MLA

Spring Calendar:

Registration begins Monday, March 10, at 8:30 am.

Courses begin the week of March 31 and end June 5, 2008.

Inside

Second Annual Joint Student & Alumni GLS Symposium

Hosted by Stanford University, June 27-29, 2008

Stanford is hosting the *Second Annual Joint Student and Alumni Symposium* for graduate liberal studies programs from eight west-coast universities, and one university from abroad. All nine universities are very eager to spend that weekend here at Stanford, and students and alumni are looking forward to sharing their work with one another.

All Stanford MLA students and alumni are invited to attend this year's symposium. If you would like to present your work, submit a one-page proposal to Linda Paulson by March 18, 2008. The selection committee will be favoring interdisciplinary projects.

We are putting together different accommodations packages for symposium visitors, which we're hoping will make this affordable for everyone who wants to come. However, if any of you would be willing to host a student or two over that weekend, we could offer an even more attractive possibility to a few of them. If you live close, and if you'd like to host, please let us know.

Joint Symposium Participating universities:

Dominican University
Maastricht University
Marylhurst University
Reed College
San Diego State University
Simon Fraser University
Stanford University
University of Southern California
Mount St. Mary's College

2008 AGLSP Conference in Vancouver, B.C.

"Culture, Consciousness and Nature -- A Context for Climate Change," October 16-18

The Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs holds an annual conference for administrators, faculty, students, and alumni each year. The theme of the conference is *Culture, Consciousness and Nature—A Context for Climate Change*. The Call for Papers/Presentations Deadline is April 1, 2008

The organizers are looking for broad interpretations of the theme, to include philosophic, aesthetic, spiritual, and cultural perspectives as well as technical, scientific, and policy discourse. If you plan to submit please also send a copy to Linda at lpaulson@stanford.edu. Stanford MLA students and alumni have been a very strong presence in recent AGLSP Conferences. If your paper is chosen, Stanford will pay for your travel to Vancouver, Including airfare, hotel, and transfer costs.

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2008 AGLSP Conference in Vancouver, B.C.

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All proposals for presentation at the conference must be a maximum of 300 words and should include a detailed description of the presentation and its structure, the presenter's name, institution, email address and phone number.

The papers will be delivered during the conference and individual presentations should be a maximum of 25 minutes long.

The conference organizers are working to make this conference environmentally responsible and request that all submissions be submitted electronically as an email attachment.

Send proposals to Stephen Duguid, Conference Chair, Simon Fraser University, duguid@sfu.ca

For information about this conference and AGLSP, please visit www.aglsp.org.

AGLSP ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATE LIBERAL STUDIES PROGRAMS

ON CAMPUS - AURORA FORUM

AURORA FORUM AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY

IRAQ: REFRAME
Fifth of Five-Part Series

With filmmakers Maysoon Pachachi, Kasim Abid, Fady Hadid, and Kristine Samuelson (moderator)

Monday, March 17, 2008, 7:30 - 9:00pm, at Montalvo Arts Center

IRAQ: REFRAME is an innovative series of visual, performing, and media arts at the Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga presenting five public conversations with scholars, artists, and journalists whose engaged knowledge of past and present conflicts in the Mesopotamian cradle of civilization will reframe our understanding of current circumstances.

CONFERENCE: Global Solidarity, Human Rights, and the End of Poverty

With Amartya Sen (Keynote) Clayborne Carson, David Grusky, Ananya Roy, and others.

Saturday, April 5, 2008, 10:00 - 5:00, Kresge Auditorium

To commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–1968), the Aurora Forum joins with Stanford's King Institute to host a day-long conference on the struggle for economic justice, arguably Dr. King's primary concern throughout the whole of his life.

ON CAMPUS - CANTOR ARTS CENTER

Frederic Church, Winslow Homer, and Thomas Moran: Tourism and the American Landscape.

This exhibition explores the work of three influential artists in the context of the new and growing tourism industry in the United States during the 19th century. Church, Homer, and Moran traveled extensively in the U.S. in search of picturesque and sublime landscapes to paint. Their works, along with guidebooks and travel-related photographs and novels, helped to familiarize American audiences with the nation's scenic wonders. The exhibition includes nearly 70 painted sketches plus studio paintings, drawings, books, and stereographs.

Private and Public: Class, Personality, Politics, and Landscape in British Photography

Through approximately 15 British photographs from the Center's collection, this exhibition explores the special qualities of the British as revealed in photographs: their obsession with class, individuality, the city, and the countryside. The exhibition highlights Bill Brandt and also includes other early photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron, Peter Henry Emerson, and Francis Frith. Open Wed-Sun 11am - 5pm, Thursdays until 8pm; Closed Monday and Tuesday

Makishi: Mask Characters of Zambia"

March 26 through June 29.

This exhibition of 24 wooden masks, selected from the collection of the Fowler Museum at UCLA, explores the drama and complexity of the masquerades in which the masks are used. Makishi, or mask characters, figure in the remarkable masquerade traditions of ethnic groups living in the "Three Corners" region of Zambia, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The masks on display in this exhibition date from the late 19th to the 20th century. A lecture on makishi and associated masquerade traditions will be presented on Thursday, March 27 at 7 pm in the Cantor Arts Center auditorium, free, with open seating.

