

Literature

The Literature faculty at MIT performs a challenging balancing act. Its members aim to be the best liberal arts faculty in literary studies while meeting the most rigorous standards of professional accomplishment within their discipline. Almost without exception, we conduct small, seminar-style classes and afford undergraduate students direct and continual interaction with full faculty members—an important contribution to MIT's curriculum and an approach to undergraduate education one might expect to find at leading liberal arts colleges such as Williams or Amherst. We are also committed to hiring and to promoting from within our ranks faculty whose scholarship can compete with that carried out in leading PhD-granting departments of English such as Berkeley, Stanford, or Harvard, where graduate-level teaching takes precedence over undergraduate-level teaching.

Our faculty are expected to sustain excellent records of scholarly productivity while lacking the stimulus of a graduate program and devoting a considerable amount of their effort to general undergraduate education. We teach about one quarter of MIT's undergraduate student body each year, and all faculty members, regardless of rank, spend one half of their teaching load on introductory subjects that are part of MIT's General Institute Requirements. But we also deliver a top-quality major to those who choose to pursue it: over the past several years we have sent literature majors to graduate programs in English at such leading institutions as Berkeley, Stanford, Cambridge, Yale, the University of Chicago, and the University of California, Los Angeles.

Our balancing act calls for agility in shifting our mode of approach to our subject, from a generally accessible idiom to the most rigorously professional one. We welcome this challenge, believing that our discipline needs to maintain its ties to broad extraprofessional audiences and also that the extraprofessional public can benefit from exposure to the knowledge and skills our discipline deploys. We help students become familiar with the traditions out of which the expressive culture of our own time has evolved and develop the crucial skills of verbal and situational interpretation that they will draw upon in later life as citizens and professionals. What might at first appear to be our peculiar position vis-à-vis both MIT and our own discipline may in fact be a position of flexibility and strength from which MIT Literature, along with other humanities units at the Institute, can exercise national and international leadership.

Overview of AY2008

Academic year 2007–2008 has been a productive and harmonious one for the Literature faculty of MIT. Collectively and individually, we have initiated or continued numerous innovative projects in research and teaching; our members have published a significant body of important scholarly and creative work during the year; we have lectured at conferences and universities in many parts of the world; some of our number have won distinguished awards and fellowships. We made no new faculty hires, but we did have a number of important changes in staff. There were no faculty retirements. One particular highlight of the year was the successful promotion of our colleague, Noel Jackson, whom we are delighted to welcome to the tenured ranks of the faculty.

As a unit, we appear to be functioning very well. We enjoy a high level of collegiality and make group decisions effectively. We pride ourselves on having built a faculty in which every member, including the most junior, can participate fully in our collective deliberations. We are proud of and committed to the model of hiring new faculty with the intention of promoting them, and of giving them all the support they need to meet the Institute's promotion standards. We adhere to the principle that the vast majority of our teaching should be done by regular tenure-line faculty. We play a leadership role in MIT's undergraduate curriculum and perform a variety of valuable service roles across the Institute and in our professional organizations.

New Developments

In AY2007, we made the fourth new hire in three years, effecting an important demographic shift and inaugurating a phase of significant renewal and revitalization for our faculty. Although we made no faculty hires this past year, we have definitely begun to reap the benefits of our new cadre of junior faculty. Each one of our four assistant professors—Sandy Alexandre, Arthur Bahr, Alisa Braithwaite, and Sarah Brouillette—has taken part in major innovations in our curriculum and performed admirably in the classroom. As we predicted, our latest hire, Arthur Bahr, has proved to be a superb teacher: in his first semester, his student evaluation numbers were among our very highest. The energy and new ideas of our youngest colleagues are sure to be an invaluable resource to us in coming years.

