Literature Welcomes Marah Gubar

Marah Gubar will join the Literature faculty as an Associate Professor with tenure, beginning July 1, 2014. Prof. Gubar comes to MIT from the Department of English at the University of Pittsburgh, where she was Director of Children’s Literature.

Marah Gubar’s book *Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children’s Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2009) takes a fresh look at the Victorian “cult of the child,” arguing for more complex notions of agency and identity than Romantic models of childhood offered. This work received the 2009 Children’s Association Book Award, and in 2003 Prof. Gubar received the Children’s Literature Association Article Award for “Species Trouble: The Abjection of Adolescence in E. B. White’s Stuart Little,” published in *The Lion and the Unicorn*.

Prof. Gubar trained in Victorian Studies, but her scholarship ranges across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and she is currently at work on a book that maps a new interdisciplinary area, Childhood Studies, that proposes to bring humanists and scientists working on children into new forms of dialogue. In addition to introducing children’s literature to our curriculum she will also teach a variety of our existing classes.

On her future at MIT, Prof. Gubar states: “I am very excited to be joining Lit @ MIT — an agreeably Dr. Seuss-y location! Having taught a lot of large lecture courses at Pitt, I am especially excited about the opportunity to interact closely with small groups of students and craft assignments that take advantage of Boston’s rich history as a home to famous children’s writers, librarians, and theater practitioners.”

We welcome Prof. Gubar with great delight and look forward to her presence among us in Literature.

Arthur Bahr Awarded Tenure

Arthur Bahr, who has taught at MIT since 2007, has been awarded tenure beginning July 1, 2014. Professor Bahr’s first book, *Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London* (University of Chicago Press, 2013), has received national attention; Vera Wang, the fashion designer, mentioned it was on her recent reading list (*Bloomberg* November 15, 2013). Arthur has received a Faculty Fellowship in the Susan and Donald Newhouse Center for the Humanities at Wellesley College and will spend the 2014-2015 academic year working on his second book, *Pleasurable Forms and Speculative Histories in the Pages of the Pearl Manuscript*. This project investigates the practical and theoretical ramifications of the recent turn to aesthetics in literary study.

Prof. Bahr has enlivened the Ancient and Medieval Studies community at MIT and has organized the AMS Colloquium Series for the past two years. In addition, Professor Bahr is an award-winning teacher who received the James A. and Ruth Levitan Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2012 and holds the Alfred Henry and Jean Morrison Hayes Career Development Chair. His fall 2013 Medieval Literature (Legends of Arthur) class was featured on the MIT homepage when a student, Laura Meeker, designed a board game as her final project in the class (*MIT News*, March 25, 2014).

We congratulate Prof. Bahr on his award of tenure, which he so richly deserves.

Eugenie Brinkema Promoted to Associate Professor


Prof. Brinkema received the James A. and Ruth Levitan Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2012. In academic year 2013-2014, she held a Faculty Fellowship in the Susan and Donald Newhouse Center for the Humanities at Wellesley College, where she has been working on a new book on post-1960s horror films. Her scholarship and teaching have greatly enriched Literature’s offerings, and we are pleased at this recognition of her contributions.

Inside: Curriculum, New Developments, Programming, Social Media, Events, News, Honors & Awards, Comings & Goings, and Retirements
Literature has introduced a number of new classes and curricular initiatives in the past year.

With support from the School of Engineering, Prof. Mary Fuller piloted “Literature from Anywhere,” a project that allows students to continue their study of literature from anywhere in the world. The project combines two classes. One, a six-unit Sampling titled “Big Books: Reading Paradise Lost,” provides an intensive experience of reading Milton’s great verse epic in the MIT classroom. The second class, “An Engineer’s Guide to Paradise Lost,” begins with a three-week Milton “boot camp” over IAP to provide crucial skills and backgrounds for reading the poem; during the spring semester, students collaborate asynchronously to develop a group of multimedia resources providing a student’s-eye perspective on the poem, using the on-campus class as beta-testers.

Prof. Arthur Bahr has brought Anglo-Saxon language and literature back to MIT for the first time since the 1970s, when it was taught in Foreign Languages and Linguistics. The class was popular enough to require being taught in two sections, and demand continues to be such that Prof. Bahr is piloting an “Anglo-Saxon from Anywhere” course on the model of Mary Fuller’s recent “Literature from Anywhere” course so that students can continue studying the language while he is on leave in 2014-2015.

Wrapping up her year in Italy as recipient of the Rome Prize, Prof. Stephanie Frampton participated in the Herculaneum Graffiti Project in June 2014. The project aims to record and study the ancient handwritten inscriptions from the site of Herculaneum, Italy.

Frampton explains the importance of this project: “The graffiti of Pompeii and Herculaneum are some of the most immediate and resonant documents of everyday literacy among the citizens and slaves of ancient Italy, and they are in danger. Prof. Benefeil, who leads the project, is at the cutting-edge of collecting data about the ancient spaces of the ancient city, making that data open in digital form, and ultimately preserving these precious documents before they disappear.”