For more events on campus, see events.stanford.edu and continuingstudies.stanford.edu/course/special.asp

ALUMNI NEWS

Life of the Mind Committee, MLA Alumni Association

Several of our members have taken new jobs or moved on, so we need some new members--please, please join us to help plan interesting programs for MLA alumni, students, and friends of the program. We'd especially like to build on any special expertise or entré that you, our alumni, can provide. We were fortunate this year to have Sheryl Nonnenberg guiding us through the Anderson Collection and Marie Sigan organizing a panel at NASA. Contact Angel Rocha at ErochaE@aol.com for more information.

Spring Garden Tour, Saturday, April 26th: Spring is just around the corner and we are planning an event to celebrate the season. Come join MLA alumni and students in the magnificent surroundings of the nearby Filoli Center for a docent-led tour of the world-renowned gardens and beautifully furnished house from 10 a.m. until noon. Following our tour, we have scheduled an optional box lunch in the café located right on the grounds. Afterwards, you are also free to roam the gardens on a self-guided tour (maps available) and browse the well-stocked gift shop for unique house and garden items.

We are limited to 24 people for the tour and optional lunch. The cost is $10 per person for the two-hour tour and $14.00 for the box lunch. Filoli is located only 20 minutes from Stanford campus, at 86 Cañada Road, Woodside, CA. Let us know immediately if you are interested as we are sure the tour will fill quickly. Please contact Sally Honey at salhon@attglobal.net

Our winter event was at NASA Ames, organized by Marie Sigan. An enthusiastic group of about 60 people came out to hear members of the Kepler mission speak about the scientific and technical challenges of searching for other earths. A lively question and answer session concluded this exciting peak into the working environment of a NASA space project. Scheduled to launch in early 2009, Kepler will look for evidence of small rocky planets circling distant stars (more information at www.kepler.nasa.gov).

For 2008-09, we will build events around Special Collections with John Mustain; the Martin Luther King, Jr., collection; and an architecture tour of campus.

The committee: Stan Chism '03, Sally Honey '97 (on leave), Denise Osborne '07, Angel Rocha '01 (chair), Marie Sigan '02 (on leave), Jim Torre '01, and Suzanne West '01.

The MLA Alumni Book Club

The MLA Alumni Book Club meets monthly to discuss new and classic works of literature. All alumni are invited. We will be meeting this Wednesday, February 13 at 7 p.m. in Mountain View to discuss Gabriel Josipovichi's 2002 work Goldberg: Variations. Next month, we will meet on Thursday, March 13 at 7 p.m. in Portola Valley to discuss Willa Cather's My Antonia. The books which we read are all available at Kepler's in Menlo Park on their Book Club shelves. To receive a discount, please mention that you are part of the MLA Book Club when you go to the register.

We are always looking for new members, both recent grads and long time alumni who miss the discussion of seminars. If you would like to attend one of our meetings, please contact Beth Karpas at beth@enjolrasworld.com for exact meeting location and directions.

ALUMNI NOTES

Blake White '06

Both Congruence (the journal of the AGLSP) and Tangents will be publishing versions of my paper on the Digital Divide that was presented at AGLSP last fall in Memphis and at the Dominican College symposium last summer. The paper is based on my thesis.

I'm spending quite a bit of time on international business these days. My company has won major projects that frequently takes me to Singapore, London, and Johannesburg.

Karen Letendre'98

Living on the Monterey Peninsula (where I grew up) is wonderful. There is a great Stanford community down here, including a lively group of Stanford alumni who are members of the local Stanford club. Every time an event is planned, it is usually over subscribed!

I am leading two Stanford Travel/Study trips this year, sponsored by the Stanford Alumni Association. The first will be in May to the Islands of the Western Mediterranean. We'll be traveling to Malta, then Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, Majorca, Menorca, Formentera and ending up in Seville, Spain. Professor Robert D'Alimonte is accompanying us one this trip -- he specializes in Political Science and is currently on appointment at the University of Florence, Italy.

In July, I head to Moscow to manage the Trans-Siberian Rail College tour -- 12 days on the Golden Eagle Trans-Siberian Express train through Siberia to Vladivostok. The faculty leaders and lecturers on this trip are History Professor David Holloway and Scott Momaday, professor of Indigenous Cultures.

If anyone is interested in these adventures, contact Stanford Travel/Study at www.stanfordalumni.org/learningtravel/travelstudy/ It would be great to have you along!

Shannon Marimon '06

Quite a bit has changed on my end, but I'll just mention the highlights. My husband, Mike, and I moved in August 2007 to New Haven, CT. He is completing a 2-3 year post-doctoral fellowship at Yale in the Geology Dept. He's simultaneously looking for professorship postings, so we could be headed almost anywhere after this (preferably the west coast!). New Haven is an interesting place- it lacks a lot of the beauty of Northern California, but we're trying to make the most of the urban environment, and, of course, the offerings at Yale.

