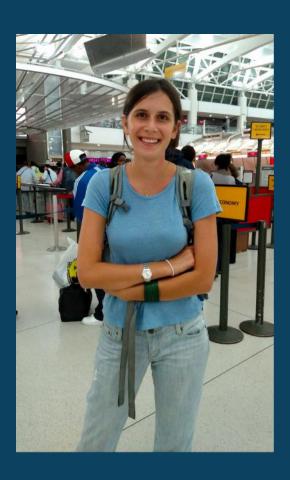
Catherine Medalia Johannet Prize 2017–2021

# Awardee Stories

Catherine believed people's stories could make a difference. Learn how these awardees have been changing the world.





Dear friends of the Catherine Medalia Johannet Fund,

Five years ago, when we lost our beloved Catherine, we knew how important it was to carry on her mission to help others. The Columbia University Institute for Comparative Literature and Society (ICLS) is where Catherine was inspired to focus on literature as a means to change societal views about people with disabilities. It is also where she found the mentors who helped her find her summer internships and guided her in her senior thesis. We knew ICLS would be the right place to carry on Catherine's vision. With your support, the prize and internship was established in Catherine's name at ICLS.

We are extremely grateful to Mia for compiling these stories from the prize recipients, and so impressed with their creativity, engagement with ethical questions and commitment to effect change in the way societies address inequalities, strife and injustice.

There is an African saying: "Say my name and I live."

We keep Catherine's name and spirit alive by enabling the Catherine Medalia Johannet Prize and Catherine Medalia Johannet Summer Internship to continue in perpetuity. Both the prize and the internship acknowledge all that she accomplished as well as the many ways she inspired others during her short life.

Thank you for your support,

Catherine's Family

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## Introduction

#### by Mia Xing

Every one of us has actors, writers, or musicians we adore so much that every so often, we wonder, what are they up to now? We want to keep up with their every project because their vision inspires us, and their drive motivates us. Occasionally, we even turn to articles that report, "The Cast of X: Where Are They Now?" Consider the compilation before you a similar investigation. This is a heartwarming collection of reflections by previous recipients of the Catherine Medalia Johannet Prize for senior theses and internships. What was the experience of these outstanding students of ICLS? What was the behind-the-scenes thinking motivating their projects that were recognized by the prize? What are they up to now? And most importantly, how did the support of the Catherine Medalia Johannet fund shape their academic and professional careers?

You will find that the recipients are all in lanes of study and work that continue their pursuit for meaningful engagement with society: forging her own path in neurology and critical care, working with refugees, backpacking and seeing the world, studying privacy and health law, working as a paralegal in Paris... One thing unites their diverse paths and pursuits—their strong commitment to using literary, linguistic or translation skills to address social inequalities, conflict and injustice. This is the mission of the Catherine Medalia Johannet Prize, in memory of Catherine's love for using language and literature for social causes. With the financial support they received from the fund, students were able to live in New York City during the summer, fund personal trips that further extend their academic understanding, and so on.

As the compiler who had the privilege of connecting with everyone and learning about their inspiring experiences, I myself am also a beneficiary of the Catherine Medalia Johannet fund. Winning the Internship Fellowship Prize in the summer of 2021 allowed me to work at a nonprofit publisher that focuses on uplifting literature in translation and works by immigrant writers in the U.S.

But even before my incredibly rewarding internship, before I nervously pressed "submit" on my application for the prize, I have always thought that there can be no prize that better embodies the spirit of the ICLS community and what its members strive to do. Every year, consistent with Catherine Medalia Johannet's interest in literature and its use in effecting change in societies, the Catherine Medalia Johannet Thesis Prize celebrates a Comparative Literature & Society or Medical Humanities major who has written a distinguished senior thesis that demonstrates the highest academic rigor, creativity and engagement with ethical questions and the Catherine Medalia Johannet Internship supports a major volunteering at organizations that offer opportunities to use literary, linguistic or translation skills to address social inequalities, conflict and injustice.

