

Annual Report 2015-16

Research Committee on Comparative Gender Studies

International Comparative Literature Association (ICLA)

1. Statement of Purpose

The Comparative Gender Studies Committee works to further the comparative study of gender and sexuality through organising innovative seminar programmes at the ICLA and at other conferences, such as the ACLA. The Committee supports research and publication in the relatively new fields of comparative gender and comparative queer studies. We define the comparative in its broadest sense as an approach to the study of literature and culture that includes: a) traditional comparisons across national and linguistic borders as these relate specifically to gender and/or sexuality; b) comparative work across historical, postcolonial, and transnational contexts focusing on gender and/or sexuality; and c) scholarship using gender and/or sexuality as sites of comparison themselves, or as they intersect with race, class, ethnicity, national and religious affiliation, and other sites of difference. We also support research on the gender and queer politics of textual and/or cultural translation in all historical periods. The work from our seminars is published in international peer-reviewed journals and in edited collections with major academic presses. Anyone with a scholarly interest in comparative gender/queer studies is invited to join the Committee, and we especially welcome graduate students.

2. Committee-Sponsored Programme at ACLA at Harvard University 2016

The Committee sponsored a three-day seminar at the ACLA annual conference in Cambridge, MA, at Harvard University in 2016. The seminar was entitled 'Technologies of Gender and Sexuality,' spread over three days with 10 speakers. The seminar was organised by Jordana Greenblatt, University of Toronto and Drew Danielle Belsky, York University. The seminars were very well attended and addressed the intersections of technology with sex, gender, and sexuality as sites for gender/sexual expression, resistance, and regulation, and it addressed as well as the fraught intersections of sexuality and gender with digital culture and the internet. Plans are underway for an edited collection based on the papers. The programme at Harvard was as follows:

Seminar Title: Technologies of Sexuality and Gender

Sponsored by the ICLA Comparative Gender Studies Committee

Chairs: Jordana Marion Greenblatt, University of Toronto; Drew Danielle Belsky, York University

Seminar 1: Friday, March 18, 2016:

Is Dildo to Digital as Pen is to Penis? Technologies of Gender, Sexuality and Transwriting
in Kristien Hemmereichs' *Alles verandert*
Liedeke Plate, Radboud University

Is the Sex Robot a Top?
Alexander Aguayo, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Bottom Value: Critiquing Top Supremacy's Instrumentalization of Bottomly Risk in the
PrEP Debates
Jordana Marion Greenblatt, University of Toronto

Seminar II: Saturday, March 19, 2016:

Gendering Mopeds and Users in Taiwan: A Brief History
Kuan-Hung Lo, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Drawing as a Body: Articulations of Surgical Vision in Grant's Atlas
Drew Danielle Belsky, York University

"Monstrous Marionettes": Surface and Disidentification in Oscar Wilde
Elizabeth Richmond-Garza, University of Texas at Austin

Beyond Neuromancer: Exploring the Limits of Virtual Bodies and the Pitfalls of Techno-
Utopianism
Matthew Greengold, Texas State University

Seminar III: Sunday, March 20, 2016:

Recording the Waves: Wearable Fertility Trackers and Technological Visions
Sara DiCaglio, Pennsylvania State University

Sex, Surrogacy and Female Agency: The Example of Bollywood
Sneha Kar Chaudhuri, West Bengal State University

The Female Consumer and the Futurist Fear of Sex
Rachel Perry, Auburn University

3. Committee-Sponsored Programme at CCLA/ACLC at University of Calgary 2016

The Committee now has a guaranteed seminar slot on the programme of the Canadian Comparative Literature Association/Association Canadienne de Littérature Comparée. Our Committee Member, Tegan Zimmerman arranges the programme each year. This year's seminar programme took place on 29 May 2016 at the University of Calgary and the programme was as follows:

Seminar Title: Communities: LGBTQI Lives and Voices / Communautés: Vies et voix LGBTQI

Sponsored by the ICLA Comparative Gender Studies Committee

Chair/Présidente: Tegan Zimmerman, Okanagan College

Seminar: 29, May 2016:

Same-Sex Desire and Jewish Community: Queering Biblical Texts in Canadian and American Jewish Literature

Shlomo Gleibman, York University

LGBTQ Communities: Iranian-Canadians with Iranians

Safaneh Mohaghegh Neyshabouri, University of Alberta

Circumcision as Close Reading

Jonathan A. Allan, Brandon University,

A Study of Double Gender in Female Characters: Dian Chan in The Romance of Three Kingdoms

Xuanying Wang, University of Alberta

4. ICLA World Congress in Vienna 2016

Committee Seminar Programme. The Committee will be sponsoring a five-day seminar on the topic of '(Queer) Relationality: Gender and Queer Comparatists at Work' for the ICLA World Congress in Vienna from 21-27 July. The seminar will feature 20 speakers on the topic. A summary introduction to the seminar appears below and everyone is welcome to attend.

