of the German section of Foreign Languages



Dinner at Blue Nile before

On March 12, 2009, Peter W. Rose of Ohio University spoke on "Rhetoric and Imperialism: Athenians Debate Empire and Democracy in the Case of Mytilene," in a program sponsored by the Classical Studies Program.

On Friday, April 17, 2009, Comparative Literature organized a bus of 40 people to see Shakespeare's *The Tempest* at the Steppenwolf Company in Chicago, after seeing the play performed as a study in colonialism, thanks to Kristina Bross and the Purdue Theater department.

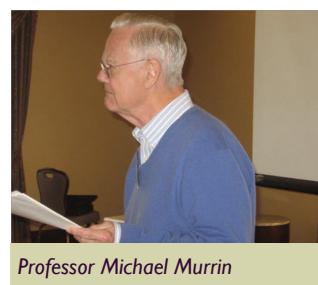


Professor Clark Muenzer

Professor Clark Muenzer spoke at the West Lafayette Public Library on October 16, 2009 on "Forms of Figuration in *Faust*: A Kantian Reading of Goethe."

Comparative Literature thanks the IDIS Classical Studies Program for organizing two interesting lectures we attended: Gregson Davis of Duke University spoke on "The Reception of Vergil's *Bucolics*: Nationhood and Ethnic Inclusion in the Age of Obama," on October 22, 2009, and Huang Yang, Professor of Classics at Beijing University, on "Ancient Greek Democracy from a Chinese Perspective," on October 27, 2009.

At this year's Renaissance Comparative Prose Conference, sponsored by the Comparative Literature Program, approximately 20 former students gathered and gave papers to honor Professor Michael Murrin of the University of Chicago, who



Professor Michael Murrin



Professor James Nohrnberg poses with Queen Elizabeth on Roanoke Island, Virginia.

spoke on "Tamburlaine Part I, Faerie Queene Book I, and the English Search for Asian Silk," and Professor James Nohrnberg of the University of Virginia who spoke on "The Mystical Method in Simile, Saga, Verse, and Prose."



Dr. Sahu with Ed Plough, Paul White and Charles Ross..

## Recent Dissertations and Graduates

### Anna Fluegge

In December 2008, Anna Fluegge, an exchange student from Germany who studied comparative literature at Purdue during the 2006-2007 academic year, defended her dissertation "James Ellroy and the Novel of Obsession" at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg. In order to create a context for the work of James Ellroy, the dissertation defines a new genre it calls the novel of obsession. The first chapter defines genre and discusses the formation of genres in fiction. Subsequent chapters illustrate its simple and complex forms by analyzing Nathaniel West's *Miss Lonelyhearts*, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, and Don DeLillo's *White Noise* before turning to the complete oeuvre of James Ellroy, the prolific American writer whose first novel, *Brown's Requiem*, appeared in 1981 and include *The Black Dahlia* (1987) and *L.A. Confidential* (1990), *White Jazz* (1992), and *The Cold Six Thousand* (2001). Anna is currently teaching at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, Germany.



### Lei Jin

During the summer of 2009, Lei Jin defended her dissertation titled "Gardens of Good and Evil: Pu Songling's (1640-1715) Supernatural Stories and Edgar Allan Poe's (1809-1849) Gothic Tales." Her major professor was Daniel Hsieh. Committee members were Charles Ross, Robert Lamb, and G. Richard Thompson. Her dissertation compares the garden as imagined in the Western literary tradition and compares it to images of gardens in Chinese literature. Considerable attention is given to the gardens and nature in the Six Dynasties' *zhiguai* stories and Tang *chuanqi* tales. The dissertation then examines the garden images depicted in Pu Songling's supernatural stories and Edgar Allan Poe's Gothic tales. Pu Songling uses the garden as a significant site from which to explore the intellectual issues of the time, literary talent, and self-identity. He dissolves the boundaries between normal and abnormal, reality and the ideal, reality and illusion, death and life, and order and disorder. Poe's poetic visions—dreamscape, Gothic landscape, and the paradisiacal landscape garden—are two complementary parts of the author's vision of the universe and man's relationship with nature, which projects his concern, frustration, and hope as a poet of dark Romanticism. Lei Jin is currently assistant professor at Charleston College, Charleston, South Carolina.