This is a prize that encourages students to explore the intersections they care about. It commends their bravery in overlooking the doubts of "is this too niche" or "is this only meaningful to me". It affirms the values of ICLS, namely that we do not read or write in a vacuum, that the power of literature, language, and translation can help us navigate and make a difference in a global context. The Catherine Medalia Johannet fund is integral to ICLS, as the memory of Catherine and the mission of the prize encourages students to chart larger and larger domains of social inquiry using their specialized knowledge in language and literature.

# CATHERINE MEDALIA JOHANNET SENIOR THESIS PRIZE WINNERS

# Alexandra White

#### 2017 Winner of Catherine Medalia Johannet Senior Thesis Prize

Thesis Title: "Crisis, Place, Health, and Narrative in Oral Histories of Hurricane Katrina and the Chernobyl Disaster"

Alexandra (Sasha) is currently a fourth-year medical student at Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine of Case Western Reserve University and a Masters student in the department of Bioethics and Medical Humanities at CWRU. She is half-Russian-half-American and grew up mostly in Moscow, Russia. At Columbia College, she double majored in biology and Comparative Literature and Society.

Tell me a bit about your thesis.

I'm half Russian and half American. I grew up in Russia and then moved to the U.S. for college. ICLS allowed me to take my struggle with being bicultural and not knowing how to fulfill both my cultural identities, and sublimate that into work I did for my major. I always wanted to compare a

Russian text and a text based in and around Russian speakers and then a text based in and around the United States. I was also pre-med, so I found the medicine, literature, and society angle very meaningful. I found this collection of oral histories about the Chernobyl disaster by the same author, Svetlana Alexievich. What I was especially interested in was how people's sense of self and identity changed when they experienced this kind of unprecedented environmental event. Further, I've always had a pretty strong interest in selfhood and identity due to my personal experience of being bicultural and not really fitting in anywhere.

I was thinking about a good comparative event in the U.S., and we landed on hurricane Katrina because of its unprecedented scale. There were lots of oral histories of Katrina. I found several and then wrote a comparison of the two oral histories. I was also incredibly fortunate that Columbia has a renowned oral history center, and I was ultimately co-advised by Sayantani DasGupta and Mary Marshall Clark at the oral history center. I think ICLS really encouraged me to pursue interdisciplinary study.

#### What has your experience at ICLS has meant to you?

ICLS was where I really thrived professionally at Columbia. It helped me recognize that I enjoyed this kind of environment where you have to blaze your own path. I was doing Medicine, Literature and Society when it wasn't even a major track yet.



Now I go to medical school at the Cleveland Clinic Lerner College of Medicine. When I was deciding which medical school to attend, my experience at ICLS played a big part. The school I go to currently is unusual in that it is very small and self-directed. You get a ton of mentorship and faculty support. You have to be very driven and chart your own path, but you don't necessarily have a lot of tests. It has this unconventional personalized approach to medical education. I feel that I could draw a lot of parallels between that and ICLS.

### How does your thesis topic relate to the mission of the Catherine Medalia Johannet Prize?

I was interested in highlighting the voices of people whose voices were not amplified at the time of these different catastrophes, and highlighting the lived experiences of people that may not match the overarching public narrative of these different catastrophes. I also talked about how power structures and societal forces intersected to cause greater suffering in both of these populations.

I'm planning on applying to neurosurgery. One of the reasons I'm interested in neurosurgery is because people who need neurosurgical care often have their selfhood or their lives at stake. During my clinical rotations, I found it meaningful and fulfilling to ensure that people's wishes are met and that they are able to have some control, even in these incredibly difficult and dark times of their lives.

In medical school, I found that I liked critical care, and I was kind of surprised by that until I thought back to my thesis. I had spent a year basically writing about these two groups of people that had suffered immensely. These are the populations and things that I do find really fulfilling to think about.

What kind of difference did receiving the financial support and the recognition from the prize make for you?

"It was incredibly meaningful, especially to be the inaugural recipient. I never met Catherine, but she truly sounded like this incredible person. It was a huge honor. I especially admired how the department decided to come up with this award in memory of this person whom everyone had true respect and admiration for."

