The Comparative Literature Program is pleased to announce two lectures in connection with CLIT30B: “Fortune, Chance and Randomness in European literature from the Renaissance to Diderot” (S 2013)

On Wednesday, May 1, 9:30-10:45am (Girvetz 1004), Rüdiger Campe will give a lecture entitled “The Game of Probability”

The probabilistic revolution in the 18th century provides a history of the relations between mathematical and rhetorical techniques, between the scientific and the aesthetic. This was a revolution that overturned the “order of things,” notably the way that science and art positioned themselves with respect to reality, and its participants included a wide variety of people from as many walks of life. Focusing on the interpretation of games of chance as the model for probability and on the reinterpretation of aesthetic form as verisimilitude (a critical question for theoreticians of that new literary genre, the novel), Campe’s lecture, through examples from German and English literature, will focus on probability’s crucial role in the constitution of modernity.

Rüdiger Campe is Professor of German literature at Yale University, specializes in 18th century literature and culture, especially the intersections between science and literature. His recent book *The Game of Probability. Literature and Calculation from Pascal to Kleist* (Stanford UP, 2013) revisits the 18th century “probabilistic revolution.”

On Wednesday, May 8, 9:30-10:45am (Girvetz 1004), John D. Lyons will give a lecture entitled “Randomness, Fortune, and Faith”

In the early-modern period European society was shaken by turmoil that touched almost every aspect of culture, though the most visible symptoms were religious and political crises. At stake was the very framework of life: why do things happen? Is there an overarching order to the world—providence, predestination, mechanical regularity—or do things happen by chance? In popular culture, the problem of chance was arguably a factor in the extraordinary flowering of tragedy, the emergence of the novel, the growing obsession with gambling, and the fierce reaction by the Catholic Church and monarchy against the free-thinking libertins. In the very middle of the seventeenth century, the writings of Blaise Pascal bring together some of the most important threads of the debates about chance. Since Pascal was a Christian writer, one might suppose that he would attempt to refute the view, largely attributed to the libertins, that the world is apparently ruled by chance. Surprisingly, this apologist for a grace-centered religion (often described as dominated by rigid predestination), embraced chance, which he usually refers to as hasard (as opposed to the more ancient term fortune). In his lecture Lyons will look briefly at Pascal’s description of the manifestations of chance in individual and collective life and to show how Pascal’s observation-based account of human life is compatible with his theological foundation.

John Lyons is Commonwealth Professor of French at the University of Virginia. He has published extensively on French 17th century literature and his recent book *The Phantom of Chance: From Fortune to Randomness in Seventeenth-Century French Literature* (Edinburgh Critical Studies in Renaissance Culture, 2012) has received excellent reviews.

These lectures are co-sponsored by the Comparative Literature Program, the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, the Graduate Center for Literary Research, the Early Modern Center, the Departments of English, French & Italian, Germanic, Slavic & Semitic Studies, and the College of Letters and Science (the Humanities & Fine Arts Division).