THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

DEPARTMENT *of* ENGLISH

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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**2009 ALUMNI
NEWSLETTER**

NOTE FROM THE CHAIR

DAVID PORTER

INTERIM DEPARTMENT CHAIR

Dear Friends of the Department,

The State of Michigan, as you know, continues to face challenging economic times. The Department of English, like nearly every unit on campus, is preparing for a period of increasing financial constraints. Thanks to the University's strong support of our mission, however, and the generosity of our friends, we continue to thrive in our core areas of teaching and research.

This fall, we welcome two new full-time assistant professors to our department. Sean Silver, a newly minted PhD from UCLA who recently won the coveted Clifford Prize in his field of eighteenth-century studies, has introduced a popular new course on "Celebrity Stagecraft." Tina Lupton, who comes to us from the University of British Columbia, has already won two teaching awards and published ten articles on topics ranging from eighteenth-century sermons to twenty-first-century video games. We are also very pleased to be joined by Victor Mendoza, a specialist in gender studies jointly appointed with Women's Studies, and Vasugi Ganeshananthan, our new Helen Herzog Zell Professor in Fiction.

At the same time, we are bidding a fond farewell to Ralph Williams, who is about to retire. As many of you know, Ralph is a legendary teacher whose packed courses on Shakespeare and the Bible as Literature inspired tens of thousands of students during the forty years he has been with the Department. We are planning a conference in his honor on the theme of "Sacred and Canonical Texts" for next April, and have established a new annual award in Ralph's name to encourage the cultivation of teachers who can reach a broad undergraduate audience with the best that literary study has to offer.

Though we hope she won't retire any time soon, the Department held a lecture event last spring to celebrate the many contributions of Sidonie Smith, who stepped down as Department Chair in June after six years of dedicated service for which we all remain deeply grateful. I have taken on the role of Interim Chair for one term until Michael Schoenfeldt begins a four-year term as Chair in January.

We remember a number of sad departures. In February, we lost our colleague Merla Wolk, who had been with the Department for over 22 years as a much-loved teacher of courses on women and literature and the Victorian novel. Tom Garbaty, a distinguished medievalist who was with the Department for 42 years from 1960-2002, passed away in July. We've received news of the recent passing of William Steinhoff, who taught Modern Literature in our department from 1948 to 1984 and was a leading authority on George Orwell. Delia Silski, a beloved staff member, passed away in January.

As befits an increasingly digital age, two major new initiatives in the Department reflect our expanding engagement with evolving forms of media, literacy, and communication. Over the past six months, we have completely overhauled our department website, creating a far more enjoyable and user-friendly experience for students, faculty, and friends alike. And in May, after a highly competitive application process, the Office of the President selected English as one of several units across campus that would be given special authorization to hire this year in an area of pressing social concern. Our proposal made the case for expanding our expertise in the emerging field of Digital Humanities, and we look forward to the cutting-edge teaching and research this initiative will make available in our department.

The accomplishments of our remarkable faculty continue to bring honor on us all. Anne Curzan has been selected to receive a 2009 Faculty Recognition Award on the basis of her exceptional scholarly achievements. Both Alan Wald and Nicholas Delbanco received Michigan Humanities Awards for 2009-10. Julian Levinson won the 2008 National Jewish Book Award for his study, *Exiles on Main Street: Jewish American Writers and American Literary Culture*. Adela Pinch has been selected to receive a 2009 University Undergraduate Teaching Award, and last spring, Ralph Williams was honored with the first-ever Lifetime Achievement Golden Apple Award.

As you leaf through the pages of this newsletter and our new website, you'll find many more reasons to be proud of your affiliation with this department. We remain committed, as always, to sharing with our students the boundless wonders of the world of literature, and to contributing to scholarly conversations that are forever tracing new pathways within it.

Do drop us a line to tell us about the pathways you've been exploring. As always, we're delighted to hear from you.

David

Ralph Williams

A Final Year at Michigan

Over the past year Professor Williams's numerous contributions to the teaching of English Language and Literature were noted at several events across the University—from his Golden Apple Lifetime Teaching Award to the English Commencement Ceremony for graduating seniors. The following remarks by Sidonie Smith introduced another such event, the final lecture in our yearlong Departmental Pedagogy Series, fittingly given by Professor Williams.

▼ Ralph Williams receives notification of his Golden Apple Lifetime Teaching Award.

Photo: Chris Dzombak, Michigan Daily

It is my great pleasure to introduce today's presenter in our pedagogy series, Ralph Williams. And in honor of Ralph I'm going to organize my introductory remarks under three *rubrics*:

Woo, woo, woo!