We also continued our efforts toward increasing the visibility and outreach of literature and the humanities at MIT. We played host or cohost to two eminent fiction writers, Vikram Chandra and Jhumpa Lahiri, who visited the campus to give seminar discussions and public readings of their works. Chandra and Lahiri are leading figures on the vibrant English-language literary scene among writers of Indian descent, and their selection reflects our ongoing effort to broaden our disciplinary self-definition from “British” or “American” literature to “World Literature in English.” These events were very well attended, drawing an audience from both MIT and the wider region. Chandra's reading now appears on MIT World, and we assume Lahiri's will soon do so as well.

One of our goals is to establish, perhaps in partnership with the programs in Writing and Humanistic Studies and Foreign Languages and Literatures, a regular visiting authors series, both as a contribution to the MIT community and as a demonstration of the vital links between the literary traditions we study and the most powerful and innovative literary work being done today. Our ability to fund such a series, however, cannot be guaranteed. MIT's Council for the Arts, which along with some other groups on campus has helped support our efforts so far, has warned us not to expect funding on a predictable, recurring basis. Since our aim is to gain and hold recognition, we feel that sporadic events, supported by “one-off” grants, will not suffice.

One regrettable event during the past year was our unsuccessful attempt to bring a Martin Luther King visiting scholar to MIT. MIT Literature is committed to increasing and maintaining diversity on our campus. We had identified an excellent candidate who expressed keen interest in the prospect of spending a year with us, but the process of getting the appointment approved (and the money to support it guaranteed) was so

protracted that our candidate wound up accepting another offer. We certainly intend to try again on a regular basis, and we hope the vetting and approval process can be streamlined in the future.

Our members' achievements for the year in scholarship, teaching, and service are described in the appropriate sections below. Since two of our faculty members, Henry Jenkins and William Uricchio, codirect the Comparative Media Studies (CMS) program, many of their activities appear in the CMS report.

We experienced considerable turnover in our office staff this year. Jacqueline Breen became our new administrative officer in the fall of 2007 and has been a great pleasure to work with. Our other full-time staff member, Jo Choi, is still with us, but we have two new half-time workers, Kevin McLellan and Jamie Graham, and the office is currently functioning very smoothly. Graham's particular focus is on our outreach and publicity efforts.

Research and Publications

This year, Literature faculty members published, completed, or significantly advanced several major projects. Peter Donaldson's research team is completing the first year of a major endeavor, *Expanding the Shakespeare Electronic Archive*. One new development is that HamletWorks, the distinguished website of *Hamlet* texts, images, and commentary throughout the ages, is moving to MIT to become part of the new collaborative approach to Shakespeare collections in the digital age pioneered by Donaldson. The archive has also become home to *Shakespeare Performance in Asia*, the first entry in what is planned to be a fully global digital collection of Shakespeare in performance. Donaldson is collaborating with colleagues at Pennsylvania State University, Doho and Gunma universities in Japan, and the National University of Singapore. An overview of the archive's history and latest developments appears in Donaldson's essay "The Shakespeare Electronic Archive: Collections and Multimedia Tools for Teaching and Research, 1992–2008," published in *Shakespeare: Journal of the British Shakespeare Association*.

Another Literature project using digital technology and involving collaboration with numerous colleagues at other universities in the US and abroad is James Buzard's *The Serial Experience*, begun this year at MIT's HyperStudio. This is an effort to construct an electronic archive and resource for teaching and research focused on the serial publication of fiction in Victorian Britain. Its emphasis on the relationship of publication medium to content suggests that it will develop useful links with CMS. Shankar Raman's participation continues in the collaborative research project *Making Publics*, an interdisciplinary group investigating the formation of audiences for culture and science in 16th- and 17th-century Europe; this venture is supported by Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