### Ying Liang

On July, 2008, Ying Liang defended her dissertation titled "An Imaginary Land of Women: A Comparative Study of Modern (eighteenth to early twentieth century) Chinese and American Feminist Utopian Fictions." The dissertation argues that feminist utopias move from gender segregation to blurring gender differences; from utilizing the utopian impulse to intertwining it with extensive social critique and the dystopian; from projecting possible futures to rewriting concrete realm of the present; from a vision of a world of women only, the separatist trend, and an absolute female power to a vision of a larger world of humanity—a state "beyond women." The texts Ying worked with include some of the most well known and important:

Cao Xueqin 曹雪芹 and Gao E 高鄂 's *The Story of the Stone* (*Hong Lou Meng* 红楼梦) (eighteenth century); Li Ruzhen 李汝珍 's *Flowers in the Mirror* (*Jing Hua Yuan* 镜花缘) (1828); Sarah Orne Jewett's *The County of Pointed Firs* (1896); and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915). These texts in particular portray a fictive land of women or even an exclusively female society, which experiences a complete reversal of patriarchy. Ying is currently teaching literature and English in Beijing and living with her husband and son Brandon.

## Recent Dissertations and Graduates (*continued*)

### Tetyana Lyaskovets

On April 7, 2009, Tetyana defended her dissertation "Visualizing Temporality: Visual and Temporal Structures in Bely, Nabokov, Resnais, and Robbe-Grillet." The dissertation begins by treating the philosophical problem of time in the work of Henri Bergson, who won the Nobel Prize. Chapter One looks at Bergson's book *Creative Evolution*, where he refers to our habit of thinking about the experience of time in terms of images like clocks as spatialized time. Chapter Two argues that twentieth-century narratives go beyond Bergson, however, in ways that are clarified by the thinking of Gilles Deleuze on time. Deleuze defines time as the collapse of the false and the real and creates the concept of the crystal image to represent this phenomenon. Chapter Three argues that the source of Bely's practice can be found in the writings of Bely's contemporary Pavel Florensky. Florensky synthesizes intellectual reasoning, knowledge of optics, and historical experience to transcend the boundaries of disciplines in order to come closer to an ultimate answer. Nabokov's short novella *The Eye* (1930) is the subject of Chapter Four, which argues that Nabokov's story shows how personal time is experienced as the interpenetration of the real and the imaginary, of the subject and the object. The story of a man who watches his own life as a ghost depends on images that the characters keep perceiving and conjuring through their internal vision. Chapter Five looks at Nabokov's more complex novel *Despair* (1937), in which the question of time and its irreversibility culminates with despair—the exact word that the first-person narrator Hermann's uses to express his inability correct the fatal mistakes in his plot to murder his misperceived double. The final chapter, "Mental Time in Resnais' *Last Year at Marienbad*," shows how this avant-gard film, from a script by Alain Robbe-Grillet, can be explained as the continuous evocation of spatiality caused by repetitions, returns, and stationary shots that interrogate chronological time that passes and erode the feeling of inevitability that comes with it. The *nouveau roman* as practiced by Robbe-Grillet makes powerful use of Deleuze's concept of crystal-images. The dissertation concludes that by interrogating time and visuality, these artists presented a truly humanistic attitude towards the world around us, a freedom to remain untouched and imaginative. In 2010 Tetyana will be going to the Ruhr-Universität Bochum in Germany after she finishes a year as an adjunct instructor at Purdue.



### Yoshiko Matsuura

In Fall 2009, Yoshiko Matsuura successfully defended her dissertation, "Behind the Mask: Rereading Tachihara Masaaki's Literary Works from Postcolonial Perspectives." The purpose of the present dissertation is to study literary works by writers who have Korean heritage, Yuasa Katsue, Jewish American writers and other postcolonial writers and to question the ubiquitous tendency to integrate a people, their language, and their culture into one entity. The writer primarily studies Tachihara Masaaki in contrast with the aforementioned writers by employing two theoretical concepts, hybridity and mimicry. Since these concepts are intricately intertwined in identity and language, they must be studied both individually and synergistically. "Hybridity" has become an integral concept in postcolonial work; a substantial number of studies have been completed. Some critics positively evaluate hybridity, while some other critics focus on its weaknesses. In the present dissertation, the two contrasting approaches are studied thoroughly. One approach, which indicates that hybridity has the potential to deconstruct a colonizer's hegemony, tends to focus on explicit "minority-ness" in hybridized literary texts; such as, a minor language. In spite of evaluating hybridity as a strategy, few studies focus on unmarked "minority-ness." The other approach depreciates hybridity because of its universalism, indeterminacy, and lack of autonomy. The dissertation closely shows implicit "minority-ness" in minor texts and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of hybridity. In addition to hybridity, mimicry is discussed as a main topic in the dissertation. Tachihara followed Japanese medieval tradition and mimicked canonical modern works. Many readers regard his replicas as reconstructions of pure Japanese tradition; in fact, Tachihara's replicas deviate from their models. Most critics believe Tachihara's ethnic myth—his parents are half Japanese and half Korean—and imagine that Tachihara suffered from his ambiguous position and made strenuous efforts to pursue Japanese tradition. This dissertation questions conventional criticism and examines the impact of Tachihara's mimicry on the reader and on the literary mainstream.