I am working as the lead fund raiser for the Yale School of Art, which is a nice fit. It's the first time that the School has had a development program, so it's been a challenge getting it off the ground and running. However, I enjoy being connected to the arts, and I have lots of excuses to read all the fun art publications out there! As I am still trying to determine what next to do with my life, I have decided to head on back to school in the fall. I will be attending the Yale School of Management (MBA program), which just so happens to specialize in non-profit management. I can't wait to get started, and I hope this might lead to work for a community arts organization or a marketing role. I look forward to seeing other updates!

Megan E. Hansen '05

I am working at my dream job at the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) in Palo Alto, a nonprofit land trust which strives to permanently protect to the beauty, character and diversity of the San Francisco Peninsula and Santa Cruz Mountain range. I am the POST webmistress, and I also coordinate our photographers and annual lecture series. The 15th Annual Wallace Stegner Lecture Series begins March 20th with environmental author Bill McKibben, so check out www.openspacetrust.org/activities/lecture for more info. I would love to see you all there!

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JC Miller '07

In April I will be taking over as the director of the Landscape Architecture Program at UC Berkeley Extension. It is an accredited curriculum for working adults, similar in some ways to the MLA program. It began in 1986 and I will be the third director since the program's inception. Concurrent with this work, I will also maintain my own practice, Miller Studio, that will be focused on historic preservation and cultural landscapes, parks, and gardens. Along with Reuben Rainey, my co-author on *Modern Public Gardens*, I am also at work on a second book about mid-century modern California gardens.

Larry Zaroff '97

Little new to report. Still teaching 3 undergrad and 2 med school courses.

I published a few more pieces in the NYT and a chapter on surgical ethics in the Cambridge text of bioethics. Revised novel and resubmitted. I have learned how much harder it is to publish non-scientific material.

Sheryl Nonnenberg '00

I wrote a piece about artist Drue Katoaka that was published in the Winter issue of *The Heart, Journal of the Society of Sacred Heart*. (www.rscj.org) - "A Brush With Success).



MLA SPRING COURSES

Enrollment Begins Monday, March 10

MLA 101C: Foundations III
Axess Class Number: 24462
Russell Berman
Required of 1st-year MLA students
Wednesdays

MLA 251: The State in History: An Intro to Historical and Social Scientific Methods (Social Science)

Axess Class Number: 24463
Joe Manning
Thursdays
The purpose of the course is twofold. First, it will introduce the student to the methods historians use to understand and write about the past. Our theme will be centered on the historical understanding of the state, perhaps the single most important topic in both the Humanities and the Social Sciences. A better understanding of the state and its many forms in history helps to clarify many issues including the relationships of "Culture" to society. We shall focus, in particular, on both traditional approaches and the historical social science approach beginning with the classic account of Max Weber. We will also examine some specific historical examples of states and how broad comparison helps illuminate specific problems.

MLA 252: Basic Issues in Philosophy (Humanities)

Axess Class Number: 25920
Chris Bobonich
Tuesdays
In this seminar, we shall explore some basic philosophical issues surrounding morality and values, using bad means to attain good ends, whether life is absurd, the subjective and the objective, the relation between the physical and the mental, and questions about the self. We shall proceed by reading and critically discussing each week, one important essay in contemporary philosophy.

MLA 253: Reading, Writing, and their Communities (Humanities)

Axess Class Number: 24464
David Palumbo-Liu
Wednesdays
How do works of literature serve as ways for people to communicate with each other? How are readers writers of their own stories, and writers readers of other's stories? When we read fiction, how do we find ourselves part of a broad, transhistorical community of readers? And how does that relationship in turn shape the way we write our own life stories?

Starting with these rather large philosophical and aesthetic questions, we will delve into one of Hanry James's last short stories, which happens to be a ghost story; we will read a novel by acclaimed Japanese American author Ruth Ozeki about trans-Pacific culture and food (My Year of Meats), as well as view one of her experimental films (Body of Correspondence); other texts include Ondatjee's magisterial novel of love

and war, The English Patient; Calvino's dizzying metanarrative, If On a Winter's Night a Traveler...; and Gordimer's investigation of apartheid and family loyalties, My Son's Story. Each of these narratives tells its stories through characters who themselves tell their stories by reading those of others. This course's chief goals will be to understand better the personal and social functions of literary narrative, and to enjoy the immense pleasure such literature can bring.

MLA 398: Thesis in Progress

Axess class number: 24148
Enroll in this if you are in the Work-in-Progress group and are not graduating Spring quarter

MLA 399: Thesis Final Quarter

Axess class number: 24147
Enroll in this if you are in WIP and are graduating at the end of Spring quarter

Natural Science Electives (enroll through Michelle)

Bio 37: Introduction to Biotechnology and Drug Development
Tuesdays, 2 units
http://continuingstudies.stanford.edu/course/BIO37.asp

Bio 72: Replaceable You: Stem Cells and Tissue Engineering in this Age of Enlightenment
Wednesdays, 1 unit
http://continuingstudies.stanford.edu/course/BIO72.asp

FACULTY INTERVIEW: CHRIS BOBONICH

Chris Bobonich has been teaching Philosophy at Stanford since 1996 and has won the Dean's Award for Distinguished Teaching, as well as several fellowships. His book, Plato's Utopia Recast: His Later Ethics and Politics, was a Choice Outstanding Academic Title in 2004. Prof. Bobonich will be teaching MLA252, Basic Issues in Philosophy, this Spring.