This field school, as part of the Herculaneum Graffiti Project, is a contributing partner to a major initiative of the European Union (EAGLE Europæana) to document and make cultural heritage more broadly accessible. Participants will also directly contribute to the Epigraphic Database Roma.

The work of Literature Faculty on Annotation Studio, a digital teaching tool for annotating and sharing text with other students, continues apace. The project started in MIT’s digital humanities lab, the HyperStudio, and involved a collaboration between HyperStudio Director Kurt Fendt and Senior Lecturer Wyn Kelley. A number of faculty at MIT and elsewhere have now used the tool in their classrooms and report that it has sharpened students’ skills in close reading, analyzing text, organizing materials for essays, and discussing ideas in class. Annotation Studio has received an NEH Digital Humanities Implementation Grant and has developed new features for tagging comments, importing multimedia materials and links, and enriching the writing process.

Curriculum

Last year, Prof. Stephanie Frampton brought Greek and Roman Mythology to the MIT curriculum. This Classical Literature course introduces students to the characters, themes, and questions of Greek and Roman mythology. The class offers a who’s who of the ancient imagina-tive world of heroines, heroes, gods, and monsters. Students consider how myth addresses such indelible human concerns as coming-of-age, identity and transformation, community and society, kindness, bravery, justice, and death.

Frampton explains the benefits of her class: “Students in my mythology course read some of the greatest stories ever told about humans and gods, but the course is not only that. We will be thinking all the time about what makes myth a special kind of story-telling, and how the historical Greek and Roman authors and audiences really used myth as a way to communicate with one another about self, family, society, divinity, and the world.”

As part of a review of teaching practices, Senior Lecturer Wyn Kelley has conducted the first-ever Pedagogy Project in Literature. Interviewing faculty, lecturers, alumni, and students, she asked questions designed to address critical issues in the classroom: What works in classroom teaching, syllabus design, or student learning? What do students want in terms of class content and skills, academic programs, and advising? What resources at MIT or in the Boston area would enrich the classroom experience? The results, compiled into a report, will provide a resource for further discussions among Literature faculty for teaching and curriculum design.

New Developments

Social networks of graffiti texts throughout the public and private spaces of the ancient city, making that data open in digital form, and ultimately preserving these precious documents before they disappear.”
The MIT Communications Forum brought three notable events to the Institute this spring. In the first, former Literature professor and CMS director Henry Jenkins, now Provost's Professor at the University of Southern California, returned for a spirited dialogue with Forum director David Thorburn about his career as a media scholar and his years as a teacher and housemaster at MIT. The second, “Science in Fiction,” brought together Hanya Yanagihara, author of The People in the Trees, and Alan Lightman, author of Einstein’s Dreams and professor in CMS/W. Finally in a panel called “Annotation and the Future of Reading,” Wyn Kelley of Literature, Kurt Fendt of the HyperStudio, and Jeremy Dean, Education Czar of Rap Genius, discussed the use of annotation in and out of the classroom. The Forum’s new associate directors, Seth Mnookin, associate professor in CMS/W, and Noel Jackson, associate professor of Literature, served as moderators.

Social Media, Events, & News

Come visit the new Literature website at http://lit.mit.edu! A fresh design by Suzana Lisanti (Senior Communications Strategist) and Belinda Yung (Sponsored Research Technical Staff) features an attractive layout, appealing visual elements, easy navigation of information about classes, programs, and policies, and faculty pages enriched with images and videos. The site will also include spotlight pages on students, faculty, and members of the Literature community, links with the SHASS and other departmental websites at MIT, and regular updates on news via Twitter and other social media. Do come by our virtual headquarters and check on what’s happening in Literature.

At the end of the semester, Literature celebrated its community with a final Literature Tea. The festivities included a splendid collation and the awarding of prizes (see p. 4). Also, in a break with tradition, Literature’s end-of-the-year party this year involved joining with Music and Theater Arts for a gala at the Sailing Pavilion that included food, music, and boats sailing off into the evening.

In an op-ed piece in the Boston Globe (April 30, 2014) titled, “At MIT, the humanities are just as important as STEM,” SHASS Dean Deborah Fitzgerald stresses the value of a broad education that includes the study of literature:

One recent graduate who went on to medical school wrote about how her practice as a physician requires not only medical knowledge, but also the ability to interpret her patients’ accounts and stories — a skill she gained reading literature, studying the various forms of narrative, the many ways humans share vital information. “MIT biology prepared me for medicine,” she says. “Literature prepared me to be a doctor.”

In May 2014, Prof. Sandy Alexandre moderated a special panel discussion on “Visualizing Blackness” as part of the Martin Luther King Visiting Professors and Scholars Program. Prof. Alexandre presented the beginnings of an article she is working on about how two black American writers, James Weldon Johnson and Richard Wright, envisioned lynching in their minds’ eyes, expressly without the visual aid of a photograph. She argues that this inward turn to visualization — this form of black imagining — attempts to: challenge photography’s claims to seeing more deeply than the human eye; dissociate from lynching photography’s complicity in documenting and marking blacks as dispensable, especially in the context of lynching’s heyday; and grant some level of dignity, privacy, and protection to the lynched dead who were often made into spectacle.