I took a year off, and I used the prize money to fund a trip organized by the University of Moscow to Georgia. It was a week-long seminar on violence in post-modern society with students from Russia and students from Georgia. I was able to meet people from Georgia and talk about the impact that the Soviet Union had had on other countries.



# Grace Alford-Hamburg

#### 2018 Winner of Catherine Medalia Johannet Senior Thesis Prize

Thesis Title: "#Criminal: Trump, Macron, and the Discourse of Deportability"

Mimi Grace Alford-Hamburg is a data analyst and traveler. Her interests include digitalization, public health, climate change, knitting, and dogs. She holds a BA in Comparative Literature and Society from Columbia University and an MSc in International Relations Research from the London School of Economics (LSE).

#### Tell me a bit about your thesis.

My thesis was a comparative analysis of the impact of online discourse on deportation laws in the U.S. and France, focusing specifically on an executive order that Trump issued and some statements that Macron made that didn't actually wind up becoming law. Both of these broadened the types of criminal activity and crimes for which an undocumented immigrant could be deported, and changed the prioritization of that. I was performing literary analysis on online discourse and on law itself.

## How do you think your thesis is related to the mission of the Catherine Medalia Johannet prize?

My thesis was about immigration and criminal justice, and the intersection between the two.

Those are really central social justice issues of our time and I was exploring them by literary-type legal analysis. It led to insights that had to do also with questions of misinformation, of what makes people fear and what makes people hate, and how people conceive of communities, which are deeply ethical questions as well. I like ICLS because it offers literary analysis on discourse about immigration and law.

#### Why was this thesis topic important to you?

When Trump first started his campaign during the primaries he was saying things about immigrants, and I remember thinking, "That's never going to work because everybody loves immigrants." But later on it became very apparent to me that that was not true. And it made me realize that I had a gap in my understanding of the world and of the country that I lived in. To get a handle on that, the focus of my major was immigration in the U.S. and France. Being able to look at what was happening in the U.S. and compare it to what was or wasn't happening in France was a good way for me to try and help cure some of my ignorance.

# How did your thesis-writing experience and your time at ICLS overall inform your later choices or aspirations in school and professional life?

There's actually a pretty direct thread through the choices I have made. My thesis focused primarily on online discourse. I wrote a bit about algorithms, AI and the context of social media and how we consume news and content.

After graduating from Columbia, I took a year off and worked. Then I did a masters in international relations where I specialized in technology policy. My master's thesis was about community, nationalism, and immigration —I did it on Estonia's e-residency program. And now I'm going to be a data analyst.

"The way the CMJ Prize is structured and what it asks gives a lot of room for students to go into their little niches and study things that are highly specific, but also the relation between the entire world and that one little dot."

It was really the dissertation that got me interested in technology in a concrete and functional sense. There is a perspective that studying the humanities gives you — a way of shifting gears and points of view, and being able to look at a problem from many directions. You don't just believe everything that the computer says; you think about what you're asking from it.

How did receiving support or recognition from the prize make a difference in your experience?

There are obvious practical benefits. The recognition made me a stronger candidate for graduate schools. Also, the Catherine Medalia Johannet Prize makes a lot of sense as a prize

for ICLS. The way the CMJ Prize is structured and what it asks gives a lot of room for students to go into their little niches and study things that are highly specific, but also the relation between the entire world and that one little dot.

#### What are you up to these days?

I'm taking a break and backpacking around Europe right now, so I've been traveling since July. I'm also doing an online data analytics certification program in the meantime, but I'm kind of just enjoying being alive after getting vaccinated. I wanted to see the world. I wanted to see my friends. I am in Nice, France right now. The sunsets are beautiful.



# Emma Kenny-Pessia

#### 2019 Winner of Catherine Medalia Johannet Senior Thesis Prize

Thesis Title: "Not a Genetic Panopticon, but a Genetic Highway: Using a Deleuzian Framework to Illuminate the Paradox of Freedom and Control in the Direct-to-Consumer Genetic Testing Sector"

Emma is an alumna of Barnard College (BC'19), where she studied Medicine, Literature, and Society. She grew up in Massachusetts. She is now a J.D. candidate at Washington University School of Law where she is interested in privacy law.