Animesh Mukherjee: From the list of books and articles you've published, your area of specialization seems to be Plato and Aristotle?

Chris Bobonich: Yes, I work mostly in the history of Greek philosophy, study Plato and Aristotle, and the notion of practical reason: what to do and how to live.

AM: I see that the dedication in your book is practical, yet whimsical: "...to my wife Karen and canine children Plato and Sappho". Do they get along?

CB: There are no quarrels between the philosopher and the poet. Initially the dedication was to my "furry children", but my wife pointed out that it might be interpreted as a genetic disorder.

AM: You had offered a seminar on Reason and Reality in winter quarter last year which I had attended. What is the reason for this new seminar being offered?

CB: To be absolutely frank, the first time I did an MLA seminar I was skeptical, but wanted to try it out. I found it really worthwhile, talking to adults who were really motivated and had a great deal of life experience, compared to the undergraduates.

AM: Yes, we have all chosen to devote our time just because we really interested in exploring and learning, and most are doing this after working in our chosen field for some time.

CB: This is especially true about this seminar where we will be examining questions that only concern us after a certain age or when we have an involvement in what is happening in the world around us. Questions like death are more important for older persons. Young people are able to argue logically, but lack the life experience to make the questions pertinent. You and I both know that we are going to die. At eighteen or nineteen, it is just a theoretical truth.

AM: How does the content of this seminar differ from the last one?

CB: In this seminar, we'll not be doing interpretation of historical texts as we mostly did in the seminar you took. Instead, we'll be reading contemporary essays on central philosophical questions that aim to make progress on understanding and answering some important questions. The issues are perennial philosophical ones, but also are the kind that reflective people who aren't philosophers ask themselves. Examples include:

- What, if anything, is bad about death? Does knowing what's bad about death help us see what's good about life? Would immortality be desirable or just boring after a while?

- Is it ever morally OK to use bad means to attain good ends? Is it sometimes morally acceptable or even required to kill or torture?

AM: That is really topical: does the potential savings of thousands of lives warrant the water-boarding of three persons?

CB: Exactly, and we need to learn how to reason about such questions and not let our emotions guide our responses. Other questions that we study include the question of the absurdity of life, unity of our consciousness, moral sainthood, whether truth is found from the outside looking in, or only from the first-person point of view.

AM: What books and articles will we be reading?

CB: *Mortal Questions*, by Thomas Nagel will be the principal text as well as articles from JSTOR.

AM: In Reason & Reality we did one article on Moral Luck from Nagel, but mostly read Plato and Pyrrho. Why did you choose modern philosophers this time? How do they differ from Plato and Aristotle?

CB: The main difference is that with modern writers we can very quickly start discussing the issues they are talking about and reason about them. In the case of Plato and Aristotle, we first need to understand what they are saying before we can reason about their statements. We would spend a lot of time understanding what Plato thought, before we could decide it was plausible.

AM: Why are these questions of philosophy important today?

CB: Think about how much time you have spent to learn how things work in the world. Mathematics, science, language in school and high school. How many of us have spent time thinking and learning about our basic beliefs, questioning and looking at alternatives? This is one thing that knowing philosophy can help with.

AM: According to Heidegger, contemplation of Being was the only work that we had to do.

CB: We don't have to go so far, but learning to think clearly about these questions is very important.

AM: Do these questions come from any cultural or ethnic viewpoint, or are they and the answers universally applicable?

CB: Culture and text influence the ideas and what is plausible. There are certain basic principles that are true all the time and in all cultures. An interesting thing about the history of philosophy is to see that arguments about these issues are found in the Greeks, medieval Islam, Jewish thinkers. There is a considerable variety of views amongst Islamic theologians on issues of free will, personal identity and moral authority. This is also true in the early Christian and Jewish traditions. In each tradition, we find thinkers on opposing sides, even across traditions. An Islamic scholar may argue along with a Jewish thinker against the position taken by other Islamic scholars. These three traditions have had a lot of interaction. Obviously this is true in the Eastern philosophies but I lack the scholarly background in that area.

AM: What will students walk off with at the end of the seminar.

CB: What I hope is a better idea about how to think about these questions, not what to think about them. Not what Nagel thinks, but more that philosophy is something that you do, an activity, not a doctrine. A sense of how to engage in it. What did you take away from the last seminar?

