Stanford



Margaret Cohen

Andrew B. Hammond Professor of French Language, Literature, and Civilization and Professor, by courtesy, of French and Italian and of Comparative Literature

English

Bio

BIO

Margaret Cohen is a scholar of transatlantic literary and cultural modernity, with particular expertise in the history of the novel and the imagination of the oceans. Her most recent book, The Underwater Eye: How the Movie Camera Opened the Depths and Unleashed New Realms of Fantasy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), was named an outstanding academic title of the year by Choice. Her The Novel and the Sea (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) was awarded the Louis R. Gottschalk Prize from the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies and the George and Barbara Perkins Prize from the International Society for the Study of the Narrative. She is also the author of Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and The Sentimental Education of the Novel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), which received the Modern Language Association's Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione Prize in French and Francophone literature.

She is co-editor of two collections on the European novel: The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel with Carolyn Dever (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), and Spectacles of Realism: Body, Gender, Genre with Christopher Prendergast (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995). She edited and translated Sophie Cottin's best-selling novel of 1799, Claire d'Albe (New York: Modern Language Association, 2003), and has edited a new critical edition of Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary that appeared with W.W. Norton in 2004. In 2019, her co-edited The Aesthetics of the Undersea appeared (Routledge). She is general editor of A Cultural History of the Seas (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), and she is volume editor of A Cultural History of the Seas in the Age of Empire, the fifth volume of this six volume set spanning from antiquity to the present.

An important part of Cohen’s current work involves building intellectual infrastructures for the growing interdisciplinary field of ocean humanities in collaboration with communities across Stanford, and notably the ocean sciences. In December 2024, she was awarded an NEH Humanities Initiatives Grant to develop and implement an oceanic humanities curriculum 2025-2027 (administratively withdrawn by NEH May 2025, appeal pending).
This award builds on two multi-year awards she received in 2023 from Stanford, which focused on creating connections and fostering collaboration between the ocean humanities and the ocean sciences, the Woods Institute Big Ideas for Oceans award and the Public Humanities Seed Grant. She will be continuing this work as a 2025-2026 fellow at the Stanford Humanities Center where her research focuses on "Ocean Science for the Ocean Humanities: The Case of Monterey Bay." .

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

- Professor, English
- Professor (By courtesy), French and Italian
- Professor (By courtesy), Comparative Literature

ADMINISTRATIVE APPOINTMENTS

- Director, Center for the Study of the Novel, https://novel.stanford.edu, (2018-2025)

HONORS AND AWARDS

- Violet Andrews Whittier Faculty Fellow, Stanford Humanities Center (2025-2026)
- "Developing an Oceanic Humanities Curriculum", Humanities Initiatives Award, NEH (withdrawn May 2025) (2025-2027)
- Project Award, "Public Knowledge Infrastructures of the Ocean," PI, Public Humanities Program, Stanford (9/23-8/25)
- Project Award, "Connecting the Blue Humanities and the Ocean Sciences" PI, Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment (9/23-12/24)
- Outstanding Academic Title for The Underwater Eye, Choice (2022)
- Fellow, John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation (2017-2018)
- George and Barbara Perkins Prize, International Society for the Study of the Narrative (2012)
- Violet Andrews Whittier Faculty Fellow, Stanford Humanities Center (2011-2012)
- Harry Levin Prize, Honorable Mention, American Comparative Literature Association (2011)
- Louis R. Gottschalk Prize, American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (2011)
- Faculty Fellow, Stanford Humanities Center (2004-2005)
- Fellow, John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island, National Endowment for the Humanities and the Alexander O. Vietor Fund for maritime history (2002-2003)
- Aldo and Jeanne Scaglione prize in French and Francophone literature, Modern Language Association (2000)
- Fellow, Project for Cities and Urban Knowledges, International Center for Advanced Study, New York University (1999-2000)
- Presidential Fellowship, New York University (1992)
- American Council of Learned Societies grant for recent recipients of the Ph.D., ACLS (1991-1992)

