Graduate Student Spotlight:
Alex Messejnikov

Alex Messejnikov is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Comparative Literature. He joined the program in 2014 and is preparing to defend his dissertation this academic year.

Can you give us a glimpse of your personal background before you came to Bloomington?

My personal background is complex. I was born in Ukraine, but my family ended up moving to Israel when I was 3 years old because the Soviet Union was collapsing. I lived in Israel for the next twelve years. Then I moved to Winnipeg, Canada at the age of 15, where I graduated high school and got a bachelor’s degree in English from the University of Manitoba. Shortly after, I moved to the U.S to pursue my graduate education. I received my M.A in English at Bemidji State University in Minnesota, where I taught Composition for three years. I wrote my M.A. thesis about Ernest Hemingway’s fiction. In it, I focused on the symbolic function of nature in his, and the ways Hemingway’s narratives affirm that life is worth living even in the face of great personal tragedy. Because of all the moving around I’ve done in my life, I became fluent in English, Russian, and Hebrew. While English is technically my third language, it is, at this point, the language in which I dream and express myself most fully.

What brought you to IU?

When I was an undergraduate student at the University of Manitoba, a professor with whom I was taking a survey course in American literature explained to me she had a degree in Comparative Literature, and suggested I consider the field because of my background. I ended up pursuing an M.A. in English first because of my interest in Hemingway. After graduating with my M.A, I decided that because of my linguistic background, I was in the unique position to put three literary traditions into conversation with one another. I sought admission to IU’s Comparative Literature department because of my interest in translation (I was interested in studying with Bill Johnston),

(continued on page 4)
By: David M. Hertz

First, hats off to Paul Losensky, previous chair of Comparative Literature. He did a heroic job getting us through the pandemic (to this point) and also overseeing three complete moves of our department as Ballantine Hall was renovated, first to one side of the building, then to another, and finally to our new home!

We now have handsome new quarters on the sixth floor of Ballantine Hall, with offices stretching from BH 642 down the eastern wing of the building, replete with meeting rooms, space for graduate students, and the latest home of the Horst Frenz Library. I hope you will come to visit us when you are in Bloomington. Our main office is very comfortable too, and we have a book cabinet filled with published writings by Comparative Literature faculty over the years, located near a comfortable couch for browsing. Sarah Shin has taken great trouble to reorganize our amazingly varied departmental writings, so by all means feel free to stop in and thumb through our collected works.

The pandemic continued to cast shadows over the university in the winter of 2022, though things gradually started to improve. The faculty also voted to increase graduate stipends, using our precious Pasko bequest, a wonderful gift that came to Comparative Literature during Paul Losensky’s term as chair.

Granted, the pandemic period has been tough on the university but we are coming back to life. Toward the end of March, we begin a series of three memorable public events. First, Carlos Colmenares Gil came out from the University of California at Irvine to speak about Venezuelan and Brazilian writers, contextualizing two fresh voices from Latin America, Igor Barreto and Carolina Maria de Jesus, unpacking their work within the context of their urban cultural environments. This was our first public event since the covid pandemic. I was reminded of that great moment in Beethoven’s Fidelio, when the prisoner finally came out for some air. Faculty and students attended and we all listened together to a live presentation in one room for the first time in many, many months.

A few weeks later, we hosted the first Albert Wertheim Memorial Lecture in two years. It was given by Matthew Isaac Cohen, who offered an intriguing talk entitled “Come Like Shadows So Depart: Notes Toward a Global History of Shadow Theatre.” As the university as a whole started to show signs of life, the ever-resourceful Stephanie Klausing could only find one space, the elegant Federal Room in the IMU. Stephanie and Sarah Shin also
managed to get refreshments there at the last moment, and for the first time in almost two years the Comparative Literature community was able to share some food and drink. Finally, Professor José Pedro Serra, visiting from the University of Lisbon, spoke at our annual spring party, which took place in the University Club. His presentation, which included penetrating comments on tragedy written over thousands of years, was entitled “Shadows and Dreams: Tragedy and Language in Fernando Pessoa’s The Mariner.” It was fascinating to hear how all of this contemplative thinking on tragedy tied into the writing of the renowned Portuguese writer.