AM: I see the last seminar as having two parts: an introduction to the classical tradition, and an exploration of some modern questions and thinkers. The concepts of reasoning were taught from Plato's Republic, where we deconstructed the statements. We then looked at Pyrrho's critique of this form of reasoning. This taught us to look for the hidden assumptions and false reasoning in arguments. We then looked at modern thinking, starting Derek Parfit who used the paradigm of matter transportation ("Beam me up, Scottie") to investigate questions of identity. This opened our eyes to the questions of identity and purpose of life. Nagel's question about whether intention mattered, no matter what the outcome, for example the difference between manslaughter and reckless driving, made us think about events in the world around us. Thus we learned the practical application of philosophy to the world around us. You made us all philosophers.

CB: Yes.

FACULTY INTERVIEW: JOE MANNING

Trained in Egyptology and Papyrology, Joe Manning's research focuses on economic and legal history. Broadly interested in comparative law and historical sociology, Manning is concerned with the ways in which Egypt is related to larger debates about the history of the state, the development of social relationships on the land, and the role of private property in history. He is the author most recently of Land and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt: The Structure of Land Tenure. With Ian Morris, he has co-edited The Ancient Economy: Evidence and Models. He is currently engaged in the editing of Greek and Demotic Egyptian papyri in the department's collection, and in a new book project on private property and private contracting in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt.

This Spring, Prof. Manning will be teaching The State in History: An Introduction to Historical and Social Scientific Methods

Lindsay Marshall: You're offering the State in History for the spring term. What inspired you to offer the course?

Joe Manning: Several things. From a personal point of view, this is stuff I work on. How states work historically and how you can contextualize specific state forms and issues in the broader context of theories of the state, has been one of the central issues in historical social sciences, which gets you into the broader reason to do this. The intention here is to offer to MLA students a kind of broad introduction to social sciences, which has not been done before in the MLA program, but it's really important in the grand scheme of things.

Even if people are interested primarily in literary analysis, I think to understand how states work historically is quite crucial for people to be able to locate properly, particularly literary corpora or particular literary texts in the context of the state and the particular history in which the text was written. So it's twofold: one it's what I work on. I'm finishing a book on the Ptolemaic state, so I've done a lot of work on state theory and how premodern states work in particular. I thought it would be fun to do. It's a good excuse to examine the historical social sciences generally. We'll examine some of the classic texts in the field like Max Weber for example, and some other fundamentally important social science texts, because this has been one of the main issues in historical social sciences. Very often this is analyzed separately from the humanities, but I think it is very intimately connected. Here's a chance to make the case for how they're connected and why it's important.

LM: You mentioned Weber. What else will be on our book list?

JM: Besides Max Weber's *The Economy and Society*, which is one of the classic texts in historical social sciences, (it's the kind of work everybody should read), we're going to read a really nice little book by Patricia Crone, who is an Islamic historian, called *Pre-Industrial Societies: Anatomy of the Pre-Modern World*, which is basically a really nice analysis of how premodern states work. One of the issues is that we think we have it bad now with how states function and some of the problems we face, but if you look at premodern states, it really is a whole different world.

One of the important things in analyzing anything historically is being able to specify the differences between premodern societies and states and modern societies, and what modernity is, in fact. Even if you're working on the most modern kinds of literature, it raises issues about what modernity is and where we've been. They're both questions that can be at least partly answered by looking at how the premodern world works. So we're going to look at theory, we're also going to look at specific states like Egypt, for example, which is something I work on quite a lot. To examine in particular what the problems were, how rulers dealt with those problems, and how individuals may have responded to the needs of the state, and all these kinds of things, is important for all fields of study, and required actually.

LM: It makes sense you'd have us look to Egypt first. What other states are you planning to look at?

JM: We'll look at some of the European states, and European state formation, to some extent, the classical world, the near east a bit. One of the books we're going to read parts of is Michael Mann's first volume of the *Sources of Social Power*, one of the most significant books in historical sociology in the last twenty or thirty years. It's made a huge impact in all kinds of fields, including history, and that book, unlike Weber's, is based on a lot of case studies in specific states, so we're going to tease that apart a bit and look at the specific states these guys are using to craft their theories.

LM: You did mention that as the MLA program doesn't offer many social science courses, probably a lot of MLA students are a little unused to thinking historically. Are there any books you would suggest reading, or any other way to contextualize these things that you would suggest in order to prepare for the course?

JM: Well, the first assignment will be the first chapter of Patricia Crone's *Pre-Industrial Societies*, which sets up some of the issues. There are so many things one could read that are relevant. Almost everything in an ancient history context deals with these issues as well. If people haven't read Herodotus, they should read Herodotus, because that's what Herodotus is doing. He's examining these very same issues, albeit from a cultural point of view, not an historical social science point of view, which does have different axes to grind, so to say.

Boy, there's so much one could read that problematizes history. One book I think we're going to read bits of that I'm just reading now is the recent one by William Sewell called *Logics of History*. It presents trends in history writing since the 1960s, what's motivated people to do history, what are the issues involved in history writing and research in history, what are kind of texts people use, is a literary point of view more important than a social science point of view, these kind of huge debates in history, and social science generally, is what this course is going to examine.