In the area of scholarly monographs, assistant professor Sarah Brouillette, in only her second year with us, published her first book, *Postcolonial Writers and the Global Literary Marketplace* (Palgrave, 2008), a study of how marketing considerations influence the contemporary production of literature in one of its most prominent "niches," the postcolonial. Brouillette studies how authors such as Salman Rushdie, Zulfikar Ghose, and J.M. Coetzee self-consciously both accommodate and resist the pressures they sense

to conform to certain stereotypes of what “authentic” literature from the postcolonies ought to look like. Associate professor Mary Fuller published *Remembering the Early Modern Voyage: English Narratives in the Age of European Expansion* (Palgrave, 2008), a book on how early English explorers gave shape to their encounters with alien places and cultures in their texts. Noel Jackson’s book *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry* was published by Cambridge University Press; it examines how poets of the Romantic era (roughly 1789–1830) in England drew upon the life sciences of their day in their works and in their conceptions of poetry’s purpose and benefits. Senior lecturer Wyn Kelley’s *Herman Melville: An Introduction* appeared this year from Blackwell. Just on the verge of appearing is John Hildebidle’s latest collection of poetry, *Signs, Translations*, due out from Salmon Publishing in August 2008.

Some of our faculty also published, edited, or coedited volumes during the year. James Buzard coedited *Victorian Prism: Refractions of the Crystal Palace* (University of Virginia Press, 2007), a study by many hands of the cultural influences and “afterlife” of the Great Exhibition of 1851. Diana Henderson edited the collection *Alternative Shakespeares 3* (Routledge, 2008), the latest installment in an important multivolume project in revisionist criticism. Both Buzard and Henderson contributed essays to these volumes as well. Wyn Kelley was coeditor of “*Whole Oceans Away*”: *Melville and the Pacific* (Kent State, 2007), a collection of essays about Herman Melville’s travels among the Pacific islands and their significance in his later fiction writing. Ruth Perry brought out a new edition of *Henrietta*, a novel by the increasingly recognized 18th-century writer Charlotte Lennox (University of Kentucky Press, 2008).

A selection of the latest refereed article publications from our faculty includes Brouillette’s “Contemporary Literature, Post-Industrial Capital, and the UK Creative Industries,” in the journal *Literature Compass*, and “The Creative Class and Gautam Malkani’s Londonstani,” in *Critique*. The first of these essays in particular represents the expanding scope of Brouillette’s research agenda and a clear step toward her next book project. Buzard recently published “Enumeration and Exhaustion: Taking Inventory in *The Old Curiosity Shop*,” in the *Dickens Studies Annual*. Perry’s ongoing work on the 18th-century Scottish ballad has been advanced by “The Finest Ballads”: Women’s Oral Traditions in Eighteenth-Century Scotland,” in the journal *Eighteenth-Century Life*. Stephen Tapscott’s essay on Dante and Modernism has been published in *Somicercio*. Sandy Alexandre has an article soon to appear in *Modern Drama*, on August Wilson’s celebrated play “The Piano Lesson,” and Noel Jackson’s “Rhyme and Reason: Erasmus Darwin’s Romanticism” is due out shortly in the distinguished journal *Modern Language Quarterly*.

Mention should also be made of the writings by our faculty appearing in edited volumes of criticism or in other venues. Shankar Raman contributed his essay “Death by Numbers: Counting and Accounting in *The Winter’s Tale*” to Henderson’s *Alternative Shakespeares 3*. Buzard’s entry on Charles Darwin appeared in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*. And our three practicing poets, Hildebidle, Tapscott, and David Thorburn, have all published their verse in magazines ranging from *The Bear River Review* to *The Atlantic Monthly*.