# What was the focus of your internship/thesis? How does it relate to the mission of the Catherine Medalia Johannet prize?

My senior thesis centered around data privacy in the direct-to-consumer genetic testing sector. More specifically, I illuminated the need for a paradigm shift in how we conceptualize genetic data privacy and privacy in consumer healthcare products more broadly. To advance my argument, I predominantly focused on the shortcomings of Michel Foucault's panopticon as a model for surveillance, turning instead to Gilles Deleuze's highway metaphor as a more



accurate characterization of mechanisms of control and surveillance at work in the data-driven present day.

#### Why was the internship/thesis topic important to you?

This thesis topic was important to me because it allowed me to hone in on the nexus of my two interests, healthcare/medicine and civil rights/liberties.

#### What was your favorite part of the experience? What did you learn?

My favorite part of the experience was the extended research and writing process as a whole. Before my senior thesis, I had never undertaken a year-long research/writing project, and I found the overall process to be equal parts challenging and satisfying.





## How did the experience inform your later choices and aspirations in your academic/professional career?

My senior thesis completely changed my

academic/professional career trajectory. I was on the pre-medical track throughout college, but while writing my senior thesis I was exposed to legal research and analysis for the first time and found myself more energized than I had ever been by an academic pursuit. I had not once seriously considered law school before this exposure, but

## How did receiving support and recognition from the prize make a difference in your experience?

to make a long story short... I am now in law

school and absolutely loving it!

Receiving monetary support from the senior thesis prize helped me afford an LSAT class and study materials, which were vital to the law school application process.

"Moreover, receiving recognition from this prize validated my academic interests, research and writing abilities, and future aspirations, which has made an invaluable difference in my life."

#### What are you up to now?

I am a first-year law student at Washington University in St. Louis School of Law. One of the reasons I chose to attend WashU was for their Cordell Institute, a collaboration between the law and medical schools that brings together biomedical experts in human genomics with legal experts in privacy and health law – the nexus of interests that I discovered while writing my senior thesis! Outside of class, I am a 1L rep for the Health Law Association, and I am hoping to secure a judicial internship next summer so that I can further develop my legal research and writing skills.

## Gabriel Garon

#### 2021 Winner of Catherine Medalia Johannet Senior Thesis Prize

Gabe graduated from Columbia College this last spring with a BA in Medical Humanities. They are currently working at a non-profit.

My thesis focused on the history of the Young Lords and the acupuncture clinic that the Young Lords and a few other radical organizations set up in Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx in the early '70s. I wrote it for the Medical Humanities major. I started with the takeover of the hospital, and went through how the Young Lords and the Lincoln Detox Clinic found out about acupuncture. I also examined how acupuncture was brought into the clinic. Specifically, there was an auricular acupuncture technique that they brought to the clinic. I analyzed how the clinic was used to build political power and to organize a neighborhood—it went beyond just providing relief to people who were addicted to heroin.

This thesis started out with me just being curious about how acupuncture was brought to the clinic. But it ended up being about the history of those creating abolitionist medical spaces. Of course, I am applying the term "abolitionist" retrospectively. I looked at parallels and resonances such as the "barefoot doctors" in China during the cultural revolution. I also looked at Che Guevara's writing on public health. I was very interested in a communist view on health and biopower.

What I really enjoyed about my thesis was being able to combine the things I was interested in.

My focus within the Medical Humanities major was the intersection of political power and public health, as well as scaling between the individual body, i.e. how we conceptualize our individual bodies and how we understand political bodies.

"It was incredibly rewarding to receive the Catherine Medalia Johannet thesis prize...I'd been researching for about two years before I finally started writing the thesis. So it was nice to have my work be recognized, and to feel that what I was doing was worth people's time and energy in reading."

It was the first time I'd written anything that was longer than thirty pages. I had to learn how to write an academic paper of that scale with that level of independence and openendedness.

