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New Books Published by UCSB French and Italian Scholars

Three faculty members in the Department of French and Italian at UC Santa Barbara have published new books ranging in subject from deadly medieval theater to Scheherazade's Lovers to the culture of secrecy in early modern Europe.

In "Murder By Accident: Theater, Medievalism, and Critical Intentions" (University of Chicago Press, 2009), Jody Enders, professor of French and Theater, explores the concept of intentionality, especially as it relates to the theater. Drawing on a group of medieval events in which a theatrical performance precipitated deadly consequences, Enders suggests that the marginalization of intention in critical discourse mirrors the marginalization -- and misunderstanding -- of theater.

"Murder By Accident" revisits the legal, moral, ethical, and aesthetic limits of the living arts of the past, and pairs them with examples from the present -- reality television, snuff films, the "accidental" live broadcast of a suicide on a Los Angeles freeway, or an actor who jokingly fired a stage revolver at his temple and caused his own death.

In "Les Amoureux de Schéhérazade: Variations Modernes Sur les Mille et Une Nuits" (Droz, 2009), which translates to "Scheherazade's Lovers: Modern Variations on the Thousand and One Nights," Dominique Jullien, professor of French and comparative literature, explores modern rewritings of the tales of the "One Thousand and One Nights." Focusing on the French-language tradition while also placing her study within a larger context, she identifies four dominant interpretative readings, which

provide the book's four chapters: political, aesthetic, feminist, and introspective.

Rather than attempting to exhaustively catalogue each of these, Jullien offers in-depth analyses of exemplary cases. The first chapter, for example, studies the motif of the prince in disguise in the French popular novel of the 19th century. While the Caliph Haroun Al-Raschid of the "Nights" wanders the city in search of adventure and to restore social order, his modern incarnations engage in ambiguous projects of philanthropy as entertainment. Disguised as a man of the people, the aristocratic righter of wrongs becomes the central protagonist of these serial novels, while the depiction of urban reality, transferred from 10th-century Baghdad to 19th-century Paris, takes on heightened political and social meaning in an age defined by capitalism, expansion of the press, and social unrest.

In his book "Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy in Early Modern Europe" (University of California Press, 2009), Jon R. Snyder, professor of Italian Studies and comparative literature, and chair of the Department of French and Italian, crisscrosses Europe, with a special focus on Italy, to explore attitudes toward the art of dissimulation -- the deliberate disguising or silencing of one's most intimate thoughts and emotions.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, many early modern Europeans -- princes, courtiers, aristocrats, and commoners alike -- chose to practice the shadowy art of dissimulation. For men and women who could not risk revealing their inner lives to those around them, this art of incommunicativity was crucial, both personally and politically. Many writers and intellectuals sought to explain, expose, justify, or condemn the emergence of this new culture of secrecy, and from Naples to the Netherlands, controversy swirled for two centuries around the powers and limits of dissimulation, whether in affairs of state or affairs of the heart.

Discussing many canonical and lesser-known works, Snyder, who is also chair of UCSB's Consortium on Literature, Theory, and Culture, examines the treatment of dissimulation in early modern treatises and writings on the court, civility, moral philosophy, political theory, and visual arts.

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