



# Comparative Literature Program Graduate Master's Essay Presentations

Thursday, May 21, 2020

Panel I : 3 PM - 4:50 PM

Panel II : 5 PM - 6:30 PM



Left to right front: Antonio Gómez, Yixuan Shi, Michaela Jordan, Annabel Jankovic  
Back row left to right: Diego Fleitas, Michel Klante, Sage Engberg Missing: Cherrie Kandie



**PANEL I 3:00 PM-4:50 PM**

3:00 pm: Introduction: Klaus Mladek

3:05 pm: Moderator: Diego G. Fleitas

3:10 pm: Sage E. Engberg

Hideous Men in the Age of #metoo: On David Foster Wallace, Puig, and the Specter of Misogyny

3:35 pm: Cherrie A. Kandie

Kejeli-ed African Statehood: Back to Africa High on Vibranium

4:00 pm : Yixuan Shi

Riprap of Things: Allures and Ethical Stakes of Visual Reading

4:25 pm: Annabel M. Jankovic

‘Two commas with no words, at last, to keep you apart’:

Trauma-Induced Convergence of Self and Other in Ru and On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous

**4:50-5:00: Break**



**Sage E. Engberg**

***Hideous Men* in the age of #metoo: On David Foster Wallace, Puig, and the specter of misogyny**

Among David Foster Wallace's global influences examined in Lucas Thompson's 2016 monograph, was the work of Manuel Puig. Thompson argued that this influence stemmed from a depoliticized, purely stylistic reading. Despite their differing cultural contexts, both Wallace and Puig explored some similar political concerns in their fiction, particularly those embedded within patriarchal structures. By evaluating how Puig's style evinced his treatment of gender, I draw a connection to Wallace's use of similar devices to explore comparable concerns in *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*. As Wallace's interaction with masculinity and misogyny is increasingly scrutinized in the wake of #metoo, and his author figure is taken as shorthand for "male genius", this collection calls for renewed attention. Examining Puig's influence on Wallace as more than a stylistic solution, but additionally, in terms of how each author grappled with gender, expands the reading of *Brief Interviews*. Both authors depict a world in which commercialization and popular culture mediate reality and help to inscribe gender roles. Writing from early stages of the sexual revolution, Puig's portrayal of women bound by media and domestic roles reads as a gesture towards liberation. From his vantage, Wallace depicts the disconnect between sexual freedom and human connection, examining how questioning of sexual scripts has served to complicate gender relations, without necessarily ameliorating them. Moreover, *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* uses male-female sexual interactions as a lens through which to examine some of Wallace's fiction's most enduring concerns: the intersection of the contemporary epidemic of solipsism, fear of the Other, and loneliness, and the resultant difficulties facing interpersonal communication. His marked men are used as models to speak to a generalized sense of loneliness, erasing the specificity of gendered concerns. In examining how Puig and Wallace differ in portraying characters profoundly affected by their situation in a patriarchal structure, I hope to shed light on how the directionality of empathy in Wallace's work intersects with the female backlash to his status as masculine icon.

**Advisors:**

Patricia Stuelke, Assistant Professor of English

Rebecca Biron, Professor of Spanish and Comparative Literature



**Cherrie Kandie**

***Kejeli-ed African Statehood: Back to Africa High on Vibranium***

Frank B. Wilderson III, Dartmouth '78, makes the intriguing claim that, “Black emplotment is a catastrophe for narrative at a meta-level rather than a crisis or aporia within a particular narrative.” This claim is rooted in the school of Afropessimist theory that steers the essay through a comparison between the Kiswahili play *Kifo Kisimani* and the 2018 feature film *Black Panther*. Both these stories are set in fictional African nation-states. Taking up Homi Bhabha’s nation-as-narration frame, where the nation-state is meta-aporic, *kejeli* and vibranium are found to be the material mediums through which the respective narratives negotiate this meta-aporia. Each perform a distinct function: where *kejeli* diagnoses this meta-aporia, vibranium interacts with African and Afro-diasporic (politico-)aesthetics to remove it *a priori*. These distinct instrumentalizations result in distinct affects. Butangi, the fictional nation in *Kifo Kisimani*, is outrightly established to lack integrity. On the other hand, Wakanda, the fictional nation in *Black Panther*, is noble, sincere, and earnest. This affective distinction is produced through alternately positive and negative characterization.