Ambassador

The river Thames

At the Ford Honors gala, honoring Ralph and Michael Boyd and the Royal Shakespeare company in January, I sat toward the side front. Arrayed around me were undergraduate students whose bodies bounced in their seats in anticipation of Ralph's introduction and his presentation. When his name was announced and he climbed to the stage, these students erupted in excitement. *Woo, woo, woo* could be heard throughout Rackham auditorium. They laughed when he laid out his rubrics. And they sat rapt as he spoke about language, and Shakespeare, and theater, and the humanities, and ethical commitment. They were Ralph's students. He gathered them in with his passion and his hands and his words. He worked this magic for tens of thousands of students over his career. A seat in one of his classes was a must-have seat. And his rhetorical force bound those students to their beloved teacher, to this institution and to this department long after they graduated.

But Ralph was not only a major presence on campus. He was an ambassador for this university in outreach to alums and to parents. One day in Fall 2008, I got a call from the president's office to say that Ralph's teaching had just jingled the pocket of another parent donor whose son had made him go to Ralph's class when he was visiting campus. The father too sat rapt in Ralph's classroom and after leaving campus donated a significant gift to the University. Ralph embodied for him the Michigan Difference.

Ralph taught his last courses in the Department this past term. And now, the world is going to be made anew for him as he begins his next adventure. His will be a transatlantic itinerary, one that keeps him in motion between Ann Arbor, London and Stratford-on-Avon. I see him along the river Thames, hands gesturing in anticipation of dramatic exchange, perhaps with Michael Boyd, perhaps with the actors in the Royal Shakespeare Company. And often, I suspect, he will be greeting former students who return to him through memories of a professor in action. We wish Ralph the best in all his new adventures—some of which, we must believe, will play themselves out to new and returning audiences, here in Ann Arbor. ☐

—Sidonie Smith

MISS YOUR CHANCE TO ATTEND ONE OF PROFESSOR WILLIAMS'S LECTURES?

Visit the multimedia section of our website for a number of Williams's lectures—from his 367 Shakespeare course to his English commencement address—available for free download.

www.lsa.umich.edu/english/media/
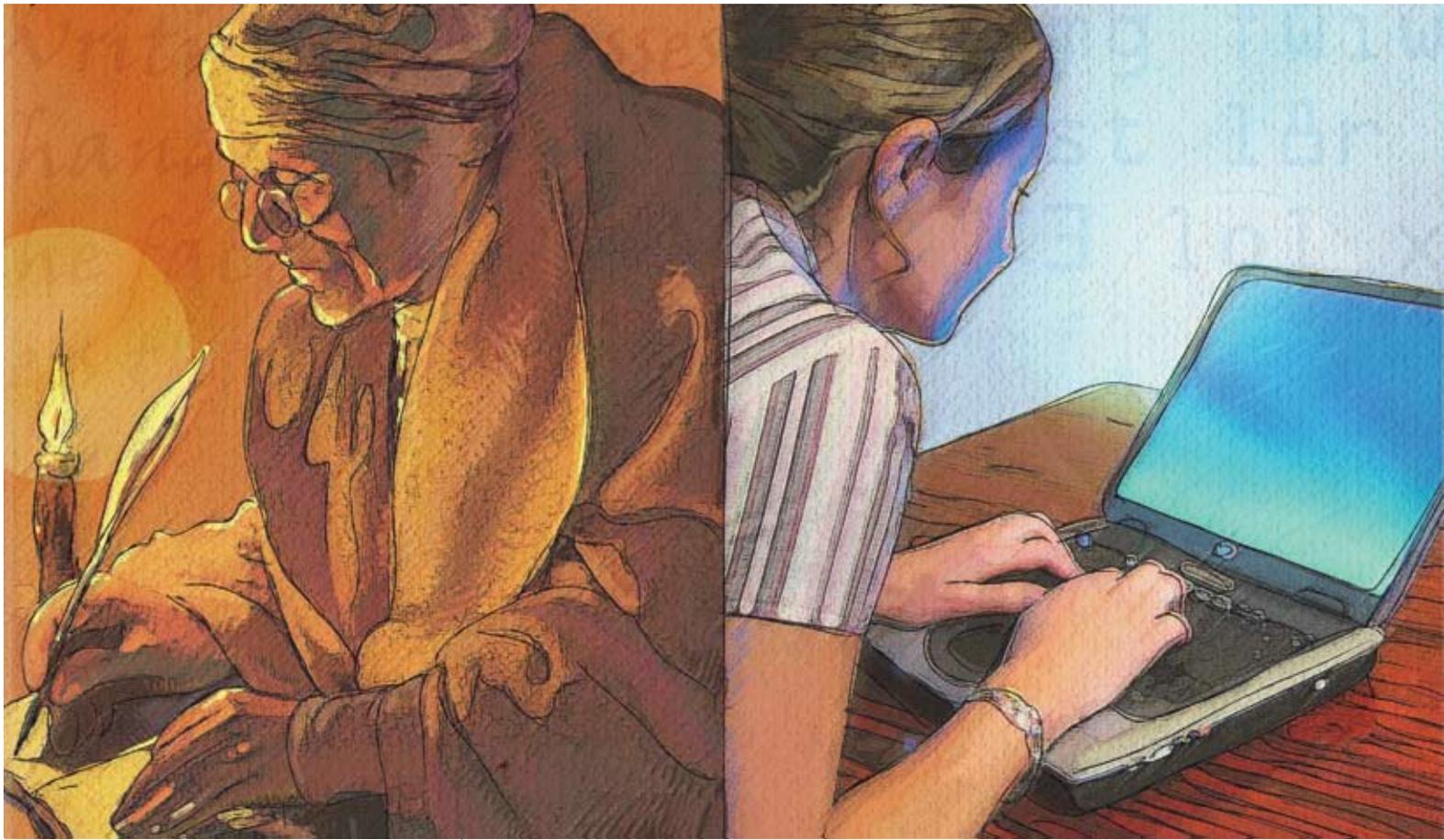
Writing
NOW