## Recent Dissertations and Graduates (*continued*)

### Lindsey Milkert

Lindsay Milkert came to Purdue from the Air Force academy and finished her MA in one year. Her M.A. thesis "Coping with the Memory of Violence: The Poetry of World War I, Vietnam, and Afghanistan" combines broad historical context with a specific, detailed reading of Russian poetry written by Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan. It won the prize for the best MA thesis in the College of Liberal Arts in 2008 and was also nominated for the Midwestern Association of Graduate Schools 2009 Distinguished Thesis Award



### Xianfeng Mou

On February 17, 2009, Xianfeng Mou defended her dissertation "One Hundred Years of Solitary Light: Rites of Passage for Modern American and Chinese Women Writers, 1899-1996." Her committee members were Charles Ross, Shaun Hughes, Robert Lamb, and Daniel Hsieh. Chinese women writers belatedly experienced what American women writers endured up till the 1940s, not because they used the American writers as role models, but because women writers in both countries shared cross-cultural similarities over the three historical phases. To

show this Xianfeng chose three American women writers—Kate Chopin (1850-1904), Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), and Eudora Welty (1909-2001)—who together represent three historical phases in the development of American women writers: the alienated woman artist at the turn of the twentieth century; the outspoken woman narrator in her loud communal voice in the 1930s; and the confident but elusive woman artist hiding behind her stories in the 1940s. Their Chinese counterparts are Su Qing (1917-1982), Zhang Jie (b. 1937), and Wang Anyi (b. 1954), who manifest similar trends in their historical development: the alienated and comic woman artist (in 1940s China); the outspoken woman narrator in her communal voice (in late 1970s China); and the confident but marginalized, absent woman narrator (late 1990s China). During the course of her dissertation, Xianfeng shows how her six chosen writers depict female characters who make choices and overcome difficulties in their lives. She argues that the respective authors' choices obliquely reflect their own attitudes, because each author creates female characters that fulfill some function of the women artists themselves.

### José Newton de Seixas Pereira Filho

In November 2008, José defended his dissertation "The Non-Violent and Violent Mimetic Desires of Street Orphan Characters in Anglo-American and Luso-Brazilian Literatures." The dissertation looks at how selected Anglo-American and Luso-Brazilian authors use fictions of non-violence and violence to create myths of "ambition and success" and "struggle and failure" in the world of street orphans. In Anglo-American novels such as Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* or *Street Life in New York with the Bootblacks*, Theresa Nelson's *Beggar's Ride*, and Sherman Alexie's *Flight*, the main characters (Oliver Twist, Ragged Dick, Clare Caldwell, and Zits) have different desires, leading them to respond positively to the outcast. They are mostly looking for life with happy endings. Their desires for family, work, love, and ethnicity are optimistic in terms of constructing self-identities or self-citizenships. By contrast, in Luso-Brazilian novels such as Jorge Amados' *Captains of the Sand*, Soeiro Pereira Gomes' *Esteiros*, José Louzeiro's *Pixote: infância dos mortos*, and Paulo Lins' *City of God*, the main characters (Bullet, Gineto, Dito, and Miúdo) grow progressively violent. These street orphans who are not taken seriously when they fight for survival. They struggle and fail and are punished by society. José is currently head of the Department of Foreign Languages in The Federal University of Bahia, Brazil.