What I'd like to do for assignments is once we've worked on the theoretical issues and identified the problems we're dealing with, students will produce papers on specific states they're interested in and write from the point of view of historical and social science analysis, and from a humanistic point of view too. How can we marry these things? I don't think these things can be separated; that's my philosophy. Historical social sciences are informed by traditional humanities, and the reverse should also be true. The issue really is formulating questions. That's why historical social sciences are important. Looking at historical case studies and looking at how things develop and change over time allows you to begin to formulate really interesting questions of material. That question forming process is fundamental to all research at the graduate level in every field, so I can see this also as a laboratory for getting people to think about problems and how to ask question and what is a good question to ask as opposed to what is a less good question to ask. This is something we face in every course, and every scholar faces it in writing articles or books, not just learning how to ask questions, but learning how to ask interesting questions.

LM: Because we're in the context of the university, I've noticed that in contemporary political debates Ron Paul is really popular this year and libertarianism seems to be a lot more mainstream this year, and with that the debate on statism in general. Do you see that playing into the course in anyway?

JM: It could well, although the specific modern political debate less so, unless people want to engage in that of course. I wouldn't close that down as a possible avenue for discussion and maybe some reading. That's a huge body of literature obviously. Some of the questions are important depending on your political philosophy, such as what the proper role of the state is, how much states should be involved in certain kinds of decisions, what's the best way to make reforms, what's the best way to deal with the environment. There's a whole spectrum of heavy state involvement to free market environmentalism, which is a libertarian solution, which is a big one to some Stanford economists for example.

That's a debate I do follow, actually, these market-based solutions. Some of them are brilliant and should happen, some shouldn't. And again, the issue is proper amounts of information. How do you get information to make decisions, and at what level should decisions be made? It's the whole debate about how to form a federal state, and the American founding. The Founding Fathers are engaged in historical social science debates which are all the rage in Europe in the 16th, 17th, and 18th century with Hobbes and so on. That's fully a part of the historical social science debate on the nature of states, the good and bad of states, and their strengths.

It's a very current topic throughout the world, concerning state death, the change of state power, the scope of state power, and it's a very important thing in understanding ancient states, and empire formation in particular. Again, we could go back to Herodotus and others and this is exactly what they're interested in. It's been an issue since the rise of states, and it's still timely. The nation-state is a particular state form that's coming under question these days, but it's a new state form. It's only two hundred or three hundred years old. It's important in understanding modern states and how they work, it's very different than premodern states and how they work. The issue is assessing power, which Michael Mann does and is a classic sociological thing to do that economists don't spend a lot of time with. Assessing the power of states is really important here, as well as how people react to them.

If you look at post-colonial literature for example, the whole body of literature is based on the reaction to state power, in this case European colonial power and it's aftermath. That's why this stuff is important even to people who are only interested in literary theory. To understand what states do, how they do it, why they expand, why they contract, what problems they face – a lot of culture, including literary production is engaged with and in response to these fundamental historical processes. That's why I think it's crucial to link those two together and understand how they work really well as opposed to just analyzing literature separately from everything else.

LM: What is your goal for the students in this class?

JM: To introduce everyone to the classical texts in sociology so they understand what's going on, what the debates are about the history of the state, the variety of state forms that have existed in the human past why states matter, how they affect individuals and how individuals react to them. I'd like to have them understand specific case studies and begin to compare different states, or even comparative literatures. I'm not a literary historian at all, but I'm guessing people in the class will be interested in literature and comparative literature, and I think the history of the state is really important for understanding issues in comparative literature. I'd like to get back from students those kinds of reaction and engagements with this kind of theory. It'd be nice if some MLA theses could come out of this seminar as well. That would be a nice byproduct to get people thinking a bit deeper about these issues and how they might relate to things they're interested in.

LM: For your own professional development, what's up next for you? What are you working on in the near future?

JM: I'm trying to finish two book projects at the moment, one on the Ptolemaic state in its historical context. The debate is whether it's a Greek state or an Egyptian state, and how do the Ptolemies actually function in it. I'm finishing a book about the legal sources in Egypt, an edited book on the legal papyri, which is trying to reshape the whole field of legal papyrology and how we understand ancient law, ancient legal documents, and ancient legal systems. I have an archaeology project I'm working on, I'm teaching an international summer institute on papyrology here at Stanford for graduate students, and I have a few articles I'm working on and some other book projects on the back burner I'm beginning to think about. I suppose that's enough to keep me busy.

FACULTY INTERVIEW: DAVID PALUMBO-LIU

David Palumbo-Liu is a professor in the Department of Comparative Literature at Stanford University, which he joined in 1990, after teaching at Georgetown University's English and the School of Foreign Service from 1988-1990.

His current work is on the status of literature in an age of increased globalization, social theory, globalization, ethics and aesthetics, and race and ethnicity. His publications include the books Asian/American: Historical Crossing of a Racial Frontier (1999) and The Politics of Appropriation: The Literary Theory and Practice of Huang Tingjian (1045-1104) (1993). He has edited the volumes Streams of Cultural Capital: Transnational Cultural Studies (1997) and The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, Interventions (1995), and authored many dozens of articles. He is also an active public speaker, and is very involved in national, campus community and departmental initiatives. Currently, he is working on a book titled The Deliverance of Others on the status of literary narrative and ethics in an age of globalization. He is also co-editing a volume on World-Scale Ambitions.

