PAUL KROLL, Professor of Chinese, Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Colorado, Boulder

“Personal Moments in Medieval Chinese Poetry”

Medieval Chinese poetry, like most self-consciously traditional literature, embraces learning, presumption, and intertextuality with ardor. Scholarship delights in such fields and provides rich fare for the mind. But those moments that suddenly engage the heart (a somewhat neglected organ in the postmodern era) affect us at a deeper level. It is for these irregular but personally cherished encounters that one continues to read throughout a lifetime. In this lecture readings and interpretations will be offered especially from two medieval poets with rather contradictory histories—Lu Zhaolin 卢照邻 from the mid-seventh century and Jiang Yan 江淹 from the late fifth century. Reflecting on their works may also prod us to reconsider the critical limits latent in the oft-heralded “death of the author.”

ANNA SHIELDS, Director of the Honors College, Associate Professor of Chinese, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

“It’s All About Who (and How) You Know: The Epistemology of Friendship in Mid-Tang China”

In social and political competition in medieval China, elite men needed patrons and friends to climb the ladder of the bureaucracy as much they needed literary talent to succeed on the “battlefield of letters” (wenchang 文場). The ability to know and build trust with patrons, friends, and family had long been an important social value in Confucian society, but questions of social knowing had rarely been extended to the knowledge of other phenomena, or to epistemological questions broadly construed. But certain mid-Tang writers, particularly those from outside aristocratic circles, began to raise these questions in new terms. What constituted true knowledge of others--how was it attained and measured? Was it merely instrumental, or was there value in intersubjective knowledge beyond the social realm? Letters, poems, and funerary texts from the long careers of writers such as Li Ao 李翱, Han Yu 韩愈, and Bai Juyi 白居易 give us a surprising range of perspectives on these problems.