It was incredibly rewarding to receive the Catherine Medalia Johannet thesis prize, mostly because I was writing about often under-reported and overlooked history, so I had to assemble my own "archive" of sources. I'd been researching for about two years before I finally started writing the thesis. It was nice to have my work be recognized, and to feel that what I was doing was worth people's time and energy in reading.

I'm currently working for a nonprofit on the Upper East Side., and my work is somewhat adjacent to public health. Overall, the thesis project made me rethink how I see public health and how to organize a community, and what kind of political structures are beneficial to communities that are under-resourced. It was an immensely rewarding experience.

# CATHERINE MEDALIA JOHANNET INTERN FELLOWSHIP WINNERS

# Daniella Adepoca

# 2018 Winner of Catherine Medalia Johannet summer intern fellowship

Daniella graduated from Columbia College in 2020 and majored in Comparative Literature and Society. She earned her master's degree with Distinction from Oxford University in Spanish and French Literature in 2021. She is originally from New Mexico and is currently working in Paris as a paralegal. She will be attending the University of Chicago Law School commencing in the fall of 2022 to continue her passion for using language and literature for advocacy.

I interned with the New Mexico Immigrant Law Center (NMILC) in the summer of 2018 and worked primarily on the asylum advocacy team. One of my main duties was to translate asylum declarations, most commonly from Spanish to English, for pro se applicants being detained at the Cibola Detention Center in New Mexico. Most of the applicants that I worked with were transgender women fleeing persecution in countries across Latin America, and it cannot be overstated how critical receiving asylum was for their security. Working analytically and semantically at the heart of translation was thus a vital exercise, as every word was needed to communicate their stories in the effort to make an immigration judge understand their situation.

Given how in demand NMILC's services were, particularly in the summer of 2018 when we witnessed the height of the Trump administration's inhumane migrant separation policy, I had to step into various roles of high responsibility, and as a consequence, learned a great amount, as I tackled duties ranging from



legal research to client intake to translating. My favorite part of the experience was getting to know and learn from a group of passionate advocates and speaking with our clients and hearing their stories.

I have always been passionate about immigration issues, as I grew up listening to stories of my grandmother and her family seeking political refuge in Mexico following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Growing up in New Mexico, I experienced the value of growing up in a multicultural and multilingual environment, but also witnessed the unequal burden shouldered by immigrant communities. This was the initial impetus motivating me to intern with the New Mexico Immigrant Law Center, but since my summer there I have stayed on board remotely as a volunteer translator. The experience also furthered my interest in law as it gave me real-world perspective into advocacy, and I hope to work as an advocate for immigration rights when I complete law school.

"The opportunity also necessarily encouraged me to reflect on my internship under the framework of Comparative Literature, and in turn I came to understand my experience through this lens: using translation and narrative, I was striving to help someone communicate their story in order for them to surmount a politically defined border."

The prize was instrumental in providing me the financial support I needed to work this unpaid internship. I frequently had to make the one-hour drive between NMILC's offices in Albuquerque and Santa Fe and paying for gas would have been a costly burden without the support from the Catherine Medalia Johannet Memorial Prize. The opportunity also necessarily encouraged me to reflect on my internship under the framework of Comparative Literature, and in turn I came to understand my experience through this lens: using translation and narrative, I was striving to help someone communicate their story in order

for them to surmount a politically defined border.

I graduated from Columbia College in 2020 and went on to receive a master's degree at Oxford in Spanish and French Literature in 2021. Not surprisingly, getting a master's degree did not give me a true break between my undergraduate studies and law school, and so I am taking a year away from studying and am currently working as a paralegal in Paris, seeking to improve my French and gain further experience in law. I will begin law school at the University of Chicago in the fall of 2022.



# Alondra Aguilar

#### 2019 Winner of Catherine Medalia Johannet summer intern fellowship

Alondra Aguilar graduated this past Spring from Columbia College with a major in Medical Humanities and on the pre-med track. While she considers Napa, California her hometown the experiences she had moving throughout her childhood instilled in her a love for traveling and cultural immersion as a way of learning. She completed a summer internship at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health as a CDC Scholar and is currently traveling through Europe with her best friend and a 36 liter backpack.