**Advisors**

Jesse Shipley, Professor and Chair of African and African American Studies

Daniel Behar, Research Associate – Lecturer, Jewish Studies and Middle Eastern Studies



**Vivienne Yixuan Shi**

**Riprap of Things: Allures and Ethical Stakes of Visual Reading**

Somehow a distinction between a “good reading” and “bad reading” makes sense if we read across languages and cultures, since we risk omitting the original context and interpreting things in a misinformed way. But can such a “bad reading”, superficially named so, be helpful to reaching the truth in cross-language reading? This essay addresses this question by discussing the visual stage of how a non-native speaker of Chinese reads a classical Chinese poem; that is, seeing a poem as an arrangement of visual elements, or fragmentation. Through a close examination of Gary Snyder’s “Riprap,” a prominent example of calculated fragmentation, it is evident that a “bad reading” can indeed be productive and loyal to truth. Meanwhile, this essay discusses the pleasure and ethical implication of choosing to read a foreign language in a visual stage, and the conflict between morals and aesthetics.

**Advisors**

Dennis Washburn, Professor of Asian Societies, Cultures and Languages, and Comparative Literature  
John Kulvicki, Associate Professor of Philosophy



**Annabel M. Jankovic**

**Two commas with no words, at last, to keep you apart': Trauma-induced convergence of self and other in 'Ru' and 'On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous**

My paper considers in tandem two voices: a child and grandchild of the war in Vietnam. Kim Thúy Ly Thanh's 2009 *Ru*, and Ocean Vuong's 2019 *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* - two auto-novels arising from the North American Vietnamese diaspora. *Ru* incarnates the fragmentation of displacement, arranged in a succession of non-linear vignettes, each scarcely longer than a page. It is a circuitous chronicle of the protagonist's passage from war-torn Vietnam to the "warm belly" of French-Canada. It is a pell-mell of time and space, a meditation on (physical, psychic, and spiritual) death and rebirth, equal parts pleasurable and harrowing, often both at the same time. *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* takes and warps the form of the epistolary novel. It is, explicitly, an address from a son - a writer by nature and by vocation - to an illiterate mother, rendering its mission, from the outset, futile. Written by a dyslexic-turned-poet, the novel is - increasingly over its course - hyper-aware of the pliability of language: of its pressure points, fatigues, and radical possibilities.

I suggest that, if ten years delayed, *On Earth* is an answer to *Ru*. Although not explicitly so, *Ru* can be read as a mother's address to her two young sons. *On Earth* "responds," so to speak, taking the form of a letter written from son to mother. It is my project's foremost purpose: to meditate on the texts' shared phenomenon, of trauma-induced *convergence*. Trauma - said to topple not only the boundaries of time and space, but of "self and subjectivity" - is, for Thanh and Vuong, a means not merely of interpersonal connection, but amalgamation. Inter-subjective mergings are engendered by and manifest in (the act of) testimony; in wounds (psychic and bodily); and in the dissemination of trauma through the mechanisms of postmemory

**Advisors**

James Dorsey, Associate Professor of Asian Societies, Cultures and Languages

Tarek El-Ariss, Professor of Middle Eastern Studies





Comparative Literature Program  
Master's Essay Presentations  
**BREAK**  
We will resume at 5 PM sharp





**PANEL II 5:00 PM - 6:35 PM**

5:00 pm: Moderator: Annabel M. Jankovic

5:05 pm: Michaela A. Jordan

Goblin Market: Visuality, Adaptations, and the Price of Transformation

5:30 pm: Diego G. Fleitas

Cite-Seeing: Parody, Narrative Desire, and Enchanted Castles in Orlando Furioso and Don Quijote

5:55 pm: Michel H. Klante

Milton, Racine and the Turn Towards Biblical Tragedy: Thinking history in Athalie and Samson  
Agonistes

6:20 pm: Klaus Mladek

wrap up and thank you





**Michaela Jordan**

**Goblin Market: Visuality, Adaptations, and the Price of Transformation**

Withstanding the test of time, great works of literature possess the capacity to captivate and continue to draw in readers. A classic example of Victorian poetry, *Goblin Market* has generated strong critical, creative and emotional response from its readers. In this sense, it is a richly productive source.

