



ROMS Newsletter - Fall/Winter 2021

Transition and adaptation have been the key themes of this fall semester. Bit by bit, we are spending less time at our computers and more time interacting in person. Campus is bustling again. Professors and students are resuming travel for research and study. But we continue to exercise our creativity to face the various challenges of this moment.

This newsletter focuses on examples of creativity and resilience in Romance Studies through these challenging times. Below, alumnus Quique Toloza beautifully articulates how his passion for Spanish and Hispanic literature sustained him through a demanding STEM program at UNC. Continuing a theme from previous issues, we share examples of two courses making innovative use of technology to connect students and experts across the globe. We learn how Dr. Chloe Hill integrates her research on Brazilian literature with work as a literary translator and teaching in the Portuguese program. Graduate student Giuseppina Gemboni explains how African-descended Italian authors expose Italy's postcolonial legacies, and how her dissertation research rethinks Italian Studies against a backdrop of fraught debate about Mediterranean migration.

It is a pleasure to share with you some of the work that Romance Studies professors and students continue to accomplish in extraordinary circumstances.

Ellen Welch, Department Chair

Recent Highlights



- This Fall, Associate Professor Emil' Keme took over as convener of the [UNC Critical Ethnic Studies Collective](#). Professor [Oswaldo Estrada](#) began a term as Director of the Faculty Fellows Program at the [Institute for the Arts and Humanities](#).
- Teaching Professor [Dorothea Heitsch](#) and UNC in Montpellier Resident Director [Carol Huber](#) earned a [Transatlantic Mobility Grant](#) from the French Embassy's Cultural Services division to support new initiatives in UNC's study abroad partnership with the University of Montpellier, France.
- In October, Professor [Serenella Iovino](#) interviewed Indian writer Amitav Ghosh as part of a forum on "[Water Politics in the Age of the Anthropocene](#)" hosted by the Center for the Humanities and Social Change in Venice, Italy.
- Professor [Hassan Melehy](#) hosted the writer and poet [Habib Tengour](#) on campus in October for a public poetry reading and class visits.
- PhD. Candidate in Italian Studies and Graduate Romance Association President Gina Mangravite was inducted into UNC's [Frank Porter Graham Honor Society](#) in recognition of her outstanding service to the university.

Alumnus Spotlight

Enrique (Quique) Toloza graduated from UNC in 2017 with a double major in Physics and Hispanic Literatures and Cultures. He is now a graduate student in a joint MD/PhD program at Harvard Medical School and MIT specializing in neuroscience.



What made you decide to double-major in Physics and Hispanic Literatures and Cultures at UNC?

As a first-year, I knew I wanted to eventually apply to medical school, and I had felt drawn to Physics since early high school. Despite this pull to the sciences, the teachers who had made the biggest impact on me as a high schooler were the ones who taught my literature courses, both in Spanish and English, and I was sad to be moving away from that.

As a side note, I was also pretty embarrassed that every time I visited my relatives in Colombia, I was too shy to speak up in Spanish.

I decided I could address both of these problems at once by bringing Spanish literature in as one of my majors, thus allowing me to connect with my roots in the history of Latin America and to keep pursuing a mastery of the Spanish language. Choosing this course made possible some of the most formative experiences in my college career.

How did studying Hispanic Literatures and Cultures enhance your undergraduate experience?

First, the obvious: my literature courses were a very welcome change of pace from the pile of science courses prescribed to pre-med students. Preparing for medical school is a marathon: engaging with a very different academic environment, especially one centered around creative analysis and discussion, is a really great way to keep from burning out.

The less obvious but perhaps more significant impact of studying Spanish literature, and studying the Spanish language in general, was the way it empowered me to do fun things outside of the classroom and make broader connections with my interest in medicine. It was one of my Spanish professors who recommended I join an after-school program reading Spanish books to elementary students – one of my favorite things I did in college. It was because I had sharpened my Spanish skills through coursework that I had the confidence to apply for an interpreter position at UNC-CH's student-run clinic, SHAC. Along with my basic science research, clinical interpreting was the most meaningful experience I had as an undergraduate.

You must be incredibly busy these days with your PhD research! How and to what extent do you maintain your passion for Spanish and literature in Spanish?

In medical school (and before Covid), I was able to once again use Spanish in a clinical setting, this time as a student clinician at a night clinic specializing in Spanish-speaking patients. It has been wonderful to have this intersection between Spanish and medicine continue to evolve as I progress in my training – it's exciting to think about being able to work with Spanish-speaking communities in the future as a full-fledged physician.

Do you have any advice for current undergraduates at UNC?