It is true that two of our distinguished speakers mentioned shadows. But they brought us back into the light of intellectual life, as experienced by human beings sitting together in a live setting (not on Zoom, thankfully) with their fine lectures.

What a variety of provocative topics! These presentations ranged from South America, out to Indonesia, and finally to Pessoa, one the greatest modern writers of Portugal, exploring how his voice related to the ancient Greco-Roman concepts of tragedy.

But now let’s take a look at what some of our graduate students are doing. I’d like to acknowledge the recipients of our recently developed departmental fellowships and the generosity of the donors that has made it all happen. Our first recipient of the Newman Family Fellowship is Meaghan Murphy, who is researching ancient Roman conspiracy theory in relation to contemporary American conspiracy theory. She is investigating how narratives from these different periods “maintain similar reference points and construction across time.”

Our first Fogg Highsmith Award recipient, Yilin La, who has to come from China to do her doctoral work with us, is researching the poetics of prayer in George Herbert and Emily Dickinson, and her intrigue with the comparative poetics of Islamic and Christian traditions continues. Alan Reisner has been awarded the Stallknecht Fellowship for his dissertation research. He is developing a theory of myth based on Gödel’s incompleteness theorem. He will be in Paris next year as part of our Nanterre exchange program for graduate students. He plans to consult with Luc Brisson, a highly respected French scholar who happens to be an emeritus director of the CNRS, a distinguished French research institute, and also an alumnus of Nanterre. Brisson has also written on the connections between Gödel and myth theory, but Alan plans to also branch out into new applications based on his unique knowledge of Japanese literature and culture.

This is a stunning array of varied intellectual projects pertaining to comparative literature. I can’t wait to hear more about their work.

I have been thinking a lot about the breadth and flexibility of Comparative Literature, enabling us all to study literature without the usual confines of disciplinary walls and linguistic strictures. All of the awards and lectures I’ve described above have helped me appreciate our field all the more.

What other discipline could offer such breadth?

The comparative literature community, so diverse and so full of intellectual riches, really ought to stay in touch. I hope all colleagues, current and emeriti, and all alumni, far and wide, will send news.

We would love to hear from you.

David M. Hertz
Chair and Professor
Comparative Literature
What has been your favorite thing about living in Bloomington?
Most areas in Bloomington are within walking distance, and you are always likely to see someone you know when you are out for a run or heading to class, which makes you feel like you are part of a community. The size of the town makes it easier to form and maintain friendships with people in the department and outside of it—even if they live a bit too far, since you can always meet with them at a bar or a coffee shop somewhere in the middle. Overall, Bloomington is great because it offers an opportunity to form close-knit ties with intelligent, interesting people from diverse disciplinary and cultural backgrounds.

You’re a couple of chapters into writing your dissertation, would you like to share what it is about?
My dissertation compares Vladimir Nabokov’s and Thomas Pynchon’s fiction on the basis of their interest in the representation of reality through visual media. In the context of their writing, this category includes (but is not limited to) photography, film, television, advertising, memory, representations of history, and works of art. Both authors are interested in the potential visual media has of becoming hyperreal—of appearing more real than reality itself and thereby replacing reality. I find the topic of hyperreality interesting and especially relevant to the social and political dimensions of modern life because our understanding of the world is increasingly determined by what we see represented onscreen.

What do you hope to do with your IU education?
I hope to be able to continue my research and teaching as a professor. One of the reasons I want a career in post-secondary education and research is my belief in the continued importance of studying and teaching the arts and humanities. Studying literature (and art) makes us better human beings because good art tackles life’s spiritual, moral, philosophical, and existential dimensions. As things stand, American culture puts a lot of emphasis on vocational training. Vocational training is important, but human beings are much more than servants of the economy or producers of money. Learning to engage with and understand art helps us realize our full potential as moral subjects and complex, thinking and feelings beings.

In addition, studying the arts and humanities helps us make better sense of the lives we lead in the vast media landscape of the twenty-first century. In this day and age, we consume a lot of fictional texts (film, television, advertising, literature etc.) on a daily basis—more than at any other time in history. Reading these texts critically, with an eye to why we produce them and how they shape our lives and understanding of reality is crucial if we want to realize ourselves as autonomous, self-aware subjects.