But don't let the expanse and range of his literary and professional achievements deceive you - David is very interested in working closely with his students and colleagues, easy to approach, and welcomes your knock on the door! He has designed this course to enhance your pleasure in reading and in understanding how reading and writing "communities" are invented through literary texts.

Prof. Palumbo-Liu is teaching the MLA seminar "Reading, Writing and their Communites" in spring, 2008. This seminar asks: How do works of literature serve as ways for people to communicate with each other? How are readers writers of their own stories, and writers readers of other's stories? When we read fiction, how do we find ourselves part of a broad, transhistorical community of readers? And how does that relationship in turn shape the way we write our own life stories?

Students will read works by Henry James (The Jolly Corner), Ruth Ozeki (My Year of Meats), Michael Ondatjee (The English Patient), Italo Calvino (If On a Winter's Night) and Nadine Gordimer (My Son's Story). Each of these narratives tells its story through characters who themselves tell their stories by reading those of others. The course's chief goals are to understand better the personal and social functions of literary narrative, and to enjoy the immense pleasure such literature can bring.

Marianne Mueller: "Reading, Writing and Their Communities" -- this is a fascinating topic. What led you to put together this seminar?

David Palumbo-Liu: I have become more and more interested in how narrative is such a basic part of human being--and so fundamentally part of who we are and how we present ourselves to others. When we are asked who we are or what is important to us, what we value, what we hope for, the answer is rarely a single word--the answer more commonly takes the form of stories, anecdotes, analogies, metaphors. And often enough we also cite other stories by other people. I am fascinated by how we are always both writers and readers, creators of stories that build on not only the stories of our ancestors, but also stories by total strangers that have meant something to us, sometimes in ways unintended or unimagined by their authors. Nonetheless, when we cite others, we become part of a collective re-invention and regeneration of that tale. Hence my notion of "community."

MM: Is this in the air, in the zeitgeist - the realization that narrative is a basic part of being human? I notice people talking of "narrative" all the time these days, on NPR talk shows; in colloquia/ lectures/seminars not directly related to literature or written narrative; in New Yorker articles also not directly related to written narrative; in political discourse.

DP-L: I think it is--people from various walks of life are all commenting on narrative. But I'd like to take this opportunity to emphasize that this is one possibility; it does not exhaust the other genres. I say that because my first love (and the subject of my first book) was poetry, and I think a good case could

be made that one thinks poetically. Narrative in the sense we are using it is rather a new phenomenon.

MM: Are you consciously focusing our attention on the fact that readers project their own experiences, and even their current frame of mind, into what they read? I often think "everything is projection", in all human communications. Do you agree with that?

DP-L: That is certainly part of it--we always enter into the interpretation of what we read. But literary texts also have the power to make us rethink who we are. Maybe not in any fundamental or absolute way, but they can present us with alternate ways of being, of acting, of decision-making, that add importantly to the repertoire of who we are.

MM: In this class, are you looking at specific cases where a writer is strongly influenced by another writer's story? Or - what I'm trying to get at - Do we conclude such influence exists by inference ("it must be that this writer was strongly influenced by Pasternak's "Doctor Zhivago"), or do we know such influence exists by virtue of the author stating so explicitly?

DP-L: We will consider a range of ways writers are influenced by other writers. Authors are of course often consciously signaling their indebtedness to writers who have preceded them, even across huge expanses of time and space. Sometimes it is more a matter of emulating a genre or style than a particular author. But we will also read novels in which characters, as writers, read each other's stories and shape their stories in response to those textual encounters. We'll think carefully about questions such as: why does this author find these stories by that other author so compelling, so fitting, as to make them part of their own story? How has the encounter with these other stories reshaped their own?

MM: It's supremely unfair to ask - but do you have a favorite among any of the five works by Henry James, Ruth Ozeki, Michael Ondaatjee, Italo Calvino, and Nadine Gordimer?

DP-L: No, quite honestly I enjoy them all equally, for different things, and that is what I would like to share with the class--how each of these authors touches upon a common theme, but uses that theme to convey different messages about life, literature, and the world.

MM: Why did you choose Ruth Ozeki's "My Year of Meats"?

DP-L: First of all, it's tremendously witty, funny, and ethically important.

Second, it illustrates nearly every one of my main points. Third, conveniently enough, Ozeki also is a film-maker, and we will watch one of her films to see how she treats a similar theme in a different medium.

MM: Wow! Now I know a great film to add to my netflix queue!

DP-L: I am afraid you cannot find it--anywhere. Ruth and her co-director never released it. It is definitely an "art" film!

MM: Why did you choose Henry James' late short story about ghosts?

DP-L: I chose it because it is a very condensed illustration of the idea of imagining who we are and what we could have been through a (to use your word) "projection" of oneself into another time and space. The protagonist wonders what or who he would have been if he had decided to stay in New York instead of emigrating to England. He returns to New York, to his empty family mansion, and finds dwelling there the person he would have been had he stayed behind. Or so he thinks. I won't spoil the ending. Suffice it to say that he tells he story entirely through his imagined "other." Which one of us hasn't wondered who we would have been had we made a different choice? James addresses this question precisely by letting the "two" persons narrate their tales to each other.

