

PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION  
The University of Michigan  
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

Benjamin B. Paloff, associate professor of Slavic languages and literatures, with tenure, and associate professor of comparative literature, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to professor of Slavic languages and literatures, with tenure, and professor of comparative literature, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

Ph.D.	2007	Harvard University
M.A.	2002	Harvard University
M.F.A.	2001	University of Michigan
B.A.	1999	Harvard University

Professional Record:

2016–present	Associate Professor, with tenure, Departments of Slavic Languages and Literatures and Comparative Literature, University of Michigan
2010–2016	Assistant Professor, tenure-track, Departments of Slavic Languages and Literatures and Comparative Literature, University of Michigan
2007–2010	Assistant Professor, non-tenure track, and Junior Fellow, Michigan Society of Fellows, University of Michigan

Summary of Evaluation:

Teaching: Professor Paloff has taught several core courses that fulfill a number of requirements, such as R&E and ULWR, and prerequisites in both units. He is a sought-after mentor across disciplines, in both of his home departments, in the MFA program, and in the Departments of History, History of Art, English, and others. He has directed, or is directing, seven doctoral theses and has served on the doctoral committees of a dozen more. In Comparative Literature, his teaching is central to the department's mission, in particular with regard to the deep expertise in the theory and practice of translation, on both the undergraduate and the graduate level. In the Slavic department, he has expanded the department's offerings in Polish literature to such an extent that the Polish program has been completely transformed, with students consistently exposed to a far greater range of texts and periods than ever before. He is also teaching the most popular, and most demanding, course on East European film, which carries requirements. His evaluations in both units are high: Q2 is typically above 4.5 and, in several cases, reaches 5.

Research: Professor Paloff is a specialist in Slavic studies whose work spans Russian, Czech, and Polish literature, history, and culture, as well as literary theory, with a special focus on the theory of translation. He has a distinct presence in transnational scholarly discourse, making significant American contributions to intellectual communities in Poland, the Czech Republic, and Russia. His first monograph won two prestigious awards from the American Association of Comparative Literature and the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages. His second book project, Worlds Apart: Real-Life Fictions of Concentration Camps, Ghettos, and Besieged Cities, is currently in the final stage of completion; it takes up one of the core questions of literary representation—mimesis, or the relationship between fiction and the non-literary world—and considers it in the context of the most difficult events of 20<sup>th</sup>-century East European history. Professor Paloff's extensive translation work is an integral part of his research. He is an active

translator of scholarly and literary texts from four languages—Polish, Czech, Russian, and Yiddish—which makes him unique in the field of Slavic studies. A particular strength of Professor Paloff’s scholarship is how it bridges the East European and the Anglophone cultural traditions by combining academic research with translation practice, thus creating a critical framework for transmitting East European culture into the Anglo-American cultural context. Professor Paloff is a well-published poet and a public intellectual with an international profile.

#### Recent and Significant Publications:

“The Career of The Career of Nicodemus Dyzma: An Introduction.” In The Career of Nicodemus Dyzma, by Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz, translated by Ewa Małachowska-Pasek and Megan Thomas, vii-xii. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020.

“Matter, Spirit, and Linguistic Metamorphoses: Bolesław Leśmian.” In Being Poland: A New History of Polish Literature and Culture since 1918, edited by Tamara Trojanowska, Joanna Niżyńska, and Przemysław Czapliński, 475-479. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018.

“If This Is Not a Garden: Olga Sedakova and the Unfinished Work of Creation.” In The Poetry and Poetics of Olga Sedakova: Poems, Philosophies, Points of Contention, edited by Stephanie Sandler, Maria Khotimsky, Margarita Krimmel, and Oleg Novikov, 17-39. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018.

“Can You Tell Me How to Get to the Warsaw Ghetto?” *Modernism/modernity* 24, no. 3 (September 2017): 429-460.

Service: Since his last promotion, Professor Paloff has served as the director of graduate studies in both units, he has chaired admissions committees, and he has served on executive committees, ad-hoc committees, and lecturer review committees. In Comparative Literature, he has been involved in various translation initiatives, including serving on the Translation Committee where he performed tasks such as reading entries for translation prize competitions. He has completed his term as the acting director of the Copernicus Center for Polish Studies, and he will direct the Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies (CREES) beginning in fall 2021. He is an active participant in MLA committees and maintains strong ties to ALTA, the professional organization of literary translators.

#### External Reviewers:

Reviewer (A): “In terms of scholarly achievement Prof. Paloff’s ‘peer group’ includes only people ten to twenty years his senior. I define it to include scholars who work in multiple Slavic literatures and perhaps have other scholarly or creative interests or have considerable experience at translating ... Prof. Paloff...has, with his prize-winning first book, his nearly completed second book, many book-length translations, and two books of his own verse, put himself, quantitatively and qualitatively, in the company of our most accomplished Slavists.”

Reviewer (B): “Paloff’s research dossier is remarkable for its breadth, which also makes it more challenging to evaluate than most others I have read: its many aspects—from literary and cultural history to public humanities, literary and scholarly translation, translation studies, and poetry—combine with a degree of geographical and linguistic diversity that, in my estimation, it would require several outside readers with different areas of expertise to adequately evaluate.”

Reviewer (C): “I am impressed by the ways in which the totality of Paloff’s published work, disparate on the surface as it is, coheres in his pursuit of understanding the relationship between the various ways in which literary works can explore and reflect the puzzle of what we choose to think of as ‘reality’ when considering our own and historical experience.”

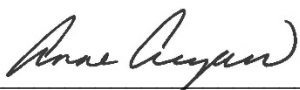
Reviewer (D): “First, every aspect of Paloff’s profile is marked by work of the very highest quality, from articles to translations, interviews, and poetry. Second, he consistently works toward nuanced elucidations of East European or Russian cultural impulses, while avoiding the pitfalls of claims of absolute regional exceptionalism or of a monolithic and universal truth without respect for regional distinctions. And third, every aspect of his profile is supported by an overarching philosophical and moral concern for the way the written word can help us understand what it means to be human. He is a humanist in the broadest and deepest sense of the word.”

Reviewer (E): “He has a breadth of knowledge about multiple literatures and their publishing and book-selling practices, which allows him to discuss the ways in which these books are understood in Europe as simultaneously fictional and documentary, whereas in the United States book market, authors are strongly critiqued as deceptive when they integrate fictional techniques into a purportedly documentary account.”

Reviewer (F): “Ultimately what interests Paloff in this manuscript is affect, what he calls the problematic ‘moral urgency of camp literature’ and the ways in which it engages and manipulates readers, invoking pronounced emotional and moral response. He examines a body of literature whose affect had seemed obvious and morally necessary, but turns out in reality to be more complex, in ways that foreground our habits of reading literature in general.”

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Paloff has played a key role in strengthening the Polish program in Slavic Languages and Literatures and creating the Translation Studies Program in Comparative Literature. One of the leading specialists in Polish culture, he has broad comparative expertise in Russian, Czech, and Yiddish languages and cultures. Professor Paloff is a prolific translator of four languages, a well-known poet, and a public intellectual recognized in Anglophone and Slavic language communities. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Associate Professor Benjamin B. Paloff be promoted to the rank of professor of Slavic languages and literatures, with tenure, and professor of comparative literature, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



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Anne Curzan, Dean  
Geneva Smitherman Collegiate Professor of  
English Language and Literature, Linguistics,  
and Education  
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor  
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

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