Seminar Title: (Queer) Relationality: Gender and Queer Comparatists at Work

Sponsored by the Comparative Gender Studies Committee

Chair: William J Spurlin, Brunel University London

Because the comparative examines literary and cultural texts relationally rather than what is assumed to be ontologically given, how might we theorise the ways in which genders, sexualities, languages, temporalities, identities, and cultural spaces touch? How might we examine spatial and cultural notions of physical proximity in comparative gender and queer studies frameworks? Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick observes in *Touching Feeling* that the term 'beside' is generative because 'it comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivalling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting,

aggressing, warping, and other relations' (8). What is crucial to queer relationality is not only the act of comparison, but a critical examination of the space 'in between,' which is not a space separating discrete categories, bodies, or languages, but binds, transforms, and translates them quite queerly. How might an emphasis on relationality demonstrate, in new ways, the multiplicity of inflections and intersections between gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, national and religious affiliation, and disability? Finally, what are some of the political stakes of a relational analysis, when we consider, for example, relations of language and violence and other power relations? To what extent can the relational, the trans, the liminal, the mediating space 'in between' operate as a potential site of rupture, of epistemological or social transformation?

The papers in the seminar will be grouped according to the following sub-themes for each of the five seminars:

- Seminar I: Gender Relationality and the Spaces Between
- Seminar II: Translation and Crossing Languages Queerly
- Seminar III: Cultural/Spatial Relationalities
- Seminar IV: Gender/Sexual Relations of Power
- Seminar V: Intertextual and Generic Relationalities

Annual Business Meeting of the Committee. The Committee will be holding its annual business meeting at the ICLA in Vienna on Tuesday, 26 July, and all are welcome to attend. The business meeting is open to its members and to anyone with a scholarly interest in comparative gender and comparative queer studies. Elections will be held at the business meeting to fill posts vacated by those whose offices expire in 2016; these include those of the Chair and one Executive Committee Member. Other members of the Committee's Executive Sub-Committee who were elected at ICLA in Paris in 2013 have the option of continuing in those offices for another 3-year term (expiring in 2019), or they may step down and the office will be up for election. The Committee will also discuss its plans for a seminar at the ACLA in 2017 in Utrecht, The Netherlands, and publication plans for the ACLA seminar in Seattle in 2015 and for the ACLA 2016 papers, as well as for the papers at the ICLA in Vienna.

5. Publications of the Committee

The Committee has published special issues in such journals as *Comparative Critical Studies* (on 'Gender and Literary Studies' in 2009); *Comparative Literature Studies* (on 'The Gender and Queer Politics of Translation: Literary, Historical, and Cultural Approaches' in 2014); and in *Intertexts* (on 'Comparatively Speaking: Gender and Rhetoric' in 2014). Additionally, the Committee has published edited volumes, such as *Translating Women* (ed. Luise von Flotow, 2010); and *Comparatively Queer: Interrogating Identities across Time and Cultures*

(eds. Jarrod Hayes, Margaret Higonnet, and William J Spurlin, 2010). All of these works have made important interventions in the field, and the Committee has several other projects in line for publication.

6. Status of the Committee at ICLA as a Standing Committee

The ICLA Executive Board in Beijing in September 2014 granted the Committee permanent, standing status as a research committee of the ICLA given its record of accomplishment over ten years since its inception at the Hong Kong ICLA in 2004, given its membership of over 70 members located on all six continents, given the new membership it has brought into the ICLA (especially graduate students, whose research is reshaping the contours of comparative studies), and given its productive record of seminars at ACLA and ICLA, its involvement in Canada and in South Africa, and its productive publication record. The study of gender and sexuality as sites of comparative enquiry will continue to make important interventions to the field of comparative literature for many years to come, and the Committee plans to remain active within the Association, internationally within the discipline, and within the broader academic context. The Committee is grateful to the ICLA Executive Committee for the support of its work over the past three years and for the recognition of its contribution to the Association. The Committee also appreciates the financial support given by the Executive Committee for its conference in Pretoria, South Africa, last year, and the Committee is willing to host another conference in Africa, Asia, Latin America, or in the Antipodes, in the years in which there is no ICLA World Congress, in order to make it easier for its members located outside of Europe and North America to attend and participate in its activities.

7. Chair's Note

As this will be my final report for the Comparative Gender Studies Committee, I would like to thank personally the ICLA Executive Committee, especially the President, Hans Bertens, for the wonderful support in recognition of the work of this Committee. It has been a pleasure serving as the Committee's Chair for the past six years.

Respectfully submitted to the ICLA Executive Committee,

William J Spurlin
Brunel University London (UK)
Committee Chair

10 June 2016