Although a tough subject to talk about, this inward visualization, Prof. Alexandre explains, is its own coping mechanism. She adds, “I look forward to participating in future events designed to increase educational outreach about the humanities to the broader Cambridge & Boston communities.”

(Photos: M. Scott Brauer, MIT News)
Honors and Awards

On May 14th, Dennis Freeman, Dean for Undergraduate Education, presented Literature Prof. Noel Jackson with the Freshman Advising Award that “recognizes the dedication and contributions of freshman faculty advisors.”

Laura Meeker received the 2014 Peter S. Donaldson Prize for Excellence in Literary Studies — “Awarded to a literature major each spring who excels academically and is an engaging participant in the literary community at MIT.” Prof. Diana Henderson presented Meeker with the prize after graduation.

Sterling Watson received the John Hildebidle Poetry Prize, which is “awarded to students who excel academically in 21L.004 ‘Reading Poetry’ and enrich the poetry community at MIT more broadly.” The award was presented by lecturer Kate Delaney, who is also a recipient of the award.

Comings and Goings

Prof. Ruth Perry spent most of the Spring term in Oxford on the MIT-Balliol exchange, reading in the Bodleian Library for an article on music in Jane Austen’s Emma, as well as investigating the music books that Jane Austen herself compiled for her own pleasure. She has also been working on a biography of the ballad collector Anna Gordon, Mrs. Brown of Falkland, tracing materials in county record offices about some far-flung family members. She has given a lecture to Oxford’s “Restoration to Reform” colloquium on the importance of folk music to the Scottish Enlightenment and has been meeting with scholars from around the university with similar interests.

Literature welcomes two pre-doctoral fellows during academic year 2014-2015. Shermaine Jones is a graduate student in the Department of English at the University of Virginia. She works in African-American Literature and twentieth-century World Anglophone Literature with an emphasis in African and Afro-Caribbean materials. Rosa Martinez is a graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley. She is an Americanist whose interest in “passing” in literature extends from the period of Spanish colonization through the twentieth century.

Julia Panko will be leaving Literature to begin a tenure-track appointment as an Assistant Professor of English, specializing in new media, at Weber State University in Utah. Julia Panko joined the Literature Section as a Mellon Post-doctoral Fellow in 2012 after completing her Ph.D. at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

In Literature Headquarters, we said goodbye to Hannah Carpenter, administrative assistant for publicity and outreach. She has moved to Music and Theatre Arts as the administrative assistant to the Head, Peter Childs. Kevin McLellan, the administrative assistant supporting the financial and HR, moved to Foreign Languages & Literatures (now renamed Global Studies and Languages) and supports the AO and Head. Doug Purdy, the Humanities Film Office Coordinator, has moved to New York City to complete research for a second novel, currently under contract. Doug’s first book, Serpents in the Cold, is available for pre-order at Barnes & Noble.com.

Literature Headquarters welcomed Susan Wiedner as the administrative assistant for publicity and outreach. Prior to joining Literature, Susan worked at Emmanuel College and Pearson Education. Benjamin Kemp is the new administrative assistant for financial and HR support. Ben previously worked at the Harvard School of Public Health in the faculty appointments office. We also welcome Corinne Spencer, who is working with Professor Mary Fuller as her personal assistant. Cori will spend this summer at the Skowhegan Artist Residency in Maine. Coralie Kraft is supporting the Communications Forum. Laura Ryan is the new Media Assistant for the Humanities Film Office. Laura recently worked at Simmons College as a Technology Assistant.

Retirements

We are sad to announce the retirement of two beloved and long-standing members of Literature’s teaching staff.

Lecturer Kate Delaney (seen in photo to left) will be retiring after nine years at MIT that followed a long career in the foreign service, with postings to Colombo, Sri Lanka; Lagos, Nigeria; Paris, France; Johannesburg, South Africa; The Hague, the Netherlands; and Warsaw, Poland. She has taught a wide range of classes, from “Writing About Literature,” “Reading Fiction,” and “Reading Poetry” to “Postmodern Fiction,” “Cyberpunk,” and “The Sixties.” Kate and Tom Delaney have also been housemasters in East Campus since 2006. They are moving to Hawaii.

Howard “Skip” Eiland has taught at MIT since 1983, specializing in modern fiction and poetry and also teaching across the spectrum. He is the author, with Michael Jennings, of Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life (Harvard University Press, 2014); Skip has translated and edited numerous works by Benjamin, a central twentieth-century German critic, and has written essays on Heidegger, Nietzsche, jazz, and film, among other topics. Deeply committed to undergraduate education and critical writing and thinking at MIT, Skip will be missed by generations of students.

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