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

- Ph.D., Yale University (1988)
- M.A., New York University (1982)
- B.A., Yale University (1980)
- Student, Universität Konstanz (1981)

LINKS

- Center for the Study of the Novel podcasts: https://novel.stanford.edu/podcasts
- Stanford Report: A Cultural History of the Seas: https://news.stanford.edu/2021/04/22/oceans-examined-historical-literary-lenses/?utm_source=Stanford+Report&utm_campaign=83c4471e82-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2021_04_21_03_17&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_29ce9f751e-83c4471e82-52264045
- Guggenheim Project: https://www.gf.org/fellows/all-fellows/margaret-cohen/
- The Novel and the Sea (lecture, Sydney Environment Institute): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7xxgO-Mweo
- Internet Archive blog: http://blog.archive.org/2021/09/01/access-to-rare-historical-materials-makes-an-ocean-of-difference-for-stanford-professor/
- Conversation with John Plotz about The Underwater Eye: https://newbooksnetwork.com/underwater-eye-margaret-cohen-explores-the-film-aquatic
- Interview about The Underwater Eye: https://press.princeton.edu/ideas/margaret-cohen-on-the-underwater-eye
- The Gothic Imagination: From Castle to Shipwreck: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6HNtJwV9Yw
- Whale-Eye Fantasies Across the History of Film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_8V8k4pzbWA
- Margaret Cohen receives National Endowment for the Humanities Grant: https://sgs.stanford.edu/news/margaret-cohen-receives-national-endowment-humanities-grant

- Oceanic humanities project envisions new wave in education: https://humsci.stanford.edu/feature/oceanic-humanities-project-envisions-new-wave-education
- Ocean Science and Ocean Humanities at Stanford: https://humsci.stanford.edu/feature/oceanic-humanities-project-envisions-new-wave-education
- National Academies: New Heroes: https://explorers.com/margaret-cohen/

Research & Scholarship

CURRENT RESEARCH AND SCHOLARLY INTERESTS

Across her career, Professor Cohen has explored the literature and culture of modernity. Her books include Profane Illumination (1993), which showed the impact of surrealist Paris on Walter Benjamin and The Sentimental Education of the Novel (1999), recovering the forgotten role of women writers in shaping 19th-century French realism. In The Novel and the Sea (2010), she revealed the impact of the ship's log and the history of writing about work at sea on the development of the modern novel, foregrounding the importance of adventure fiction and representations of labor in the history of this form.

Professor Cohen's The Underwater Eye (2022), traces how film and TV created a modern imagination of the underwater and undersea environments that even today few experience directly, yet whose well-being is integral to life on our planet.

Professor Cohen is general editor for A Cultural History of the Sea, a six-volume set spanning from antiquity to the present that appeared with Bloomsbury in April 2021, as well as editor of the fifth volume in the set, The Age of Empire.

Throughout her research and teaching, she emphasizes the importance of engaging with the reality and diversity of marine environments. She is currently researching a book whose working title is Ocean Science for the Ocean Humanities: The Case of Monterey Bay.

PROJECTS

- A Cultural History of the Seas
- Ocean Cultures, Underwater Worlds - Sydney Environment Institute
- Visualizing the Oceans (9/9/2013 - 10/2016)
- Podcast host, Center for the Study of the Novel - Center for the Study of the Novel

Teaching

COURSES

2026-27

- History and Theory of the Novel I & II: COMPLIT 360C, ENGLISH 360C (Win)
- History and Theory of the Novel: Foundations: COMPLIT 360B, ENGLISH 360B (Aut)
- Imagining the Oceans: ENGLISH 168B (Win)
- The Gothic in Literature and Culture: COMPLIT 238E, ENGLISH 238E (Aut)

2024-25

- Imagining the Oceans: COMPLIT 268A (Spr)
- Imagining the Oceans: ENGLISH 268A (Spr)
- Integrative Ocean Study: ENGLISH 149, ENGLISH 249 (Win)
- Long Victorian Novels: ENGLISH 136 (Win)
- Transatlantic Gothic: COMPLIT 338, ENGLISH 338, FRENCH 338 (Win)