Now that you are approaching the end of your time in the program, how would you reflect on your experience at IU?
The last eight years have been stressful, but looking back at things, I also had a lot of fun. I consider myself very fortunate because I met many wonderful people in the department with whom I formed close friendships and made long-lasting memories. I feel proud of everything I learned and all the challenges I overcame. My tenure at the department of Comparative Literature has made me a better thinker, teacher, writer and overall, a better human being. I would not have made it without the support our department’s wonderful, close-knit community of graduate students (of which I am proud to be a member), the mentorship of our faculty, and the tireless dedication of our secretarial staff, who always do their best to help us navigate administrative and life-related issues.
In Memoriam: Eugene Eoyang

Professor Eugene Eoyang passed away in the fall of 2022. He was one of the great comparatists and the first Chinese American to serve as president of the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA). He was also the author of many books and essay on comparative literature, east-west literary relations, Chinese poetry, translations, and many other interdisciplinary topics.

Over the years, I collaborated with Professor Eoyang on many projects and I always found them to be rewarding and fun. Among the best of these projects was our effort to collect a series of papers on the most universal topic we could identify. We eventually gathered up a series of scholarly papers on the theme of “mutability” in poetry, including poems from Nahuatl, German, French, Italian, Chinese, Arabic, and more. Many of them were published in the Yearbook of Comparative Literature, which is now published by the University of Toronto Press. Recently, I also learned that Eugene and Pat Eoyang have been philanthropists for many years, endowing a number of fellowships in the Office of International Studies that have helped many students from overseas attend Indiana University.

Professor Eoyang’s teaching reached a wide audience, which, considering his many interests, is completely understandable. One of Eugene’s gifted students, jazz professor and pianist Luke Gillespie, who teaches in the IU Jacobs School of Music, organized a special memorial concert in February 2022. Those of us who attended heard some jazz, and chamber music by Schubert and Brahms. The performances were fabulous.

Most memorable were the comments that Eugene Eoyang arranged to be released upon the occasion of the memorial concert. I’ll include an excerpt here: “I have asked my friend (and former student Luke Gillespie) to organize the concert, because instead of being remembered with sadness and sorrow, I wish to be remembered with joy and enjoyment, as I did on the many Sunday afternoons in which I attended chamber concerts in Auer Hall performed by the superb musicians of the Jacobs School of Music.” Professor Eoyang then went on to explain why he requested each piece that was to be performed. Then he concluded with the following: “Now, as the New York waitresses are fond of saying: Enjoy!”

A party at the University Club in the Indiana Memorial Union followed.

This was a superb way to celebrate a great life, as organized by the person who lived it.
Jacob Emery

Professor Emery’s essay “The Mirror and the Mine: Photography in the Abyss of Labor,” appeared as the afterword to the Verso anthology *Capitalism and the Camera* in 2021. Another essay, on “The Contemporary Russian Novel,” will be included in the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of the Russian Novel*. His novel *A Clockwork River*, which he wrote with his sister Sara, came out in October 2021. It was featured in a list of the best new fantasy and science fiction in *The Times*, which called the book “as charming as it is uncontainable, an uber-confident picaresque comedy in the authentic, madcap 18th-century manner.” He co-edited a selection of Sigizmund Krzhizhanovsky’s nonfiction in English translation with Alexander Spektor of the University of Georgia. The compilation is called *Countries That Don’t Exist* and was published by Columbia University Press in February 2022. Professor Emery’s next book, *The Vortex That Unites Us: Versions of Totality in Russian Literature*, is a conceptual anthologizing of the Russian canon and is scheduled to release in 2023 with Northern Illinois University Press.

