

Lit News

ALISA BRAITHWAITE RECEIVES WILSON FELLOWSHIP



Alisa Braithwaite, Assistant Professor in Literature, has received a Career Enhancement Fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. She will begin work in June 2009 on a book about the role of science fiction and fantasy in recent Caribbean literature. Professor Braithwaite has a special interest in Caribbean women writers and narrative innovation.

LITERATURE WELCOMES MLK VISITING SCHOLAR

Ricardo Pitts-Wiley, director of Mixed Magic Theatre (a community theatre and arts program in Pawtucket, RI), will join the Literature Faculty as its first Martin Luther King Visiting Scholar and Artist in 2010.

Mr. Pitts-Wiley brings to Literature, as well as to Theater and Musical Arts, extensive experience in adapting classic texts for theater—including *Moby-Dick*, *Frankenstein*, *Don Quixote*, *Othello*, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*, and the poems of Paul Dunbar, among others. During his time at MIT, he will co-teach with Wyn Kelley a class on adapting *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* for the stage (21L512: American Authors). He will also direct productions through Theater Arts, Dramashop, and student theater groups, reach out to schools and theater groups in Cambridge, and research new productions for his ongoing literacy initiative, "Books that Define a Nation."

Over the last three years, Mr. Pitts-Wiley has contributed to projects in Literature and Comparative Media Studies through the New Media Literacies program in CMS. He consulted with the authors of the *Teachers' Strategy Guide for Reading in a Participatory Culture*, who were

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DIANA HENDERSON NAMED MACVICAR FELLOW

Diana Henderson, Professor of Literature and Dean for Curriculum and Faculty Support, has been named a MacVicar Faculty Fellow, MIT's highest teaching award.

She is the fourth Literature professor to have won the award. The other current MacVicar Fellows are Ruth Perry, Stephen Tapscott and David Thorburn.

Now in its 18th year, the MacVicar program aims to establish an elite group of MIT scholars who are committed to excellence in teaching and to innovation in education. The program is named for the late Dean for Undergraduate Education and Professor of Physics Margaret MacVicar.

Professor Henderson joined the MIT faculty in 1996. She holds a BS in Philosophy and English from the College of William & Mary, and a PhD in English from Columbia University. The author of two books on Shakespeare, Professor Henderson focuses her research on gender studies, early modern culture, modernism and world drama. In 2005 she won the Everett Moore Baker Memorial Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching.

According to colleagues, Professor Henderson has been a force behind the revitalization of the Literature Major at MIT, and works hard to show that learning is enjoyable and that reading and understanding difficult texts can become a pleasure.

"Professor Henderson is one of those rare people who is able to spread her enthusiasm and academic vigor for any literary topic to make even the most terrified or uninterested student want to learn more," one of her students told the MacVicar nominating committee. "She doesn't lecture, she engages."



INSIDE:

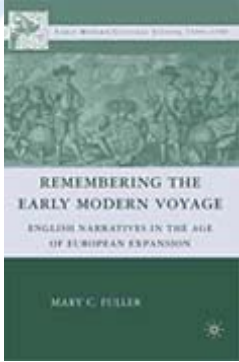
Recent Faculty Publications

New Faculty Initiatives

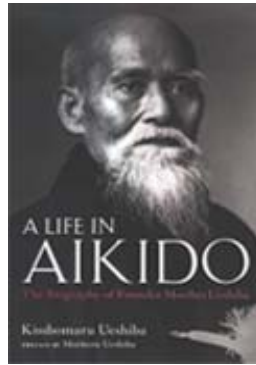
IAP 2009

Events

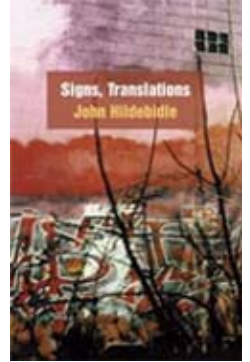
Recent Literature Faculty Publications



Mary Fuller,
Remembering the Early Modern Voyage: English Narratives in the Age of European Expansion,
Palgrave Macmillan

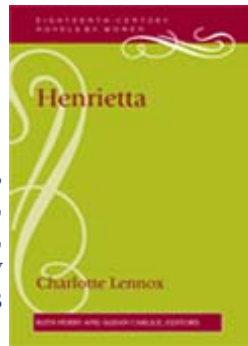


Mary Fuller,
Editor, *A Life in Aikido: The Biography of Founder Morihei Ueshiba,* by Kisshomaru Ueshiba and Moriteru Ueshiba, Kodansha International



John Hildebidle,
Signs, Translations,
Salmon Poetry

Ruth Perry,
Editor, *Henrietta* (1758),
by Charlotte Lennox,
University of Kentucky
Press