In my first year or so, I was really worried about building my resume and hitting these imagined goal posts that seemed prerequisites to getting to the next stage. Not only was this stressful, but I found I wasn't really into a lot of my extracurriculars.

Please, try to relax and focus on finding what stimulates you – I was surprised by how often I was able to work towards my goals while actually enjoying myself. Besides, it's a lot easier to present yourself (in interviews, personal statements, etc.) in the best light when you are genuinely excited about what you've done.

Many of my favorite interview moments have come from science-focused interviewers asking me about playing guitar, or clinical interpreting, or Spanish literature.

RadioGrafías: A Literary Podcast Created by Students

Teaching Assistant Professor [Paola Cadena-Pardo](#) and her students share an innovative course project



During this past Spring 2021 we embarked on a literary journey in SPAN 373, “Literature and Life.” This course offered a panoramic approach to Latin American literature with the specific purpose of relating biographical experience to literary works. We approached a varied corpus of major and representative authors, both canonical and more contemporary, including short stories, poetry, correspondences, diaries, memoirs, and interviews. Our discussions were focused on the different aspects surrounding the creative experience: biographical, social, and historical contexts, as well as the aesthetics of the literary works. However, we not only read and discussed the authors. We also got to meet and talk with some of them directly. As the main project for the course, we produced a narrative podcast called *RadioGrafías*, in which students had the opportunity to interview one of five contemporary Latin American writers over Zoom. Each author answered questions about their life and creative experience, and about the poems or short stories that were read by the students in advance. These audio files from the Zoom interviews then served as the main source to produce podcasts. Above all, students had the possibility to personally ask the authors about their texts, and their experiences both as human beings and as writers, which they said was the most significant and relevant part of the whole project. All in all, they were able to get a closer view of the life behind and inside literature.

My Latin American Literature course pushed me to another level as a Spanish student. Every class we read different authors from different countries with different styles. The diversity of language that Dr. Cadena-Pardo exposed me to was astounding. It opened me up to so much variety in the Spanish-

speaking world, and gave me a much richer picture of how people across the continent speak and interact with one another.

The big project in the course involved interviewing an author and making a podcast about his or her life and works using our own narration and clips from the interview. Often when we read things in an academic setting, we only discuss them with our classmates and professors. It's a rare and precious moment in any discipline when one has direct access to the artist, and can inquire from the source as to the meaning of a work. My partner and I interviewed Dr. Manuel R. Montes, a professor, drummer, and accomplished writer. As someone who loves to write and create, I couldn't help asking off-topic questions about his creative process and how I can know where to begin, but fortunately Dr. Montes was gracious enough to give me some wonderful advice!

Not only did the interview with Dr. Montes give me some words of wisdom in my life, but it gave me a boost of confidence in my abilities as a Spanish student. When learning the language, I usually only practice speaking with my classmates and professors. To be able to converse and conduct a professional interview with someone natively fluent (and who isn't purposefully trying to make it easier for me to understand!) showed me that I have the skills I need, and I have gone forward in learning Spanish with confidence rather than nervousness.

-- Jack Brownlee, '22, History/English & Comparative Lit/Honors Program/Hispanic Studies Minor

Taking SPAN 373 at UNC this past spring was a very rewarding and interesting experience. The course itself covered a variety of Latin American poets and authors and their works, but it was especially interactive because we were tasked with meeting with, interviewing, and creating a podcast about a modern Latin American poet. It was incredibly interesting to read their works, analyze their poems, and then ask them about their writing process to fully understand the meaning of the poems. Many literature classes are based on interpretation, and it is difficult to fully understand the context and intention behind poems by authors who are no longer living. So to be able to interview and talk to a writer was a very important experience that was unlike many other classes I had taken before. I appreciated the way in which this class offered more interactive and collaborative projects like the podcast assignment, because while taking classes online during COVID, it was extremely difficult to stay focused or motivated, especially when many classes all followed the same, repetitive format. The podcast project really expanded my abilities to discuss interpretations of literature, because I was transferring my thoughts on the poems into a very different form that allowed me to be more creative. It made the process of analyzing literature feel a lot more interactive, as if we were all having one large, living conversation, rather than being told what to think based on years of scholarly analysis. I really appreciated the ways that this class offered a different perspective to the study of poetry and literature.

--Chelsea Ramsey, '23, English & Comparative Lit/Latin American Studies

Listen to the podcast at: <https://amelietagus.wixsite.com/radiografias-unc>

Meet Professor Chloe Hill

Teaching Assistant Professor Chloe Hill joined the ROMS faculty in Fall 2020 after earning her Ph.D. in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies from Brown University.



