Comp Lit Newsletter
Spring 2026

It's breathtakingly cold as I write this, but the sun is shining (very brightly upon the mountains of snow) and, when I step outside, I can hear birdsong—a reminder that our hemisphere is gradually angling back towards the light. This has been a difficult time for so many of us—a dark winter in more ways than one. Yet our work matters more now than ever. One of the best things about Comparative Literature is that our studies teach us to look outside of ourselves, to adopt new perspectives, and to find connections across languages, cultures, geographies, and history. As the days lengthen, let's hope that this good work continues to bear fruit and fosters deeper mutual understanding in a time when such understanding sometimes seems to be simply beyond reach. Our discipline stands as a testimony to the ability to reach across borders and to the vital necessity of meeting the world with openness and curiosity.

And we have much to celebrate: great classes, wonderful students, and a slate of exciting events (with more to come). I'm also happy to pass along a host of accomplishments by our students and faculty. Please note, however, that nearly all faculty and student news was self-reported. If we missed anything, send it to me at jbarr@umass.edu for inclusion in our next newsletter (Fall 2026). Your successes make us all look good, so be sure to share them!

Events:

Thursday, February 12, 2-3 pm, 3rd floor lobby of Herter Hall
Comp Lit Coffee Hour
Stop by for a snack, a warm drink, and to say hello!

Monday, February 23, 5 pm, Herter 301
"French Perspectives on Polish Cinema: An Evening with Joël Chapron and Emmanuel Burdeau"
French film critics Joël Chapron and Emmanuel Burdeau will give talks about their engagement with Polish cinema. The talks will be followed by a discussion, moderated by Jeremi Szaniawski, during which the audience can ask Chapron and Burdeau about their work, including in the areas of translation, programming, journalism, and film criticism. Refreshments will be served.

Thursday-Saturday, March 19-21, Campus Center and South College
Medieval Academy of America Annual Meeting
This conference, hosted in 2026 by the Five Colleges, brings together 150 speakers from around the globe on all aspects of medieval studies. We are actively seeking **volunteers** for this event—email jbarr@umass.edu if you're interested in helping out.

***mOthertongue* Submission Deadline: March 23!**
Submit translated literary works and works of visual art to mothertongueliterary@gmail.com.

Monday, March 30, 2-3 pm, 3rd floor lobby of Herter Hall
Comp Lit Coffee Hour
Take a break from midterms with refreshments and pleasant comparatist company.

Tuesday, April 8; details TBA
A conversation with Melissa Mendez, author of the graphic memoir "The Weight." Hampshire College graduate graphic novelist Melissa Mendes will address Christopher Couch's Introduction to the Graphic Novel course, talking about her new book *The Weight* (Drawn & Quarterly, Montreal 2025). A Western Mass native, Mendes graduated from Hampshire in 2002 and received an MFA in 2010 from the Center for Cartoon Studies, White River Junction, VT. Her first book, *Freddie Stories* (2010), was self-published with support from the Xeric Foundation, a nonprofit agency founded by Peter Laird (UMass BFA 1996), co-creator of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, to support independent comics creators. *The Weight* appeared on many graphic novel best-of lists for 2025, including *The Guardian* UK, *Washington Post, Forbes,* and *The Comics Journal.*

Friday and Saturday, April 10–11
Crossroads Conference
The eighth edition of *Crossroads*, the graduate student conference of the Program of Comparative Literature at UMass Amherst, is taking place on April 10–11, 2026 and features a keynote lecture by John Hawkes Professor of Humanities and English, Dr. Leela Gandhi. The conference will tentatively be held in Herter 301 and 601. This year's theme is "Alterity and the Comparative Imagination," inviting students to explore ethical, theoretical, and literary engagements with alterity in comparative practices. Open to the public.

April 15 or 16; details TBD
Iman Humaydan and translator Michelle Hartman
International Prize for Arabic Fiction winner Iman Humaydan will discuss her book *Songs for Darkness*, with translator Michelle Hartman.

Saturday, April 18; details TBD
Art and Ice Cream field trip for undergrads
This is still in the works—but stay tuned!

Wednesday, April 29, 5-6:30 pm, location TBD
***mOthertongue* Launch Party**
Celebrate the release of this year's issue of *mOthertongue*! Featuring a guest speaker, readings by contributors, and refreshments. More information to follow.

Undergraduate News:

Dex Veitch had poetry published in *The Scribe* and will be presenting his video essay, *Mon Orphée, Réincarné*, at the Five College Film and Media Studies Undergraduate Conference at Smith College on February 21st. Dex was also named among the "Emerging Voices of Videographic Criticism" by BFI's Sight and Sound list of 2025's top video essays (congratulations, Dex!).

Dex and **Mia Ikeda** are the Comp Lit Ambassadors for this year. Our *mOthertongue* editorial team was also recently convened: **Marissa Bell** (editor-in-chief), **Kylie Chamberlin**, **Ondine Napoles deCaussin**, and **Karin Suzuki**.

Graduate Student News:

Selma Asotić has been selected for the Friederike Mayrocker Residency in Vienna, hosted by Literaturhaus Wien. Only 5 residencies are awarded each year. The official announcement is here: https://www.literaturhaus-wien.at/programm/mayroecker-residence/residency-gaeste-2026/. Selma's work was also featured in LitHub and Tenement Press. She recently read her poetry at the New York jazz bar Ornithology (January 31) and has another reading in Boston, at Brookline Booksmith, on April 30.