William Uricchio,
We Europeans? Media, Representations, Identities,
Intellect Ltd



New Initiatives in Curriculum Development

ETHICS

Professor Ruth Perry will teach a new freshman seminar on Literature and Ethics this fall. Professor Perry, an authority on the eighteenth century, wrote this description of the new subject:

All the texts on our syllabus—which will include novels, short stories and poems—are about the complexities of such ethical issues as self-protection and altruism; tyranny and rebellion; violence and passive resistance; selfhood and the needs of the community; as well as such contemporary questions as modernization, technological development, and its human costs. We will meet once a week to discuss the issues raised in the texts. In addition to going wherever this leads us, we will self-consciously note the different effects that a variety of literary methods have on the way we feel about these ethical issues.

STUDYING EMPIRES

This fall, Professor Arthur Bahr will join two colleagues from History—Professors Will Broadhead and Eric Goldberg—to inaugurate a new subject focused on how empires were constructed, contested, and governed in ancient and medieval Europe. The course is part of an ongoing revitalization of MIT's program in Ancient and Medieval Studies, supported by the Class of 1960 Endowment for Innovation in Education, which has also helped the Literature Section offer elementary and intermediate Latin instruction, as well as a seminar in Latin poetry. The course will cen-

ter on Augustus, who personified and institutionalized Rome's shift from republic to empire; on the reign of Charlemagne, crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the pope in 800 AD; and on the imperial designs of England, which led to the conquest of Wales and the Hundred Years' War with France. Students will be introduced to principles of literary and historical inquiry, while also analyzing evidence from other fields: innovations in military technology, architecture, and socio-economic theory, to name just a few. Class meetings will involve a mixture of lecture, discussion, and such hands-on small-group work as deciphering manuscripts and analyzing archaeological evidence.

LITERATURE AND EARTH SCIENCES

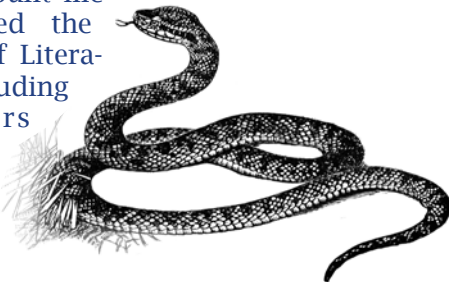
Professors Mary Fuller of the Literature Section and Lindy Elkins-Tanton of the Earth, Atmospheric, and Planetary Sciences Department received 2009 Alumni Class Funds to support a new freshman seminar titled "Expeditions: Observation, Recording, Science." The course will explore several fundamental questions: How do expeditions function in testing or generating scientific hypotheses about the physical earth? How do expeditions produce records, and how are these records shaped, stored, disseminated, and used? To be offered in Fall 2009, the seminar will focus on two 19th-century expeditions: the second voyage of the Beagle (1831-36), and the United States exploring expedition of 1838-42.



THE MOBILE MILTON MARATHON

Early on a bleak, snowy day in January, a hearty crew of Literature faculty, students, and friends gathered around a table and began to speak "Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit" of John Milton's epic imagination: the Mobile Milton Marathon was underway. Like many at schools across the country, they were celebrating the 400th anniversary of Milton's birth (Dec. 9th, 1608, but back then the new year came with spring), but in keeping with the spirit of MIT, this public reading of the complete text of *Paradise Lost* was on the move.

Picking appropriate venues to match the epic's journeying from hell (East Campus's Talbot Lounge, Bexley Basement) to Heaven (the balconies above Lobby 10 and Lobby 7) and paradise between (the Bush Room, McCormick), a core group anchored a much larger set of visitors who joined in the reading--and lured passersby to become a "fit audience though few." Memorable performances from former Dean of Science Bob Silbey and Professor Susan Silbey as the unfallen Adam and Eve, Biological Engineer Linda Griffith as the serpentine Satan of the temptation, Registrar Mary Callahan as Abdiel the righteous Angel, Associate Provost Philip Khoury as God the Creator and Philosophy Professor Rae Langton as the Son of God (a.k.a. "Account me Man") supplemented the voices and verve of Literature stalwarts, including student planners extraordinaire Anneke Schwob, Cory Smith, and Seohyung Kim, our



PLEASURES OF POETRY

The 2009 edition of Pleasures of Poetry—a popular feature of MIT's Independent Activities Period for the past 15 years—was as vital and lively as ever. From 1-2 p.m. every weekday during IAP, a Literature staff member or friend of Literature led a discussion of a favorite poem or group of poems. As in the past, this year's roster of poets spanned an immense historical and cultural range, beginning with the ancient Chinese masters Xiang Yu (232-202 BCE) and Liu Bang (259-195 BCE), and including Shakespeare, Lewis Carroll (*The Jabberwocky*), the English team of comic songwriters Flanders and Swann, Theodore Roethke, Auden, Plath, Berryman, Larkin, among others. Each session, even those in the dead middle of January, drew approximately twenty participants, with a loyal core of eight or ten attending nearly every session.

