

Literature

Highlights of the Year

The past year has been one of considerable activity and accomplishment for the Literature faculty, in both individual and collective terms. Literature continues to perform very well at the balancing act it practices at MIT, its members combining top-level research and publication productivity with devotion to general undergraduate education. Our program plays a vital role in the Institute's GIRs, offering instruction to approximately 1,000 undergraduates per year and affording many opportunities for students to fulfill HASS-D and CI-H requirements through study of literature, film, and other media. In doing so, our faculty receives some of the highest student evaluation scores at the Institute. We intend to be centrally involved in MIT's contemplated revisions of the freshman year experience: Associate professors Diana Henderson and Shankar Raman have already made crucial contributions to the task force and HOC+ debates, and the d'Arbeloff Fund for Excellence in Education has given support to two pilot courses involving four Literature faculty members (Professor Alvin Kibel and associate professors Henderson, Raman, and Noel Jackson). At the same time, we are successfully fostering individual faculty members' research in a wide variety of areas, ranging from (and this is by no means an exhaustive list) innovations in the use of digital technology in the humanities to revaluations of the nineteenth-century British novel, from new perspectives on early modern travel writing to explorations of the boundary between literature and science in the Romantic era, from research into the culture of folksong in eighteenth-century Britain to considerations of Shakespeare's "afterlife" in an array of modern media, texts, and performances.

In the summer of 2005 Professor James Buzard took over as head of the section, succeeding Professor Peter S. Donaldson, who had led our group wisely and judiciously for many years. Largely because of Professor Donaldson's expert guidance, our diverse yet unified faculty finds itself facing numerous possibilities for intellectual enrichment and increased impact, both at MIT and beyond, and a major aim of the faculty is to exploit those possibilities to the fullest. At a time when the Institute is moving decisively past any narrow view of itself as a school for training engineers, we are committed to raising the visibility of literature and other humanistic disciplines at MIT by articulating and exemplifying the value of liberal arts study for world citizens and future leaders. We look forward to collaborating with other programs in the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences (and indeed with others throughout MIT) in this important effort, which we have begun in small ways such as redesigning our section's website and hosting regular informal gatherings of faculty, students, and staff. (One such forum has been Literature's annual IAP offering "Pleasures of Poetry," which attracts a loyal following from all three constituencies each January.) We are also strengthening the working relationship between Literature and the dynamic interdisciplinary program it houses, Comparative Media Studies (CMS), codirected by John E. Burchard professor of humanities Henry Jenkins and Professor William Uricchio.

New Faculty

In AY 2005–2006, Literature took a long step toward rejuvenating its ranks and strengthening its curriculum by hiring two new faculty members, Sarah Brouillette

(PhD University of Toronto 2005; Fred L. Emerson fellow at Syracuse University) and Alisa Braithwaite (PhD Harvard University 2006) in different areas of contemporary English-language world literature. They will join us effective July 1, 2006. The field is a growth area for literary studies in an ever more self-consciously globalized world, as the discipline stretches beyond the national frameworks that have structured much of its scholarship and teaching in past decades; MIT's international student body helps make appointments in this area all the more important. Sarah Brouillette comes with the very strongest of recommendations from Toronto's English Department and its interdisciplinary program in book history and print culture. She brings an array of skills and interests that will be valuable not only to Literature's curriculum but also to the CMS curriculum as well. Her dissertation, "Local Writers, Global Markets: Authorship and Postcolonial Literary Production," was rated one of Toronto's best in recent years, and it has already secured a book contract with Palgrave. She has recently been awarded a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship on "Theorizing Cultural Heritage."

Alisa Braithwaite focuses more specifically on modern writing from the Caribbean, a particularly lively scene of postcolonial literary production from the second half of the 20th century onward. Her recently completed Harvard dissertation, "Scholarship Girls: The Reinvention of Reading and Writing in 20th-Century Anglophone Caribbean Women's Narrative," was clearly driven by her own experience as a black woman of Caribbean descent who (as she points out) first read Caribbean literature while a student at Barnard College. It provides a particularly fresh take on a classic problem of postcolonial literature, namely the vexed negotiations authors conduct in their writings with their loyalties to homeland and to erstwhile colonial center. Braithwaite's partiality toward her subject of study strikes us as entirely an enabling one, providing drive without loss of critical distance. We believe her dissertation promises to become an excellent first book in fairly short order. With the hire of assistant professor Sandy Alexandre in AY 2004–2005 and now Alisa Braithwaite, Literature is delighted to have brought two excellent young women of color onto the MIT faculty.