Chamini Abesiriwardhane Kulathunga was awarded a Summer Research Award by the UMass College of Humanities and Fine Arts in 2025, and she was invited to present her research at the HFA Graduate Student Spotlight Event in November. Further, Chamini was recognized for teaching the course "Spiritual Autobiography" at the event "Guru Vandana: Celebrating Educators who Have Made a Lasting Impact on their Students," organized by UMass-Amherst Hindu YUVA student organization, also in November.

Genny Dorgan presented a talk, "Amor vincit omnia: Literarischer Stil der Dialoge in der Lux divinitatis im Vergleich mit dem ›Fließenden Licht‹ Mechthilds von Magdeburg," at a Forschungskolloquium at the University of Freiburg in January. Her trip to Germany also included examining several manuscripts and was supported by the competitive Hope Emily Allen Dissertation Grant from the Medieval Academy of America. Genny also presented "Mechthild of Magdeburg Beyond Binaries: Post-Structuralism, Trans Theory, and *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*" at the German Studies Association conference in September. Finally, Genny worked on an upcoming exhibition at SCUA (see Abby's update, below).

Nefeli Forni Zervoudaki will defend her dissertation, "Migrant Junctions: Nomospheric Investigations of Dancefloors in Narrative," on Monday, March 23. And **Rafael Freire** will defend *his* dissertation, "Tropical Truths: A Literary History of Brazilian Popular Music," later that same week. Huge congratulations on reaching this milestone, Nefeli and Rafael!

Abby Klug will be presenting a paper entitled "Marian Mediation: The Virgin Mary in Pierpont Morgan Library MS M.450" at the Medieval Academy of America Annual Meeting in March. Along with Genny Dorgan and Professor Sonja Drimmer, she has also worked on the upcoming exhibition "Confluences: Medieval Manuscript and Early Print at UMass Amherst," which will be displayed at the UMass Special Collections for the MAA Annual Meeting and spring semester. Be sure to stop by and check it out.

Kiley Karlak ("Kit") Malloy had a poem published in the 10th edition of the anthology *Beyond Queer Words*. The piece, entitled "Rimbaud" and about shooting your lover, is one that she wrote when she was seventeen. Kit says: stop sending your work out!

Ilse Meiler will present a paper entitled "Imagining the Unimaginable: Drought in Early 20th-c. Writing by Roumain, Platanov, and Rulfo" at the American Comparative Literature Association meeting in February. Her paper will be part of a panel entitled "Climate Fictions Before Climate Change." In addition, Ilse had a translated article appear in issue 4 of *Encounters in translation* in December; this was a translation from Spanish and Catalan into English of a round-table discussion entitled "Debate on Walter Benjamin and Translation," which she completed with co-translator

Pablo Arenas Filardi from the Spanish and Portuguese Program. Ilse also has two poems translated from German, Stefanie-Lahya Aukongo's "When I came to Germany" ("Wann ich nach Deutschland kam") and "From Searching and Finding" ("Vom Suchen und Finden"), slated to appear in the summer issue of *The Massachusetts Review.*

Carlotta Mele will present a paper entitled "Queering Space in Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, *Parable of the Talents*, and *Bloodchild*" at the 2026 meeting of the American Comparative Literature Association on February 27. This paper will be part of the session "Queering the Anthropocene: Radical Ecocritical Perspectives on the End of the World in Global Literature and Media."

Chinmay Pandharipande delivered an online talk at the Centre for Comparative Literature at Visva-Bharati University, West Bengal, India in January. The talk was entitled, "Some Observations on Manga: Genre and the Subculture Community." In addition, through the collective that Chinmay co-founded (Comparatists in Conversation), Chinmay co-hosted an online three-day literary historiography workshop entitled "Literary Historiographies: A Workshop." The workshop was on the 27th, 28th, and 29th of December. The link to the program schedule and concept note can be found here: https://www.comparatistsinconversation.com/general-8

Yan Wu will present a paper, "From Angel Island to Chinatown: The Interpreter as the Hinge of Hospitality," at the American Translation and Interpreting Studies Association (ATISA) 2026 Conference, to be held in April at State University of New York at New Paltz.

Faculty News:

Jessica Barr's new book, *Medieval Holy Women and the Desire for Death*, was published in February (official release date—February 15) by the University of Notre Dame Press. She will be discussing this book at the "New Scholarship" session of the Meeting of the Medieval Academy of America.

Nahla Khalil will present a paper entitled "Gaza Narrates Its Own Story: Passage through Trauma" at the European Association for Modern Arabic Literature at St Andrews University, Scotland in June 2026. Nahla is also co-organizing the New England Arabic Teachers Council conference, which will take place at Harvard University in May 2026.

Barry Spence recently published an article, "Juxtaposition Through Sundering: Beckett's Exilic Body," in *Skenè: Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies* 11.2 (2025): 95-120.

Corine Tachtiris will present a paper at "Creative Translation in the Age of AI," the PETRA-E conference hosted by the British Centre for Literary Translation at the University of East Anglia in the UK in May.