How did you start studying Portuguese?

While also American, my mother lived in Brazil for a number of years in the 1970s. I grew up hearing Portuguese spoken at home and listening to Brazilian music. When I started undergrad, I knew I wanted to go abroad to Brazil, so it just made sense to major in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies. The rest, I guess, is history.

How would you describe your area(s) of expertise?

My scholarly work is focused on twenty-first-century Brazilian novels. I am particularly interested in works that are transnational in scope, that challenge traditional configurations of World Literature, and that incorporate practices of translation. Right now, I'm developing a project on apocalyptic fiction from Brazil and other parts of Latin America that can be read as examples of World Literature.

I'm also very interested in the works of twentieth-century Brazilian writers such as Clarice Lispector, João Guimarães Rosa, Rubem Fonseca, Caio Fernando Abreu, Hilda Hilst, Ivan Ângelo and Ignácio de Loyola Brandão.

You are also a distinguished literary translator. (Dr. Hill's translation of *Purifications or the Sign of Retaliation* by Myriam Fraga won the Cliff Becker Prize for Poetry in Translation in 2017.) How does translation complement your other research and teaching activities?

I think translation makes me a better reader. My published translations to date have all been works of poetry that really tasked me to consider questions of sense and sound. Furthermore, Fraga's poems engage in a heady intertextuality with Greek and African myth that has required me to be really attuned to these literary allusions. I take those reading practices into my work as a literary critic, particularly because I focus on contemporary fiction that stages translation in a variety of ways, for example, through communication between characters who don't speak the same language, through the transposition of digital media into literary form, and through various kinds of border crossings.

In the language classroom, I try to stay away from translation practice itself, so as not to give the students – particularly in a time when translation is so accessible through online tools – the impression that there is a one-to-one equivalency between languages. That said, however, working between languages in a material way such as translation, allows me to better understand the nuances of language that can be confusing to students and help coach them through those particularly thorny areas.

This semester, you've been teaching a First Year Seminar, "We are all Watsons: Crime Fiction from the Portuguese-Speaking World." Could you tell us about a memorable discussion or activity from your course?

This course has been an absolute joy to teach! We've been reading some very canonical writers from the Portuguese-speaking world (Eça de Queirós, Rubem Fonseca, Pepetela, to name a few) through a genre that has made them accessible and digestible to first-year students. One class in particular, I divided them into groups to cast the film adaptations of some of the novels we've been reading. It was so fun to see Idris Elba, for example, turn up in nineteenth-century Portuguese text, and I think it gave the students, who may not be particularly interested in studying literature, a better understanding of the works.

Live from Montpellier France!

Carol Huber, Resident Director of UNC in Montpellier, on connecting with students in a Languages Across the Curriculum course



What does the resident director of a study abroad program do as she waits for the easing of travel restrictions that will allow students to return to France? She leverages her newly acquired Zoom skills to engage with students on campus in a weekly Languages Across the Curriculum (LAC) discussion course from her home in southern France!

Supported by the College of Arts and Sciences and six campus Title VI centers, including the Center for European Studies, LAC courses such as FREN 308 give students the opportunity to practice communication skills in world languages outside the traditional language and literature curricula.

This fall, I have been happy to connect with students in an online setting while waiting for the UNC in Montpellier program to resume in January. My course, entitled “Speaking of Sustainability—South of France *Art de Vivre* and Public Policy at Work for a Sustainability Agenda,” allows students to use their French-language skills to explore sustainability initiatives in southern France. The Mediterranean city of Montpellier is pursuing an ambitious public policy agenda of sustainable initiatives in food production and distribution, clean energy transportation and the circular economy. Students examine how cultural attitudes representative of the Mediterranean “art de vivre” (art of good living) reinforce these

initiatives. Short readings or podcasts inform participants and provide the framework for the online discussion forum that leads up to the live Zoom session. Recently, students explored the implications of the newly minted expression “locavore” which describes a person who prefers to consume locally sourced foods. If the “locavore” movement is taking hold in Montpellier, can it translate to an American context?

UNC students will have the opportunity to explore these issues and initiatives in greater depth through a new summer study abroad program being offered in Montpellier in May 2022. The 4-week program features a French language course and FREN 379: Environment, Society, and Public Policy in Southern France, a 3-credit course taught in English by me and faculty from the Biology department of our partner Université Paul Valéry – Montpellier.

These new initiatives are supported by a 2021-2022 Transatlantic Mobility Grant jointly sponsored by the Cultural Services of the French Embassy in the U.S., NAFSA, the FACE foundation, the U.S. Embassy in France, and UNC-Chapel Hill.