Honors and Awards

During the past year, Literature faculty members have received numerous honors and fellowships. Professor Donaldson was named the inaugural Lloyd Davis visiting professor in Shakespearean studies (University of Queensland, Australia) and has continued to garner major grants in support of his pathbreaking work at the intersection of digital technologies and humanities research, including his iCampus Cross-Media Annotation System (XMAS), which is currently featured in a display at the MIT Museum and is attracting increasing numbers of collaborator institutions. Professor Ruth Perry was named a MacVicar Faculty Fellow at MIT and received a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) fellowship to support research for a biography of Anna Gordon Brown, an early and influential woman collector of Scottish folk songs (this project also won her a visiting research fellowship at the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities in Edinburgh). Professor David Thorburn received a Fulbright senior lectureship in television and media studies at the universities of Utrecht and Amsterdam next spring; he was William Evans visiting fellow at the University of Otago, New Zealand, in the spring of 2005. Professor Jackson, who holds the Homer A. Burnell career development professorship, has recently been selected to participate in the MIT/Balliol

exchange program. Professor Henderson, currently serving as secretary to the MIT Faculty, was promoted to the rank of full professor, and senior lecturer Wyn Kelley was reappointed to a second five-year term.

Publications

Recent and forthcoming scholarly publications by Literature faculty members include Professor Henderson's edited volume *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare on Screen*, published in 2006 by Blackwell. Professor Jackson's book manuscript "Science and Sensation in British Romantic Poetry" was accepted for publication by Cambridge University Press. Associate professor Mary Fuller completed a book manuscript entitled "Seadogs, Turks Heads, and Rebel Fish: Historical Memory and the Elizabethan Age of Expansion," which is being considered by Palgrave. Senior lecturer Kelley edited Blackwell's *Companion to Herman Melville* and is writing a *Short Introduction to Herman Melville* for the same publisher. Professor Uricchio edited, with Susanne Kinnebrock, *Media Cultures* (Universitätsverlag, 2006). Professor Stephen Tapscott edited a special issue of the periodical *British and American Studies*, and lecturer Howard Eiland's translations of two works of Walter Benjamin, *A Berlin Childhood around 1900* and *On Hashish*, were published by Harvard University Press in 2006. In addition, these and other Literature faculty members published a considerable number of essays and poems in scholarly journals, magazines, and edited collections.

Lectures and Collaborations

Literature faculty members have also lectured widely and participated in numerous workshops and other forums for intellectual exchange. Professor Thorburn established a collaboration with Kainan University in Taiwan, which is helping to support the thriving MIT Communications Forum and also hosted a contingent of MIT faculty and staff (headed by Professor Buzard) for an international conference this spring on digital technology and distance learning. Among many other appearances, Professor Donaldson gave an invited lecture at the Glasscock Center for the Humanities at Texas A&M University and several workshops on XMAS and the Shakespeare Electronic Archive. Professor Perry conducted a postdoctoral seminar at the Folger Library on "Ballads and Songs in 18th-century England." Professor Buzard lectured at Yale University and the University of Virginia, as well as in Ireland and Taiwan. Professor Fuller ran the Summer Institute on British and Indigenous Cultural Encounters in Native North America: 1580–1785 for the NEH at the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, Rhode Island in July 2005.

Conclusion

As stated above, these are not exhaustive lists of the Literature faculty's recent accomplishments but are meant only to suggest the number and diversity of activities our members are engaged in. We look forward to extending and deepening our contributions to our profession and to MIT's distinctive curriculum in the years to come.

James Buzard
Section Head
Professor of Literature

More information about the Literature Section can be found at <http://web.mit.edu/lit/www/>.