ACLA 2024 Charles Bernheimer Prize: Winner

Committee:
Chair, Anthony Alessandrini (Kingsborough Community College & City University of New York)
Jonathan Culler (Cornell)
Lynn Itagaki (University of Missouri)

Jessica Copley (University of Toronto), *Forms of War: Capitalism, Representation and the State in Post-45 Literatures from France, Japan, and the United States*

Jessica Copley's dissertation, "Forms of War: Capitalism, Representation and the State in Post-45 Literatures from France, Japan, and the United States," is a remarkable work of comparative analysis, spanning geographies, languages, and disciplines. Bringing comparative literature into conversation with the field of critical war studies, her dissertation is a valuable contribution to ongoing arguments regarding the role of representation as a weapon, and a bracing analysis of how literary representation has helped enable changing political representations of war. Copley begins from what she terms "a representational problem for capitalist nation-states": capital needs the crisis of imperialist war for its reproduction, but this necessity contradicts the rosy claims of post-war liberal democracy. The "solution" to this problem has been for capitalist nation-states to represent war in a different form than it took before 1945. Her brilliant readings of literary works from France, Japan, and the United States reveal the ways in which forms of literary representation have been complicit in, and have actively facilitated, the continued waging of war, focusing closely on three specific historical moments: the immediate postwar years, the Viet Nam War era, and the U.S.-led War on Terror. Copley's project departs from a more conventional comparative approach, in which literary traditions are considered sequentially, by addressing works from all three traditions in each chapter, creating productive and provocative tripartite juxtapositions: Jean-Paul Sartre, Noma Hiroshi, Ralph Ellison; Thomas Pynchon, Murakami Ryū, J. M. G Le Clézio; Don DeLillo, Murakami Haruki, Régis Jauffret. At once a subtle work of literary analysis and an exemplary instance of political criticism, Copley's dissertation could not be more timely.