Head James Buzard (Satan in all non-serpentine forms), Professors Diana Henderson, Mary Fuller, Shankar Raman, Wyn Kelley, Arthur Bahr, Kate Delaney, and many, many more. Twelve hours later, the peripatetic performance ended with pizza and the prospect of pastures new: an undaunted, unfallen few were already plotting next year's IAP possibilities, ranging from Dante's *Inferno* to *Beowulf* to the *Odyssey*. The world was all before them. Truly an epic achievement.

MLK SCHOLAR, CONT'D

Continued from page 1

working on ways to develop new media literacies in a traditional high-school language arts classroom. His play *Moby-Dick: Then and Now* served as a core text for the project and inspired teachers involved in testing the *Strategy Guide* in classrooms in Massachusetts, Maine, and Indiana.

A brilliant and charismatic director, writer, actor, composer, and teacher, Ricardo Pitts-Wiley has devoted his career to expanding theater, arts, and literacy in communities with straitened resources. He brings boundless energy to the work of connecting people of all ages and backgrounds—to great books and urgent social issues, to themselves and each other, through performance, creative remixing, reflection, and play.

To find out more about Mixed Magic Theatre, visit <http://www.mixedmagictheatre.org/>. To learn more about Mr. Pitts-Wiley's plans for his year at MIT, please consult Literature Headquarters, contact him at ricardo.1234@cox.net, or write to Wyn Kelley at wkkelley@mit.edu.

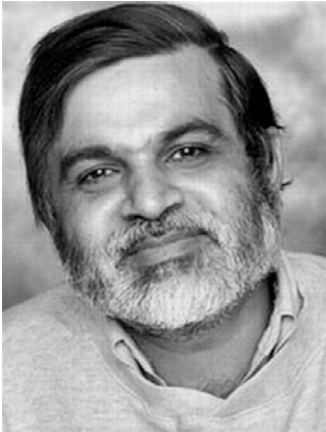
One grateful regular, an MIT librarian, said the discussions were more stimulating—and less pretentious—than she'd thought possible.

One of the poets included in this year's edition, Carol Ann Duffy, was named the first female Poet Laureate in British history a few weeks after IAP 2009 concluded. The Literature faculty does not claim to have influenced the Queen, but it remains true that several contemporary poets appeared on the Pleasures of Poetry schedule before they achieved wide recognition.

Pleasures of Poetry was conceived by Professor David Thorburn, who organizes the event each year.

A downloadable file of the 2009 edition of Pleasures of Poetry is available from the Literature web site.

NOVELIST M. G. VASSANJI AT MIT



In April, Literature welcomed acclaimed writer MG Vassanji. He talked with faculty, read from his work, and visited Assistant Professor Sarah Brouillette's class, which she opened up to members of the MIT Literary Society for the occasion. Students asked him about his themes and techniques, and he asked them about how Cambridge had changed since he lived here

himself in the 1970s. Raised in Tanzania, Vassanji first left Africa to pursue a degree at MIT. He went on to earn a PhD in nuclear physics – an unusual background for a novelist.

This is only one way in which Vassanji is unique. His debut work, *The Gunny Sack*, published in 1989, was the first novel about the South Asian community in East Africa. Since then, he has continued to follow the diverse fates of that community's members, as they migrated throughout Europe and North America. He has also begun to write of India, visiting villages his ancestors left centuries ago.

Vassanji's works include *The Book of Secrets*, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, and *The Assassin's Song*. They are read and honored around the world. A Commonwealth Writers Prize, and two Giller Prizes –Canada's most prestigious literary award—are among his achievements.

SOMETIMES, FORTUNE SMILES

Odd lapel pin, tiny copy of a photograph
(I have a 5 x 7 print, somewhere):
blond, six at most, in sailor suit.
Attached to a cheap fleur de lis
(but his people were Dutch as the day is long).

Since it's his birthday, I wear it.
Next morning it's not
anywhere I can find.

As I head off to work
I spy a glitter on the stoop.

A tiny recovery
to soothe more permanent loss.

--John Hildebidle

John Hildebidle, Professor of Literature, has published books of literary criticism, fiction and poetry.

Lit News

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