My first year at Columbia I joined an oncampus club called GlobeMed that focused on global health education through collaborative work, fundraising and our partnership with Gulu Women's Economic Development and Globalization (GWED-G). The internship component involved traveling to Gulu for a period of about 5 weeks to learn about the inner workings of a grassroots organization, help out with health outreach in rural communities and meet employees and volunteers involved at all levels. The projects that my cohort of five GlobeMed interns were primarily involved in were the distribution of 100 mama kits for HIV positive pregnant women to have safe and sanitary deliveries, assisting with malaria and HIV testing in remote villages and collecting media, such as photographs and interviews, to create educational material. GlobeMed's emphasis on promoting global health work through partnership and recognizing the racist and problematic roots of this field, such as the White savior complex and a disregard for cultural cognizance, strongly resonate with this prize's mission to encourage discussion around humanitarian efforts rooted in social justice and health equity. While English is a commonly spoken language in the city of Gulu, the predominant language in the rural areas of Northern Uganda is Acholi, making translation a significant part of the internship experience. We were not able to pick up much Acholi in the few weeks we interned but being able to communicate through art, especially with the





children, marked the universality of images and was an especially exciting experience for me as someone who loves creating art. I believe it is important to acknowledge and never forget the challenges that came from being immersed in a culture very different from my own and living in a relatively underdeveloped region, where basic resources like electricity and plumbing could disappear for days at a time because of weather conditions. I look back at this time with immense amazement for the work being accomplished by local women for local women, and the expansive knowledge I gained from speaking to health workers and community members. Thanks to this internship I know I want to root my future career as a doctor in my passion for understanding how health care is delivered throughout the world. It was because of the prize that I was able to afford all travel costs for this internship and reflect afterwards on the importance of recording and sharing what I learned in order to discuss the ways in which global health is improving and the ways it is still anchored in an imperialistic framework. I hope the Catherine Medalia Johannet prize continues to make opportunities like this a possibility for students who are genuinely

"Thanks to this internship I know I want to root my future career as a doctor in my passion for understanding how health care is delivered throughout the world."

passionate about effecting positive change in their respective fields and exhibiting the plethora of ways in which literature can serve as a robust tool for this, for creatively communicating innovation and unveiling systemic injustices in our world.

Currently I am in a small town on the Mediterranean coast of Spain, backpacking with a friend for 86 days throughout Europe—resisting having to get jobs. When we are not sprinting to train platforms or hiking up cobblestone streets for  $1 \oplus$  bocadillos I sit and read, write, or draw in the nooks and crannies of places once only known to me through art humanities readings.

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# Nora Kushner Salitan

# 2020 Winner of Catherine Medalia Johannet summer intern fellowship

Nora graduated from Columbia College this past spring. Passionate about working with women surrounding the issues of gender-based violence, she is an oral history research assistant at Women's Refugee Commission in New Jersey. During her time at Columbia, she was a Presidential Global Fellow.

I worked at Columbia's Global Health, Justice and Governance Center (GHJG) during the summer of the beginning of the pandemic. It was a remote internship, but it was an amazing opportunity. The Catherine Medalia Johannet intern fellowship prize allowed me to work with a program officer at the Columbia Mailman School for Public Health on a project to assess how COVID-19 had changed funding for gender based violence. The project investigated programs targeted to ameliorate gender-based violence in Nigeria and Colombia. I was trying to determine if COVID-19 had siphoned money away from gender-based violence prevention programming, as well as to understand whether existing grants were going towards gender-based violence in those countries. Because the research had a Latin-American focus, a lot of the documents were in Spanish. As a result, I used language and translation to address global issues.

I was drawn to the project because I wanted to work on something where I could continue to read and think in Spanish. I also appreciated the comparative approach to gender-based violence. On a broader level, I was interested in



migration and gender violence in Latin America—my senior thesis ended up being about femicide in Mexico. Looking back, doing research with the GHJG Center the year before helped direct my thesis towards thinking about gender–based violence at the border, and how capitalism and the infrastructure of the border produce such violence. I used as my primary text a report on femicide in Mexico and a commission report that was advocating for a law passed in 2007. Doing a deep dive into Colombia's laws definitely pushed me towards my thesis focus.