INTRODUCTION

—Macklin Smith

When the writers I study spoke or wrote of *reading*, they meant turning written words into spoken words, and *writing* meant for them either the translation of heard words into strings of letters or the transcription of other such letters. A monk would need a year to copy a Bible. To make a book required killing sheep (for the vellum), killing geese (for the quills, or *pennae*), and grinding minerals (for the ink). Books were scarce and dear: they often appear as the first item of movable property in wills. Therefore, most literature was performed and enjoyed orally, by groups. There were no novels. Few people read silently. The printing press changed much of this, making books cheaper, expanding literacy, enabling private reading, and allowing many more people—and more kinds of people—to write. But "serious" writing still ended up as text in books, and the act of writing still required pen and ink (or recently, a typewriter), entailing laborious, messy revision. Computing changed all that. When suddenly I could fix a typo or revise a sentence without retyping a page, it seemed miraculous. And the miracles continue—rather confusingly, it seems. What follows are the reflections of one graduate student and three professors on writing now, in our newly digital age.

ENGLISH STUFF: NEW, NEWER, AND NOW

—Ben Gunsberg

With the exception of square footage and, perhaps, seating configuration, the material conditions of classrooms generally have little direct effect on college English teachers' planning and instruction—until misfortune strikes. Try teaching *Hamlet* with water dripping on your head. Wordsworth tends to wilt in a sweat lodge. Leaky pipes, flickering light bulbs, thermostats stuck on "hot"—such malfunctions hijack our attention. Thank goodness for U-M's maintenance crews. We tell someone, who relays the message to someone else, and during off hours the problem gets resolved: the classroom returns to quiet, compliant serviceability. Next period, we're back to reading, writing, and discussing texts—the real "stuff" of English courses. The proliferation of digital and internet technology, however, changes things a bit. Students and teachers expect more than comfortable space from classrooms; they expect wireless internet access, electronic whiteboards, digital projectors, and so on. Like other emerging issues in education, attention to classroom "capability" is symptomatic of our changing communication practices, our shifting expectations for teaching and learning.

Aristotle proposes that one's credibility, or *ethos*, emerges out of moral fitness and expertise. On the failure of ethos, recall how John McCain's credibility suffered, especially with younger voters, when he admitted to not knowing how to check e-mail. A politician clearly works hard to project credibility, but what about our classrooms? What makes them credible? Whence their ethos? Consider the "smart classroom," the "enhanced classroom," the "computer lab"—spaces endowed with computer consoles, high-speed internet access, LCD projectors, printers, scanners, and the like. Say their names aloud: "smart," "enhanced," "laboratory." Even before walking through the door or being bedazzled by kaleidoscopic screensavers, have you not been touched by their suggestions of moral fitness and expertise?

How quiet and pedestrian our traditional English classrooms can seem in this environment, their default reticence out of sync with the contemporary communication habits enabled by those smart, enhanced, technologically endowed laboratories. *This is how you might look,* one says to the other, *had you evolved.*

For better or worse, we are becoming accustomed to noisy, active spaces—spaces that impart particular types of agency through digital technology, particular types of action, particular practices of teaching and learning. And I'm not just referring to academic spaces; these expectations of space and materiality extend beyond classrooms. When I visit my parents' house, for example, I get annoyed because I can't access the internet from my laptop. My parents don't own a wireless router, so I mutter to myself, "Why can't they get with the program?" Here's where the ethos of space has bearing on the ethos of people within that space. The house, and by extension my parents, limit my agency by denying me my *right* to access the internet from the couch, the kitchen table, wherever.