Lectures and Appearances

Literature faculty members presented their ongoing scholarly work at numerous conferences and in many locations during the year. Brouillette received the unusual honor, for so young a scholar, of an invitation to give a keynote lecture for a major international conference: she spoke on “Booking Daljit Nagra: Author as Meta-Brand in the Postcolonial UK” at the Universität Regensburg in Germany. Buzard delivered keynote lectures at conferences in Melbourne, Australia, and at Harvard, as well as other invited lectures at the University of California, Irvine; Rice University; Brown University; and the University of California, Santa Cruz. Some of these talks were related not just to his recent book *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels* (2005) but also to his previous one, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to “Culture,” 1800–1918* (1993), which is recognized as a foundational text in the study of travel and travel literature. Mary Fuller’s widely recognized leadership in the same area was marked by the featured lectures “On Hakluyt’s Dullness” (a plenary address for a conference at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England), “Représentations d’une identité hybride: l’autobiographie d’un colon Américain et ses sequelles” (an invited talk for a conference sponsored by the Congrès national des sociétés historiques et scientifiques, Quebec), and “Looking for the Real in Raleigh’s *Discoverie of Guiana*” (an invited lecture at the University of Alberta).

Peter Donaldson lectured, conducted a workshop, and demonstrated software for the Working Group for the Singapore/MIT Shakespeare Performance in Asia Archive Project, National University of Singapore. Diana Henderson gave an invited lecture at the University of Sydney on “Recycling the Renaissance, Redeeming the Time” and a keynote on “Shakespeare’s Afterdeaths and the Debts of History” for a conference at the City University of New York. Ruth Perry advanced her ongoing work on 18th-century ballads and ballad collecting with invited talks including the Henrietta Harvey Distinguished Lecture at Memorial University, Newfoundland; the Hopkins-McGuinness Lecture at the University of California, Davis; and other lectures at the Elphinstone Institute (University of Aberdeen), the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities (University of Edinburgh), Dalhousie University (Halifax, Nova Scotia), and the annual meeting of the Jane Austen Society of North America (in Philadelphia). Shankar Raman gave an invited lecture, “Specifying the Unknown Thing in Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice,” at the Forms of Early Modern Writing conference (Columbia University).

Literature faculty members also presented conference panel papers in a wide variety of venues during the past year. Sandy Alexandre and James Buzard spoke on panels at the annual Modern Language Association convention in Chicago; Peter Donaldson and Diana Henderson did the same at the annual Shakespeare Association of America conference in Dallas, as did Alexandre and Alisa Braithwaite at the annual American Literature Association (ALA) conference in San Francisco. Alexandre also presented work in progress at the Futures of American Studies Institute at Dartmouth; she has been invited to give a keynote address to the latter group at next year’s meeting. Braithwaite’s work on contemporary literature from the Caribbean was represented by the ALA paper “The Encyclopedic Caribbean: Junot Diaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of*

Oscar Wao"; she also spoke on "Rethorizing Migration in the Work of Merle Hodge" at the Association of Caribbean Women Writers and Scholars conference in Grenada.

Brouillette addressed conferences of the Modernist Studies Association (in Long Beach, CA) and at New York University. Buzard's work on travel and on Victorian literature was advanced by panel presentations in Cyprus (for an international conference on the island's history and culture) and Victoria, British Columbia (for the annual conference of the North American Victorian Studies Association). Henderson's interest in drama in performance led to talks on Shakespeare's *Richard II* and *Henry V* at the Royal Shakespeare Company summer school (Shakespeare Institute, Stratford-upon-Avon) and the Actors' Shakespeare Project (Cambridge, MA). Noel Jackson presented his current work in British romanticism at several conferences in England, including the Wordsworth Summer Conference (Grasmere), the Coleridge Summer Conference (Cannington), and the annual conference of the North American Society for the Study of Romanticism (Bristol).

Teaching and Curricular Innovation

The Literature faculty continues to play an important role in MIT's undergraduate curriculum; its members are also engaged in a number of new collaborative ventures in undergraduate teaching. Our most noteworthy piece of news in this area is the selection during the past year of Stephen Tapscott as a MacVicar fellow. Tapscott is a marvelous, inspiring teacher, a tremendous asset to our faculty, and eminently worthy of this honor. His selection brings the number of Literature faculty MacVicar fellows to three, approximately one fifth of our total population.