An illustrated poem from its conception, *Goblin Market* has continued to inspire generations of artists. While Christina Rossetti's enigmatic poem has fuelled critical debate in itself, matters are further complicated once we consider the works of art born out of it. Although illustrations are effectively textual interpretations, offering a lens through which to read the story, such dynamics have been, for the most part, overlooked in the case of *Goblin Market* and its many illustrators. This paper will be discussing the dialogic relationship between this text and the images that have accompanied it, their evolution and its ramifications, from the original production, illustrated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1862), illustrations by Laurence Housman (1893) and Arthur Rackham (1933), to Ellen Raskin's picture book (1970), Playboy magazine's illustrations by Kinuko Craft (1973), and art by John Bolton for Pacific Comic (1984).

Having found fertile grounds in visual culture, *Goblin Market* is revitalized. Yet this shift in medium necessarily redefines the text-image dynamic of the illustrated poem, troubling the assumption that the written word takes priority over its visual representation, and thus bearing consequences for the reader's constructions of meaning, fragmenting it into versions that tell radically different stories, both visually and verbally. These adaptations mark a significant step in *Goblin Market's* evolution, shapeshifting into something altogether new -transformed, for better or for worse.

**Advisors:**

Nancy Canepa, Associate Professor of French and Italian

Michael Chaney, Professor of English



**Diego Fleitas**

**Cite-Seeing: Parody, Narrative Desire, and Enchanted Castles in *Orlando Furioso* and *Don Quijote***

Chivalric romances, once upon a time, courted much favor with their fantastic scenes of knights, romance, and high action. Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532) and Miguel de Cervantes' *El Ingenioso Caballero Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1615) thematize this late-Renaissance trend by means of thorough, generically rich literary parody. In so doing, Ariosto and Cervantes both employed numerous tropes from classical epic and chivalric romance to subvert basic assumptions of each genre. Curiously, both authors employ the trope of the wizard's "enchanted castle" from romance in tellingly similar ways: as a locus into which Girardian desire leads, as a site where literature is cited subtly and overtly, where puns and misgivings undo what presents itself to one's sight. This paper assembles a constellation of related questions: what assumptions do the authors critique that renders their works "parodic?" How may the desires of protagonists better be understood through the vantage of the enchanted castle? How does immortal fame relate to a shaving basin? These premises are approached in this essay which proceeds through three major episode sequences of enchanted castles (battles for princesses, battles for helmets, epic journeys) in order to probe *why* this ubiquitous space engenders reflections on a range of desires, why it invites the firm contestations of Ariosto and Cervantes that the enchanted castles should not exist for one key reason: they are glittering fiction.

**Advisors:**

Nancy Canepa, Associate Professor of French and Italian

Isabel Lozano, Professor of Spanish and Portuguese



**Michel A. Klante**

**Milton, Racine and the turn towards biblical tragedy: Thinking history in *Athalie* and *Samson Agonistes***

In the paper, I want to shed light on the narrow genre of Biblical tragedy, by examining two 17th dramas of John Milton and Jean Racine. *Samson Agonistes* and *Athalie* do both dramatize a biblical narrative within the genre conventions of tragedy. The paper wants to suggest, that both dramas mobilize biblical narrative in reflecting familiar practices of typological interpretation of the bible in 17th-century England and France. Characters, events, and objects from the stories from the Hebrew scriptures are read as types, that are considered to prefigure and are fulfilled in Christ.

By introducing typology to tragedy, I will argue, the biblical dramas of Milton and Racine facilitate a particular way of thinking history. Biblical narrative and tragedy integrate two visions of history: a tragic vision, shaped chiefly by error and rupture, and a typological one, envisioning history as progressing towards fulfillment. In confronting both visions, they set into relief the aberrations and the disruptive character of history, while disclosing the means to arrive at a continuous vision of the own past and identity.

**Advisors:**

Thomas H. Luxon, Professor of English

Faith Beasley, Professor of French and Italian



Thank you!!

Gerd Gemünden - Chair of Comparative Literature

Antonio Gómez - Director of the Comparative Literature Master's Program

Liz Cassell - Program Administrator

Carol Bean-Carmody - Administrative Assistant



## Thank you Advisors!!!

Daniel Behar, Research Associate - Lecturer Jewish Studies and Middle Eastern Studies

Rebecca Biron, Professor of Spanish and Comparative Literature

Faith Beasley, Professor of French

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Dennis Washburn, Associate Dean of the Faculty for Interdisciplinary Programs