MM: This is so true. – that we wonder who we would have been had we made different choices. Do you think it's appropriate for a student's term paper to include their own "wondering about my other" with an analysis of a novel or novels?

DP-L: I early on insisted that any "creative/personal" component be coupled with an essay that explains what the personal section is attempting to do. For me, grading creative efforts is impossible--I do not teach creative writing and most students have no training in it, so it seems unfair for me to judge such pieces unless students have the chance to explain what they were attempting.

MM: The authors you will be reading are all modern. (Henry James' later writing is considered modern, I think.) Part of the course description reads: "How are readers writers of their own stories, and writers readers of other's stories?" – do you think this interplay is a contemporary phenomenon, or can it be identified in works of literature throughout the ages?

DP-L: I don't think this is uniquely modern, though your question would help us make more precise what this phenomenon is all about. For example, in one of my major fields, classical Chinese, the sense of individualism that informs so much of the modern West is totally absent, and so the idea of citing someone else is not nearly as fraught--there is much more a sense of, to use another word we have used earlier in this interview, a "community." And I'd like to ask some of my colleagues in the classics department whether this isn't true for the classical western tradition as well.

MM: Is there a theme of meta-narration among the works you chose? Is that important to this seminar, or is that an artifact and not necessarily related to this seminar's themes?

DP-L: Not in all of them, but certainly for Calvino this is absolutely true--his novel is all about metafiction, in a dizzying and tremendously fun way. He pointedly makes his tale all about the act of telling.

MM: When you ask "How does membership in a broad, transhistorical community of readers shape the way we write our own life stories" - are you referring literally to how readers put pen to paper, or more abstractly - how readers "write" their own life stories by living their own lives day to day. I often think we are all artists and our lives are our art; expressions of who we are; ideally, expression of what we most want to say to others. Does that notion fit with your suggestion that readers write their stories influenced in part by what they read?

DP-L: I think that you're right--and this is an important insight. Each of our authors is absolutely interested in the question of ethics and behavior toward others. Obviously in Gordimer, Ondaatje and Ozeki the question of ethics and morality is very strong, and in a more indirect way, in Calvino and James. And this gets back to my earlier response--how are we to persuade others of certain rights and wrongs if not by illustrating, showing the different ways lives can be led, not through singular, monolithic representations, but through choice-laden and multiple stories that blend in a diversity of views and lives?

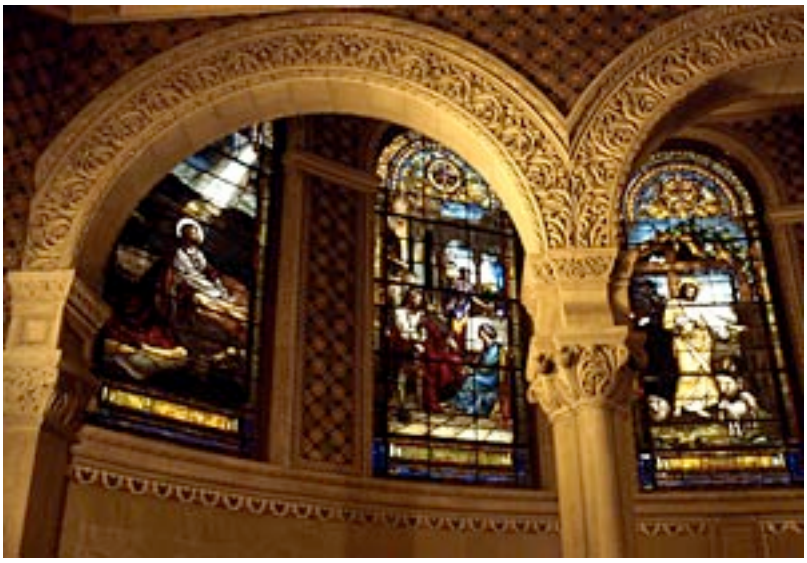
MM: Thomas Mann wrote that all writing - or all good writing - concerns itself with ethics. I always note when authors say this sort of thing, probably since it reinforces my belief (and I think we all look to reinforce our own previously held opinions). Do you have any thoughts in reaction to this - Is narrative-embracing-narrative related to ethics?

DP-L: In a word, yes! We have to decide our stance toward the narrative (starting with, are we going to read it at all). What sort of attitude do we take toward its moral, its characters, the persona of the author and the narrator? How do we choose one interpretation over another?

MM: Do you think that there is a place for capturing more of the MLA seminars on the web, especially for distance learning? It would create a lot of extra work for everyone involved ...

DP-L: Your idea about distance learning is an interesting one. For me, so much of what is valuable in the MLA seminars is the special, and irreproducible, interaction in the classroom. But certainly one could think of using the web for different things.

MM: Thank you so much for your time and insights. My schedule prevents my taking this class ... but those five novels are now on my list of books to read.



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