Graduate Student Spotlight

Meet Giuseppina Gemboni is a Ph.D. candidate in the Italian Studies program and recent recipient of the Armida Marconi Falvo Graduate Award in Italian Studies. Her dissertation, tentatively titled “The Representation of Space and Place in Italian Postcolonial Literature,” explores questions of space and place in postcolonial Italian literature.



Your dissertation focuses on Italian authors who come from, or whose families came from, regions of Africa once colonized by Italy. What drew you to study this body of literature?

As an undergraduate student in Italy, I was exposed to Mediterranean Studies, Postcolonial Studies, and postcolonial literature mainly from the Anglophone and Francophone world. In recent years Postcolonial Studies and postcolonial Italian literature have acquired an increasingly significant role within Italian Studies. Because of Italy's geographical position in the Mediterranean, migration represents a huge debate in Italy today. While current national ideology describes immigration as a "migrant crisis," Italy fails to address its colonial past and its legacy in the present. The distinctiveness of the body of literature I focus on lies in the fact that these writers have faced, directly or indirectly, Italian colonialism, and this is a main theme in their writings. This corpus unveils issues of Italian society that Italians tend to ignore, such as structural racism, colorism, sexism, violence against migrants and people of color, citizenship discrimination, and identity. I believe it is crucial to promote a process of decolonization and help redefine the Italian canon according to diverse cultural identities.

How are you hoping to contribute to the field of modern Italian studies through your project?

Italy's colonial past has been suppressed from public discourse for a long time, or, when addressed, it has been whitewashed. Discussing space and place in Italian postcolonial literature and placing the Mediterranean at the center of discourse decenters the Eurocentric analysis of issues that seem to concern only Italy, but that in actuality concern the whole Mediterranean region, such as migrations, racism, and citizenship. Through my research, by engaging with space and place, I wish to show how postcolonial cultural production questions the Italian colonial past and situates at the center of discourse long misplaced and marginalized subjects and historical events. I aim to participate in the process of reconsidering Italy's colonial past and promote debate in Italian society.

Which author or text from your dissertation do you think should be better known and why?

One of the authors who should be better known is Ubax Cristina Ali Farah. Born in Italy to a Somali father and an Italian mother, she grew up between Mogadishu and Rome. In her works, this author overturns the gaze and rewrites Italian colonial history from the point of view of the colonized, highlighting the participation of Somali women in the fights for national independence and Somali diaspora in Italy and Europe. Apart from Italian colonialism, her novels and short stories discuss institutional violence in Italy, racism, first generation migrants, and second-generation Italians. Farah shows how Italian institutions push postcolonial subjects to the margins, both of cities and society, failing to recognize and address their problems and requests.

Films Under the Stars



1 - Teaching Professor [Hélène de Fays](#) founded the ROMS Film Club to give UNC students a COVID-safe way to gather and enjoy the cinema culture of the Romance language-speaking world



2 - Teaching Professor [Dorothea Heitsch](#) introduces one of this semester's films

Faculty Publications 2021



Cadena Pardo, Paola. "Viaje estético, desplazamiento interior y exilio facultativo en Julio Cortázar: la experiencia migratoria en el discurso." *Chasqui Revista de literatura*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2021, pp. 275–87.

Estigarribia, Bruno. "A Diachronic Account of Exceptional Nasalization Patterns in Guaraní Causatives." *International Journal of American Linguistics*, vol. 87, no. 2, 2021, pp. 203–41.

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Estrada, Oswaldo. "Cruzar la frontera: violencia y afecto en la narrativa mexicana del milenio." *Novísimas. Las narrativas latinoamericanas y españolas del siglo XXI*, edited by Ana Gallego Cuiñas, Iberoamericana, 2021, pp. 281–301.

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---. "Rosario Castellanos and Her Feminist Essays." *Teaching the Narrative of Mexicana and Chicana Writers*, edited by Elizabeth Martínez, Modern Language Association, 2021, pp. 51–59.

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Heitsch, Dorothea. "Early Modern Pluralism: Religious Discourse, Natural Philosophy, and (Utopian) Space in France and Beyond." *Early Modern Visions of Space: France and Beyond*, edited by Dorothea Heitsch and Jeremie C. Korta, U.N.C. Department of Romance Studies, 2021, pp. 315–42. North Carolina Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures 322.

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Heitsch, Dorothea, and Jeremie C. Korta, editors. *Early Modern Visions of Space: France and Beyond*. U.N.C. Department of Romance Studies, 2021. North Carolina Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures 322. xii + 443 pp.

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