Jennifer Goodlander

Jennifer has been happy to once again share her research through performance. In the fall 2021, she performed Balinese wayang kulit (shadow puppetry) at Northern Illinois University after giving a research talk. In April, she gave a workshop talk and performance at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. Her article, “Representation from Cambodia to America: Musical Dramaturgies in Lauren Yee’s Cambodian Rock Band,” will be published by the Journal of American Drama and Theatre in the fall as part of a special issue on Asian American Dramaturgies. She also presented papers at the MLA and Mid-American Theatre conferences. Jennifer is also happy to announce that she and her wife Tina adopted a puppy, Lyra, in the fall. This spring also marks the return to roller derby. Watch for her playing with the Circle City Roller Derby this summer!

Bill Johnston

Bill Johnston published two new translations in 2021: from the Polish, Kaja Malanowska’s *Fog* (Melbourne, Australia: Text Publishing), and from the French, Jean Giono’s *Ennemonde* (New York: Archipelago Books). In November he was awarded the Joseph Conrad Literature Medal by the Józef Piłsudski Institute, for his contributions to promoting Polish literature abroad. For the 2021 – 2022 academic year he is on sabbatical in Marseille, France, where he is working on a translation of Parts I and II of Maria Dąbrowska’s novel cycle *The Nights and the Days*, supported by a National Endowment for the Arts Translation Fellowship.

Edith Sarra

Edith Sarra, along with her co-translator Yasuko Ito Watt, published *From the Edges of Disaster*, a volume of translations from the tanka poetry of Tanaka Takuya. The book began as a translation of 50 tanka by the poet on the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011. In 2014, Sarra and Watt’s translation of the sequence won the William F. Sibley Memorial Prize in Translation of Japanese Literature and was published on the University of Chicago’s website. Over the
next few years, Sarra and Watt interviewed Tanaka and continued translating more of his poetry, focusing on his use of tanka as a medium for documenting the subjective experience of environmental disaster. Tanaka wrote two moving, prize-winning tanka sequences in response to the “triple disasters” of March 2011, and to a nuclear accident at the Tokaimura uranium re-processing plant in 1999. *From the Edges of Disaster* includes a bilingual translation of Tanaka’s two tanka sequences on these disasters and Sarra’s critical introduction contextualizing Tanaka’s work in the framework of contemporary Japanese poetry and the cultural critique of global environmental crises. In March 2022, on the 11th anniversary of 3/11, Sarra was invited to deliver a lecture on Tanaka’s disaster poetry for Harvard’s Japan Forum series, co-sponsored by the Japan Disaster Archive. In February, she delivered the Kempf lecture at Yale University on the problem of narrative closure in the Tale of Genji, a lecture based on her 30 years of teaching the Tale of Genji at IU, and her 2020 book, *Unreal Houses: Character, Gender and Genealogy in the Tale of Genji*.

Russell Valentino
Russell Valentino returned to serve as chair of Slavic and East European Languages and Cultures in July 2021 after nearly five years in the dean’s office (work for which he received the IU Bicentennial Medal). A month earlier, his translation of Bosnian author Miljenko Jergović’s epic family saga *Kin* was published by Archipelago Books. The book was subsequently long-listed for the Dublin Literary Award, the world’s most valuable annual prize for a single work of fiction published in English. In spring 2022, Professor Valentino offered a new upper-level undergraduate course, “How to Translate Anything,” jointly listed between Slavic, Honors, and Comparative Literature. The course has drawn a very talented group of high-achieving students working in a range of languages from Spanish, French, and Italian to Hindi, Russian, Croatian, Korean, and American Sign Language. Professor Valentino will offer this course again in spring 2023. Finally, late 2022 was supposed to mark the end point for a four-year, $1M grant from the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, Ukraine for which Professor Valentino served as a co-director. The project had achieved many of its goals in support of Ukrainian higher education initiatives associated with strategic communications training by the time research and teaching in Ukraine abruptly ceased due to the Russian attack of the country in March of 2022. Professor Valentino has shifted his efforts for the time being into a variety of service projects to help displaced students and scholars and is currently serving on a coordination committee for PEN USA in search of ways to help displaced Ukrainian writers.