MIT Literature has a strong tradition of excellent classroom instruction. Our faculty routinely receive high marks on student evaluations (at last count, above 6.4 out of 7 for "Overall Rating of Teaching" and above 6.2 for "Overall Rating of Subject"). We thrive on small classes that offer students frequent opportunities to take an active role in the learning process. In addition to the MacVicar, our members have received other Institute awards for contributions to the undergraduate curriculum (Henderson and Hildebidle are the most recent recipients of these awards). Several of our faculty members play crucial roles in the staffing of CMS subjects and of subjects in the Program in Women's and Gender Studies.

Beyond the Institute, some of us offer graduate-level instruction on a recurring or occasional basis. Ruth Perry is the real leader here, as a founding member of the Graduate Consortium in Women's Studies, an interdisciplinary program involving students from numerous Boston-area colleges and universities. Buzard frequently teaches an intensive summer seminar for the Dickens Project at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Instruction aimed at the general public is offered by Thorburn's 24-lecture class *Masterworks of Early 20th-Century Literature*, which was released on DVD this past year by the Teaching Company of Chantilly, VA. In the area of new pedagogic technologies, Donaldson's XMAS—or Cross-Mediated Annotation System—continues to be used as a resource for undergraduate and graduate teaching at an increasing number of institutions in the United States and abroad.

Our involvement in teaching collaborations and innovation runs very deep. In his first year at MIT, Arthur Bahr has already participated in a major curricular innovation, joining with Anne McCants of History to design a new interdisciplinary Ancient and Medieval Studies Program (generously supported by the Class of 1960 Fund for Innovation in Teaching). The program revives the study of Latin at MIT and will involve development of new interdisciplinary subjects on such topics as Pre-Modern Technologies and Ethics and the Ancient World, each exploring the perhaps unsuspected links between centuries-old and contemporary contexts. Supported by the D'Arbeloff Fund for Excellence in Education, Alisa Braithwaite and Sandy Alexandre have collaborated with six faculty members from other MIT departments to create a new cross-disciplinary introductory subject, *Black Matters*, on African and African American cultures and histories. Sarah Brouillette piloted a new class, *Literature and Development*, that has great potential for cooperation with interested faculty from such disciplines as Political Science, Economics, Architecture, and Urban Studies.

James Buzard has teamed with Professor Mark Jarzombek of Architecture to design an ambitious interdisciplinary introductory subject, *Welcome to the Modern World*, that will seek to expose MIT undergraduates to the history of representations and debate about what it means to live a modern life—a topic especially pertinent to MIT undergraduates and one that could become the gateway to an interdisciplinary program in Studies in Modern Cultures. Alvin Kibel, with the assistance of the MIT Alumni Fund, is developing a new subject, *Leadership, Ethics, and Literature*, that will also have great potential for interdisciplinary collaboration. Shankar Raman has designed a new seminar on *Literature and Science in Renaissance England*, and Stephen Tapscott has created a new six-unit subject: *Children in Literature, Literature in Children*. All of this innovation is going on while several of our faculty members are sustaining new collaborative subjects first launched only a year or two ago, such as 21L.017 *The Art of the Probable* (Jackson, Kibel, Raman), 21L.016 *Learning from the Past* (Henderson, with Janet Sonenberg of Music and Theater Arts), and 21L.007 *World Literature* (Alexandre, Braithwaite, Fuller).

Professional Service

Our department members continue to perform a wide variety of professional roles, serving as executive committee members, delegates, chairs of ongoing seminars, advisory board members, manuscript reviewers, outside readers of PhD dissertations, doctoral defense examiners, and outside referees in tenure and promotion cases.