2023-24

- History and Theory of the Novel I & II: ENGLISH 360C (Aut, Win)

STANFORD ADVISEES

Doctoral Dissertation Reader (AC)

Ido Keren

Doctoral Dissertation Advisor (AC)

Jessica Monaco

Orals Evaluator

Alfred Jeoffrey Naddaff

Doctoral (Program)

Jessica Monaco

Publications

PUBLICATIONS

- **The Underwater Imagination From Environment to Film Set, 1954-1956** *ENGLISH LANGUAGE NOTES*
  Cohen, M.
  2019; 57 (1): 51–71
- **A Feminist Plunge into Sea Knowledge** *PMLA-PUBLICATIONS OF THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA*
  Cohen, M.
  2019; 134 (2): 372–77
- **The shipwreck as undersea gothic** *AESTHETICS OF THE UNDERSEA*
  Cohen, M.
  edited by Cohen, M., Quigley, K.
  2019: 155–66
- **The Aesthetics of the Undersea**
  Cohen, M.
  2019
- **Submarine aesthetics Introduction** *AESTHETICS OF THE UNDERSEA*
  Cohen, M., Quigley, K.
  edited by Cohen, M., Quigley, K.
  2019: 1-+
- **Seeing Through Water: The Paintings of Zarh Pritchard** *The Sea in 19th-Century Anglophone Literary Culture*
  Cohen, M.
  Routledge.2017
- **Seeing Through Water: The Paintings of Zarh Pritchard** *Coastal Works: Cultures of the Atlantic Edge*
  Cohen, M.
  Oxford University Press.2017
- **The Bonds of the Sea, Review of William Finnegan's Barbarian Days**
  Cohen, M., Borius, H.
  Public Books, The Guardian.
  2016
- **Atlantik/Pazifik: Die imaginäre Erschliessung der Ozeane im Zeitalter der Segelschifffahrt** *Handbuch Literatur & Raum,*

Cohen, M.
De Gruyter.2015

- **Underwater Optics as Symbolic Form** *French Politics, Culture and Society*
ohen, M.
2015
- **Reading the Book of Water** *WAX*
Cohen, M.
2015
- **In a Fish's Eye** *WAX*
Cohen, M.
2015
- **On Time: Kairos and the Arts of Action** *WAX*
Cohen, M.
2014
- **Denotation in Alien Environments: The Underwater Je Ne Sais Quoi** *Representations*
Cohen, M.
2014
- **The International Novel in a National Age** *The Oxford History of the Novel in English, Volume 3, 1820-1880*
Cohen, M.
Oxford University Press.2012
- **"Artists' Blood" and "Interview with Patrick Trefz"** *Surfer's Blood*
Trefz, P., Cohen, M., et al
powerHouse Books.2012
- **Literary Studies on the Terraqueous Globe** *PMLA-PUBLICATIONS OF THE MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA*
Cohen, M.
2010; 125 (3): 657-662
- **The Novel and the Sea**
Cohen, M.
Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.2010
- **Narratology in the Archive of Literature** *REPRESENTATIONS*
Cohen, M.
2009: 51-75
- **The Right to Mobility in Adventure Fiction** *NOVEL-A FORUM ON FICTION*
Cohen, M.
2009; 42 (2): 290-296
- **Review of Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience by Anne-Lise Francois** *Rmanticism and Victorianism on the Net (RaVoN)*
Cohen, M.
2009
- **Flaubert lectrice: Flaubert lady reader ('Madame Bovary')** *MLN*
Cohen, M.
2007; 122 (4): 746-758
- **Historical Fiction** *Oxford Book of Maritime History*
Cohen, M.
Oxford University Press.2007
- **Modernity on the Waterfront: The Case of Haussmann's Paris** *Locating the City*
Cohen, M.