Sonia Velázquez
After two years of Zoom conferences, Sonia Velázquez was thrilled to participate in person in the Texas Cervantes Symposium this past October. She spoke about the political importance of the prologue in Miguel de Cervantes’ *Novelas ejemplares*. Following up on her love for the author’s more unconventional works, Prof. Velázquez has published an article on *El rufián dichoso*, Cervantes’ only hagiographic drama. It will appear as a chapter in *Drawing the Curtain: Cervantes’s Theatrical Revelations*. 
Willis Barnstone
This year, Professor Barnstone completed a new translation of Baudelaire’s Les Fleurs du mal. He is also about to submit Paintings of Poets and Magic Couplets, portraits of 230 poets with couplet commentary.

Sumie Jones
Sumie Jones, who retired from teaching 15 years ago, finally gave up all serious causes and endeavors in July 2021 and moved into a retirement home, where she now enjoys taking part in the Shakespeare Study Group and the Mahabharata Reading Group as well as watching plays, operas, and movies online. By the invitation of the Center for Japanese Studies of the University of California, Berkeley, she gave an online lecture in February 2022 entitled “Uptown and Downtown in Early Modern Japanese Urban Literature: The Making of a Three-Volume Anthology,” in which she reminisced about her happy days of working on the project with her colleagues and assistants.

James Naremore
In 2021, James Naremore published Letter from an Unknown Woman, a volume in the “Film Classics” series from the British Film Institute. He also completed Some Versions of Cary Grant, which was published by Oxford University Press in April.

Bronislava Volková
The Department of Comparative Literature celebrated the completion of a truly remarkable academic year at its Spring Reception on April 27.

The evening began with a lecture from Professor José Pedro Serra, who is visiting this semester from the University of Lisbon. Following the lecture, the winners of this year’s departmental awards were announced.

**Undergraduate students**

*Wertheim Award in Comparative Drama:* Toby Huter for her paper, “The Female Gaze and Chinese Boys Love”

*Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston Award:* Samantha Waterman

*Outstanding Senior Award:* Grace Cutshaw

**Graduate students**

*C. Clifford Flanigan Memorial Colloquium Prize:* Maggie McLaughlin for her paper, “Like when God Throws a Star: Imitations of Homer’s *Iliad* Alice Oswald’s *Memorial*”

*A.I. Award for Distinguished Teaching:* Claire Riley

*Annie Geduld Memorial Prize:* Julie Le Hégarat


*Newton P. Stallknecht Memorial Essay Prize:* Raquel Grove for her paper, “Translating the ‘Materialist Novel’: Text as Body and Body as Text in Rachilde’s *Monsieur Vénus*”

*Wertheim Award in Comparative Drama:* Nidhi Singh for her paper, “Mediocre Fathers in Tracy Letts’ *August: Osage County* and Mrinal Sen’s *Ek Din Achanak*”

Additionally, the department announced the recipients of three fellowships. Alan Reiser received the Stallknecht Fellowship, Meaghan Murphy received the Newman Family Fellowship, and Yilin La received the Fogg-Hightower Fellowship.

Finally, we bid a fond farewell to Sean Sidky and Julie Le Hégarat after their successful dissertation defenses.

Congratulations to all of our award winners and graduates, and thank you to everyone who contributed to making this a successful academic year!!!

*Graduate student Farhad Anwarzai chats with Professor José Pedro Serra at the 2022 CMLT Spring Reception.*
**Eduardo Andrés Acarón-Padilla**

Originally from the coastal town of Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico, Eduardo is a dual PhD student in the departments of Comparative Literature and Central Eurasian Studies. His most recent project addresses these intersections in a comparative study of Christopher Marlowe’s and ‘Abd-Allāh Hātifī’s depictions of the Central Asian emperor, Timūr, also known as Tamerlane. In April, Eduardo was one of six IU students invited to present at the Islamic Studies Program’s conference “Mapping the Landscapes of Islamic Studies at IU.” Eduardo’s paper, titled “‘Abd-Allāh Hātifī’s and Christopher Marlowe’s Books of Timūr: Towards a Theory of Rhetoric” attempts to bridge the gaps between two poetic (and visual) portrayals of the life of Timūr. The paper argues that these portrayals allow us an opportunity to study the theoretical underpinnings of rhetorical practice in Early-Modern Persian and English literatures. Eduardo received the 2021-2022 Renaissance Studies Fellowship and was also recently awarded a Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship from the Islamic Studies Program to study second-year Arabic at Indiana University’s 2022 Summer Language Workshop. He hopes to learn Arabic to do research on Arabic-language philosophical, theoretical, and historical texts from the tenth to the twelfth centuries. Eduardo wants to learn more about the reception and importance of these Arabic texts in fourteenth to seventeenth century Persian literary and intellectual history.