Moreover, the GHJG research was interesting because it taught me about international grant funding, where money comes from and differences in countries' grant agencies.

I also got to help write a country condition report on the status of legislation against gender-based violence in Colombia.

I immensely enjoyed working with my supervisor, Clarissa. It was interesting to learn about the international structure of



"...the internship experience showed me how the nonprofit world works"

nonprofit funding, to see that apparatus—how it moves, how money is transferred, what the sums are, and what people's priorities are.

The internship experience showed me how the nonprofit world works and gave me further experience with gender-based violence. I further confirmed that I enjoy working with women, as working with women from South and Central America has been has been a really filling experience.

I also worked as a translator in an asylum clinic for three years. The mix of meeting people day to day and then seeing what are some of the projects and initiatives in place to combat these problems on a larger scale was an interesting balance.

Nowadays, I volunteer as a coordinator and community liaison at a refugee resettlement agency based in Jersey city. We work with Central American minors being reunified, and we also work with asylum seekers. I see every day that the understanding I gained from my internship of these international apparatuses do really play a role in my job. I am glad that I got to learn about institutions, such as UNHCR and USRIP, that make the refugee resettlement process work. I am incredibly grateful to Catherine's family for the support and recognition.

## **Mia Xing**

# 2021 Winner of Catherine Medalia Johannet summer intern fellowship

Mia Xing is a junior at Columbia College currently studying Comparative Literature and Society and Philosophy. She grew up in Ningbo, China, and moved to Toronto, Canada after middle school. She is interested in film, law, housing, aging, immigration, and Japanese and Francophone literature. She enjoys doing yoga, looking for good ramen in New York, and playing with her cats.

When I immigrated to Canada from China, unconfident and culture–shocked teen that I was, I found some solace in scoffing at one thing: the publishing and bookselling scene in North America. I was disappointed by how dominated it was by works in the English language, and I hoped that it would feature more literature in translation like my favourite bookstores back home. Shouldn't it just be an easy change of mindset? However, time and experience have shown me that the factors of postcolonialism, immigration, diaspora, and linguistic ecology all complicate the task of making literature in North America more diverse.

So I felt excited and lucky that thanks to the generous support of the Catherine Medalia Johannet Internship Fellowship, I got to be a summer intern at Restless Books. Restless Books is an independent publisher in Brooklyn, New York dedicated to providing a platform to literature in translation and immigrant writers. Working there was such a privilege and a joy! At editorial and acquisition meetings, I got to participate in riveting discussions about issues such as the market for and the rationale behind bilingual books. I had the opportunity to research and contact Arab-American illustrators for a Restless edition of The 1,001 Nights. I lived my childhood dream of reading

books for a living as I helped review manuscripts from around the world. I developed a personal affinity for a children's book from South Korea.

More importantly, I got to think about the mechanisms and challenges of turning a book, specifically a book in translation, or nonstandard or immigrant English, into a marketable good. How do foreign authors connect with American readers? How accessible can or should a book be? My favourite task was working on the Restless Classics, a series of classics with new introductions and contemporary approaches. I got a sense of how much thought goes into reframing a foreign language classic to address the relationship between its language and English, its world and our world. In the process of assisting with marketing and award applications, I also became first acquainted with a question that I believe will occupy me for years to come as well: Is it possible to write, translate, produce, and publish against identity politics or market expectations for so-called World Literature? Can books from around the world by people of all backgrounds truly live in the personal libraries of American readers, instead of some children's table or subsection of recognition? This summer has gifted me with hope, and I would like to thank the family of Catherine Medalia Johannet for giving me this special opportunity.



# Catherine Medalia Johannet Prize 2017-2021

Thank you for believing in the power of stories in changing the world, and for remembering Catherine with us.

With your support, the Catherine Medalia Johannet prize will continue to make an impact on student work in comparative literature and society for years to come.

Please consider making a donation at this link:

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