## Recent Dissertations and Graduates (*continued*)

### **Chao-mei Tu**

In the summer of 2008 Chao-Mei Tu defended her dissertation titled "Historical narrative in fiction: A cross-cultural exploration of contemporary American and Chinese fiction by women writers." Her committee members were Patrocinio Schweikart, Aparajita Sagar, Daniel Hsieh, and Charles Ross. This study examines the fusion of historical and fictional narratives in six postmodern novels written by American and Chinese woman writers, published in the last decade of the twentieth century or the first decade of the twenty-first century. A common motif that runs through the six novels is "the historian at work." Through their portraits of characters as historians perusing historical archives--not accidentally they are conventional historical writing seeks to undermine in the neutral, scientific, language of historical writing. Each pair of writers provides a glimpse into other issues involved in historical writing and its fusion with novelistic discourse. Chapter one examines Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1997) and Liu Suola's *The Stories of the Ji Family* (2003) to analyze the infiltration of myth into history. Chapter two discusses Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) and Shi Shu-qing's *Hong Kong Trilogy* (1992, 1995, 1997). Chapter three analyzes Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Fifth Book of Peace* (2003) and Wang Anyi's *Reality and Fiction* (1993).



### **Dong-mei Xu**

On July 11, 2008, Dong-mei Xu defended her dissertation titled "Heroines of the Everlasting Tales: A Comparative Study." Her committee members were Shaun Hughes (chair), Dorsey Armonstrong, Charles Ross, and Daniel Hsieh. In both Old English and Classical Chinese poetry, the so-called wed-for-peace princess and the peace-weaver, terms that are drawn from the historical practice of cementing peaceful relationship through marriages, have been commonly taken as epithets for a certain group of women which enforce the uniformly tragic image of such women and have formed the basis for their perception as passive and peripheral figures. This project compares the representations of women in such situations in the two literary contexts, and argues that the tragic coloring of peace marriage women, which in both is grounded in the prejudice against women's traditional role-playing in the society, underplays the importance of their individuality and agency. Dong-Mei is currently an assistant professor in the Department of English at Wai Jiao Xue Yuan 外交学院 ("China Foreign Affairs University"), Beijing, China. <<http://www.cfau.edu.cn/>>

## Visiting Scholar

From January through May 2009 we were honored to host a visit by Professor Qin Xu (Daniel), Deputy Dean of the School of Foreign Languages at Yangzhou University and Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature. While at Purdue he completed a project on the literary theorist J. Hillis Miller.



Daniel had a number of adventures while in America. When the Arnett Clinic sent him to the Lafayette Imaging Center (to diagnose a throat condition), Daniel pretended he was in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* as he hiked along side the busy traffic of State Road 52 all the way to the other side of town. A few weeks later Daniel and I flew to Cambridge, Massachusetts, for the American Comparative Literature Association meeting. Boston was beautiful and we agreed to meet there again in ten years. We drank some *pjо* at Indiana Beach and a little more at a bar in Brookston. *Gan bei!*

--Charlie Ross

## Charlie in China



I had the good fortune to visit mainland China for the first time. Professor Nie Zhenzhao invited me to speak at Central China University in Hunan, Hubei Province. (Our last newsletter incorrectly said he taught at Beijing University.) Hunan is about 500 miles up the Yangzte River, in the center of China. The single thing that stands out for me was an exhibit at the local museum. There was a real bronze sword in a glass case and a model of the copper mines that produced the metal ca. 500 B.C., which the area was the center of Chinese culture. Confucius lived there. But so did the warlord who mined the copper to arm thousands of soldiers. At Central China University I spoke on "The Taming of the Shrew and the Heiress Protection Statute" to a crowded and very hot theater. It was my first experience with a simultaneous translator and the first time I said anything in Chinese to an audience ("That's is my wife over there"). Professor Nie also arranged several other lectures for me, including: "Understanding Juliet,"

Shanghai Normal University, P. R. China., where my host was Dean Cai Longquan 蔡龙权, a most interesting man. When I told him my Spenser seminar was looking at ecocriticism, he assured me the approach was sound, even though Spenser wrote *The Faerie Queene* five hundred years ago, because Spenser was a poet, and therefore naturally thought about the environment. Yin Cong and her family came to see us while we were in Shanghai.

I also went to Ningbo, a few hours south of Shanghai, first to talk on "The Use of Horses in Shakespeare on Film" at a Shakespeare Conference at the University of Nottingham—Ningbo, and then again to give a keynote address "From Asia by Sea: Marco Polo, Boiardo, and the First Western Fantasy of the Chinese Maritime," at the Maritime Literature conference at Ningbo University. I believe it was the first talk ever on Boiardo on the People's Republic, just as last year I gave the first talk ever on Boiardo in Taiwan.



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