**Rowena Galavitz**

Rowena is finishing up her M.A. in comparative literature and religious studies this academic year. She’s also completing the certificate in literary translation. Her project for the certificate involves the translation of the award winning first novel *Ghost Horse* by Karina Sosa Castañeda, a project she is also currently pitching for publication. She was accepted into the Bread Loaf Translators’ Conference in Middlebury, VT for this summer’s Manuscript Workshop. Rowena’s translation of Elena Poniatowska’s “The Seamstresses” was accepted for publication by Toad Press, and it’s scheduled to come out at the end of the summer. She continues to work on other translation projects as well and plans to dedicate herself to translation and editing once she leaves IU. She intends to continue residing in Albuquerque, NM.

**Sarah Lawson**

Sarah N. Lawson passed her qualifying exams in both Comparative Literature and Folklore and Ethnomusicology last year and is now writing her dissertation - a structural analysis of contemporary retellings of fairy tales. This academic year, she presented on pandemic pedagogies at the American Folklore Society Annual Meeting and has published book reviews in both “The Journal for Folklore Research Reviews” and “Marvels and Tales.” She also presented a paper for the English Graduate Conference at IU in May.

**Gabriela Lemos**

This past year, Gabriela served as the Academic Coordinator for the students in
comp lit and came up with creative ways to maintain friendship and camaraderie. As of this Spring, she completed her coursework for her Portuguese minor. On a personal note, she was very happy to be able to visit her family in Brazil in December for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic!

**Margaret McLaughlin**
Maggie spent most of her year completing her master’s thesis, entitled “Hold Your Horses!: Animal Mastery and Overseas Exploration in Iron Age Greek Art and Homer’s *Odyssey*,” and diving into her PhD coursework. She served as the co-chair of the Student Advisory Board and helped initiate the departmental teaching repository. She also works as a graduate tutor for Writing Tutorial Services and is presented at a pedagogy conference in May.

**Meaghan Murphy**
Meaghan has spent the past year perfecting and teaching her course on modern conspiracy theories, as well as preparing for her qualifying exams. She also received the newly established Newman Family fellowship. This summer, she’ll head to Hangzhou, PRC to improve her language skills.

**Alan Reiser**
In the last academic year, Alan completed requirements for his Japanese pedagogy MA, and is looking forward to teaching Japanese again this summer before heading to Paris to represent our department at Nanterre next year. Beyond the classroom, Alan relearned typing after designing an ultra high-efficiency alternative to QWERTY, the Hands Down layout, and other professional-grade tools for wordies. His work is already used by dozens of others around the world in several languages and projected to save Alan more than the equivalent of 13 miles of walking on his fingertips annually while writing his dissertation about post-modern mythopoiesis. The grandest narrative Alan aims to deconstruct is that of the aspirational grad student, as his daily video calls to his two granddaughters frame his personal mini-myth that he is important, at least to these two toddlers, even as they learn of the world through stories of his own academic odyssey.

**Natasha Rubanova**
Natasha presented her work on reportage writer Hanna Krall at an annual convention for scholars studying Slavic cultures (AATSEEL) in February. She also received the Polish Century Club Exploratory Research Fellowship. The fellowship will allow her to travel to Poland this August where she will conduct research on Polish documentary film of the Thaw period and lead a panel at the Visible Evidence Conference at the University of Gdansk.

**Cynthia Shin**
Cynthia got married this year! After a small courthouse ceremony in the afternoon, the department’s end-of-the-year social served as a de facto reception for Cynthia and Sarah to celebrate their union. Academically, Cynthia received a summer research fellowship from the Institute of German Studies. She’s been spending her summer writing about Japan as a space in German cinema – a comparative project that she believes will have bigger implications in thinking about East/West dichotomy and its representation as a whole.