

## **In Memoriam**

**Marguerite “Margie” Rowland Waller  
Professor of Comparative Literature & Language and  
Gender & Sexuality Studies, *Emerita*  
UC Riverside  
1948-2020**



Professor Emerita Marguerite (Margie) Waller passed away on March 11, 2020, after a brief battle with cancer. She was 71 years old.

Born in Nyack, New York, on March 16, 1948, Margie grew up mostly in Indianapolis. Upon graduating from high school, she was featured on the cover of *Seventeen* magazine as a National Merit Scholar. She earned a coveted place in Cornell University’s joint B.A and Ph.D. program, and she earned her B.A. in 1969 Cornell. She decided to venture onward for her PhD, and earned her PhD in Comparative Literature at Yale in 1974.

Professor Waller joined the faculty of Amherst College in 1974, transitioning from a period of student activism to one of professorial insurgence by virtue of being an unapologetically brilliant woman in traditionally male spheres. She remained at Amherst until 1990 when she moved to the University of California, Riverside (UCR), where she taught in the Departments of Comparative Literature & Languages and Gender & Sexuality Studies until she retired in 2018. She directed UC Rome Study Center in 2007-08 and remained interested and invested in international education and Italian film and culture.

Professor Waller was an innovative scholar and a passionate teacher and colleague. Her Fulbright sojourns in Italy, France, and Hungary made her a

committed internationalist with a particular interest in Italian literature and cinema. On her way to obtaining her Ph.D. at Yale, Margie spent a year studying at the University of Florence, an experience that sparked her life-long love of Italy and its culture, and her enduring scholarly engagement with the writings of Dante and Petrarch began. Simultaneously, she became attuned to the influences of contemporary French theory. Her interest in emerging theoretical discourses eventually infused her dissertation on Petrarch, as well as her subsequent monograph, *Petrarch's Poetics and Literary History* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), which drew explicitly on the deconstructive approach of Paul de Man and other contemporary theorists. Margie's ability to bring literary texts, theoretical paradigms, and interpretive frameworks shaped in strikingly different historical or cultural contexts into conversation with each other was to become one of the most consistent features of her interdisciplinary scholarship throughout her career.

Margie's scholarly interests in film also led her to approach film from many angles. She also took summer courses in film production to develop a clear understanding of the technical and material elements at the basis of film language. She eventually produced, shot, and edited a small number of video documentaries. Among these was the 15-minute video essay *Snapshots: Citizens Without Shelter* (1996) on the effects and implications of homelessness in Santa Monica.

At the center of Margie's decades-long engagement with Italian cinema was her scholarship on Federico Fellini, the twentieth-century Italian filmmaker who is widely regarded as one of the most influential filmmakers in the history of cinema. She edited two key volumes that employed a range of contemporary critical filters, such as semiotic, psychoanalytical, feminist, and deconstructionist, to analyze Fellini's films: *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Federico Fellini* (2020, coeditors F. Burke & M. Gubareva) and *Federico Fellini: Contemporary Perspectives* (2002, co-edited with F. Burke). Her papers appeared in a wide range of journals and books, including *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, *Diacritics*, and *Women & Performance*. She also published a number of pieces in Italian outlets. Margie's approach was grounded in an examination of the processes of signification embedded in film texts and the political stakes that emerged in each case. Over the years, her critical apparatus grew increasingly expansive and intersectional, embracing not only Deleuzian and deconstructive influences, but also feminist, postcolonial and decolonial frameworks. Her commitment to postcolonial frameworks led her to co-edit *Postcolonial Cinema Studies* with Sandra Ponzanesi (2012).

Always seeking to bridge scholarship and activism, Professor Waller co-organized three international feminist conferences and a Project at the UC Humanities Research Institute resulting in three edited volumes: *Frontline Feminisms: Women, War, and Resistance* (2000, coedited with J. Rycenga), *Dialogue and Difference: Feminisms Challenge Globalization* (2005, coedited with S. Marcos),

and *The Wages of Empire: Neoliberal Policies, Resistance, and Women's Poverty* (2007, coedited with A. Cabezas and E. Reese).

In 2019, Margie returned to Cornell to dedicate a memorial to honor the nine students and a faculty member killed in a dormitory fire in April, 1967. Her and her roommate's quick actions forming a makeshift rope saved the lives of several others during the fire.

Margie served as the Chair of the Department of Gender & Sexuality Studies at UCR and as a founding member and Chair of the program in Women's Studies at Amherst College. Professor Waller was instrumental in designing UCR's innovative interdisciplinary undergraduate major in Sustainability Studies, the first major of its kind. The Sustainability Studies program, housed in the Department of Gender & Sexuality Studies, reflects her deep concerns over environmental degradation and her commitment to bringing feminist perspectives and knowledge to bear on key issues of sustainability, such as climate change.

At UCR, Margie taught courses in introductory Gender & Sexuality Studies, as well as upper-division courses on Italian film and literature and transnational feminist film, among others. In her final years at UCR, she taught about gender and sustainability in the innovative Sustainability Studies curriculum she was integral to creating. As an interdisciplinary scholar and teacher, her work inspired students in many fields.

Professor Waller is survived by her daughter Lea, sisters Susan Cope and Elizabeth Zee, brother Donald Waller, nieces M. Meredith Masters, Katherine Zee, Mia Zee, Luella Allen-Waller, and Cora Allen-Savietta, as well her great-niece Lennox and great-nephew Lukas. Her parents and her brother Richard predeceased her.

This statement is adapted from several sources, including Áine O'Healey's tribute published in *California Italian Studies*, a remembrance shared by the Dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at UCR, and an obituary available at [www.legacy.com](http://www.legacy.com). Katja M. Guenther combined and edited these sources with the input of Sherine Hafez and Jeff Sacks.