For the Modern Language Association, Literature's major professional organization, Brouillette is now a member of the executive committee for the discussion group on Bibliography and Textual Studies, and Buzard is an assembly delegate for the Division on Anthropological Approaches to Literature. Buzard and Henderson both cochair ongoing seminars at the Harvard Humanities Center, where they interact regularly with visiting speakers and area graduate students. MIT Literature faculty members are advisory editors for such refereed journals as *ELH: English Literary History* (published at Johns Hopkins University), *Journeys: The International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing*, and *Studies in Travel Writing* and for such book series as the Anthem Travel Classics. In the past year, Fuller and Raman have reviewed manuscripts for Palgrave, Cornell

University Press, and the University of Delaware Press. In the same period, Fuller, Henderson, and Buzard have assisted at the State University of New York at Buffalo, Rutgers, and Indiana University by reviewing dossiers for promotion cases. Buzard, Fuller, and Henderson have overseen the writing and examination of PhD dissertations at the University of California, Santa Cruz; the University of Alberta; and Boston University. Raman reviewed a proposed project for the Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Project and applications for the Radcliffe Fellowship Competition.

Institute and Departmental Service

MIT Literature is also distinguished by its members' extensive service within the Institute, much of it focused on curricular development. The real leader here is Diana Henderson, currently dean for curriculum and faculty support in the Office of the Dean for Undergraduate Education. In this capacity, the tireless Henderson has also served, *ex officio*, on the Committee for the Undergraduate Program, the Subcommittee on the Communication Requirement, and the Educational Commons Subcommittee. This past year she has also been a member of the School of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences Education Committee and the Creative Arts Council.

Within our ranks, Henderson is rivaled only by Raman in terms of Institute or departmental service. During 2007–2008 Raman was on the Committee on Foreign Scholarships, the MacVicar Fellow Selection Committee, and the I-House Advisory Council. He also directed the Kelly-Douglas Fund and a CMS master's thesis. Within the Literature faculty itself, he has continued to be an energetic and innovative leader, chairing our Curriculum Committee and heading up the redesign of our website.

Four of our faculty members currently serve as freshman advisors. During 2007–2008, Brouillette was on the Eloranta Fellowship Committee, and Jackson was on the HASS Overview Committee. Others made notable contributions in other capacities. David Thorburn continued his direction of the MIT Communications Forum, which this year collaborated with the new Center for the Future of Civic Media on a series of forums devoted to media and citizenship. Fuller gave the lecture "In the Wake of the Vikings" for the MIT alumni trip in the late summer of 2007.

Jo Choi, our undergraduate administrative assistant, participated in the development of the Online Subject Evaluation, which was piloted in the spring. Literature's administrative officer, Jackie Breen, served on the Research Administration Improvement Initiative subcommittee to design and develop a principal investigator orientation training course for faculty new to MIT, and she is a member of the Administrative Officer Development Program Advisory Group, which assisted in the design and development of the AO Fundamentals Training Program being piloted this fall.

Awards, Honors, and Fellowships

MIT Literature members garnered several distinguished awards during the past academic year. Stephen Tapscott's selection as a MacVicar fellow has been mentioned above; Tapscott was also named the first Witter-Bynner Poet/Translator in Residence by the Santa Fe Arts Institute, and he held a January residency in Florence in connection with the international Dante conference held there. Sandy Alexandre will spend AY2009

as a fellow of the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women at Brown; she was also offered, but declined, a fellowship at Harvard's DuBois Institute for African and African American Research.

Sarah Brouillette was a Rockefeller humanities fellow at the Smithsonian's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage during the summer of 2007. Noel Jackson was awarded a visiting scholarship at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science (Department II: Ideals and Practices of Rationality, directed by renowned historian of science Lorraine Daston) in Berlin. Ruth Perry was a fellow of the Institute of Advanced Studies in the Humanities, Edinburgh, in the spring of 2008. Shankar Raman was recently selected to participate in the MIT-Balliol College faculty exchange program.

Conclusion

Collectively and individually, MIT's Literature faculty continues to be highly productive in research, deeply engaged in important professional and Institute business, and proficient and innovative in undergraduate teaching. We continue to enjoy excellent working relationships, both among our members and with others at the Institute. We look forward to expanding our contributions to MIT's curriculum and to our professional fields.

James Buzard
Section Head
Professor of Literature

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