University of Minnesota Press.2007

- **The Chronotopes of the Sea** *History of the Novel*
  Cohen, M.
  Princeton University Press.2006
- **Madame Bovary: contexts, critical reception**
  Cohen, M.
  New York: W.W. Norton.2005
- **Madame Bovary**
  Flaubert, G.
  edited by Cohen, M.
  W.W. Norton.2004
- **Fluid States: The Maritime in MOdernity** *Cabinet*
  Cohen, M.
  2004
- **Modernity as Phantasmagoria: Benjamin's Arcades** *Companion to Walter Benjamin*
  Cohen, M.
  Cambridge University Press.2004
- **Complex Culture** *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*
  Cohen, M., Higonnet, A.
  Routledge.2004
- **Traveling genres (Literary history, novel)** *NEW LITERARY HISTORY*
  Cohen, M.
  2003; 34 (3): 481-499
- **Claire d'Albe**
  Cottin, S., Translated by Cohen, M.
  edited by Cohen, M.
  New York: Modern Language Association.2003
- **Traveling Genres** *New Literary History*
  Cohen, M.
  2003
- **Claire d'Albe: an English translation**
  Cohen, M.
  New York: Modern Language Association of America.2002
- **Sentimental Communities** *The Literary Channel*
  Cohen, M.
  Princeton University Press.2002
- **Empatia e sensibility nell'evoluzione del romanzo** *Storia del Romanzo*
  Cohen, M., Alliston, A.
  Einaudi.2002
- **Il Mare** *Storia del Romanzo*
  Cohen, M.
  Einaudi.2002
- **The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel**
  edited by Cohen, M., Dever, C.
  Princeton: Princeton University Press.2002

- **Claire d'Albe: the original French text**
  Cohen, M.
  New York: Modern Language Association of America.2002
- **The literary channel: the inter-national invention of the novel**
  Cohen, M.
  Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.2002
- **Les Mysteres de la rue et les mysteres du coeur** *La Modernite avant Haussmann*
  Cohen, M.
  Editions de la Recherche.2001
- **Mania, Melancholy and the Reproduction of the Dead Father** *Seductions of the Novel: Stael's Corinne in Critical Inquiry*
  Cohen, M.
  Bucknell University Press.1999
- **Walter Benjamin and Surrealism** *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*
  Cohen, M.
  Oxford University Press.1998
- **Women and French Fiction in the Nineteenth Century** *Companion to the Modern French Novel*
  Cohen, M.
  Cambridge University Press.1997
- **Spectacles of realism: body, gender, genre**
  Cohen, M.
  Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.1995
- **Red Mothers, Wise Grandmothers: Women's Non-Realist Representations of 1789** *Literature Women and the French Revolution*
  Cohen , M.
  Summa Press.1995
- **In Lieu of a Chapter on Some French Women Realist Novelists** *Spectacles of Realism: Body, Gender, Genre*
  Cohen, M.
  1995
- **Panoramic Literature and the Invention of the Everyday** *Rethinking 1895: Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*
  Cohen, M.
  University of California Press.1995
- **Spectacles of Realism: Body, Gender, Genre**
  edited by Cohen, M., Prendergast, C.
  Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.1995
- **Translation of Etienne Balibar, "Althusser's Object"**
  Cohen, M., Robbins, B.
  Social Text.
  1994
- **Review of Robert Alter's "Necessary Angels"** *Comparative Literature*
  Cohen, M.
  1994
- **Profane illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of surrealist revolution**
  Cohen, M.
  Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles, CA; London: University of California Press.1993
- **Review article on Susan Suleiman's "Subversive Intent" and Maud Lavin's "Cut With the Kitchen Knife"** *Annals of Scholarship*
  Cohen, M.

1993

- **The Homme Fatal, the Phallic Father, and the New Man** *Cultural Critique*
  Cohen, M.
  1992
- **The Most Suffering Class** *boundary 2*
  Cohen, M.
  1991
- **Walter Benjamin's Phantasmagoria** *New German Critique*
  Cohen, M.
  1989
- **A Woman's Place: La Petite Fadette v. La Voix des Femmes** *L'Esprit Createur*
  Cohen, M.
  1989
- **Mysteries of Paris: The Collective Uncanny in Andre Breton's L'Amour fou** *Dada/Surrealism*
  Cohen, M.
  1988