What happens if we refuse to adjust, if we continue using the same old English stuff to do the same old English thing in the same old English classrooms?

Apply this domestic generational paradigm to the English Department and we begin to see how the ethos of space might affect students and teachers, perhaps even an entire discipline. What happens if we refuse to adjust, if we continue using the same old English stuff to do the same old English thing in the same old English classrooms?

I'm being deliberately and pugnaciously naïve. Excellent writing, teaching, and research, I realize, is not simply a function of materials. "The same old English thing" is a sloppy reduction of what is in fact a lively, thriving community of writers, scholars, educators, and students doing wonderful and interesting things. I admire the tradition and innovation of our English Department; it is this admiration for the Department and the discipline that makes me put these thoughts to screen and encourages me to envision a department and discipline thriving in the midst of change.

To thrive often means to adapt. Indeed, the ability to adjust to changing circumstances (a survivor's *mutability*) follows good teachers from age to age. These days, Socrates would certainly flop if he required his English 225 students to memorize and recite the oral equivalent of twenty-five pages of argumentation. No doubt he would be wise enough to offer something more in-line with students' experiences and expectations. This is what we mean when we refer to teaching and learning as "context-dependent." As the context of both formal and informal learning responds to technological change, as students produce and distribute new kinds of texts in new ways outside of school, so too must teachers, classrooms, departments, and disciplines
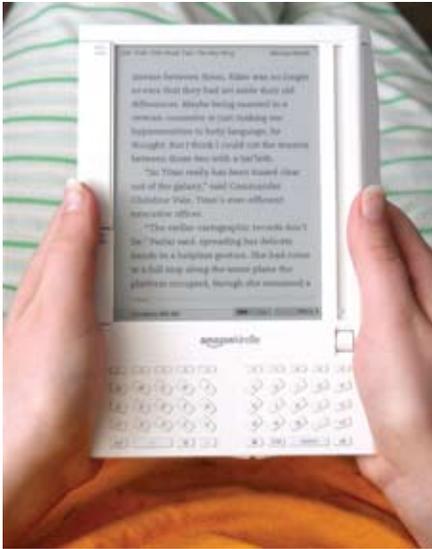
Kindling Debate?

Does the mainstreaming of high-tech gadgets— like digital readers, smart phones and net books—and the growing prevalence of electronic media signal the end of print media as we know it? Should it necessitate dramatic changes in the way we teach writing and interact with the written word? What is lost, if anything, in the movement between page and screen?

adjust. Departments unwilling or unable to adjust to the new *textscape* will sacrifice status and funding, the standard price of appearing irrelevant.

The question then becomes *how* to adjust. As I suggested earlier, it's already happening. Some English classes are held in smart and enhanced classrooms, others—for example, courses taught by Eric Rabkin and Thylias Moss—are even held in computer labs. During my observations of these classes, I witnessed teaching and writing that extended beyond the printed page to include websites, blogs, wikis, podcasts, still images, video, sound, animation, maps, and hyperlinks—to name just a few examples of "new" writing. I observed Rabkin and Moss and their students capitalizing on the new materiality of classrooms to explore the ways in which technology does—or does not—encourage new forms of expression and collaboration.

Skeptics—and I count myself as one—voice concern that something important may be lost as a result of these new and largely untested instructional approaches, these emergent modes of reading and writing. The emphasis of the discipline, after all, has "always" (that is, recently, since the late fifteenth-century invention of printing) been words on the printed page. Perhaps in the movement between page and screen, something important, something crucial, falls out of focus. Even as we admit, and praise, innovation, we should perhaps do so warily. Such concern is longstanding; we find it in the *Phaedrus,* as Plato, "speaking" as Socrates, expresses concern that writing will diminish our powers of memory and degrade public debate. Indeed, in a much earlier age, as writing achieved prominence, two rhetorical canons—memory and delivery—quietly drifted toward the periphery. We are wise to pay keen attention to what is being displaced during this transition, this so-called "digital revolution," and take pains to curate as we innovate.

WRITING IN THE AGE OF WIKIPEDIA

—Eric S. Rabkin

Once upon a time, long, long ago—let's call it 1991, that antique era only one year before many of our current first-year students and the World Wide Web were born—I expounded a psychosexual interpretation of "Little Red Riding Hood" in a lecture course on Fantasy. At the hour's end, one incredulous young man strode up as I packed my books and, standing his ground against the general exit, declared my view utterly insupportable.

"Well," I said, "it has been published by a university press."

"Where?" he demanded. I gave him the name of the press and the title of the book.

Two days later, as I entered the auditorium, I saw him pounding down the aisle toward me.

"That's not fair!" he nearly shouted in my face.

"What's not fair?"

"That book. The one with your interpretation of 'Little Red Riding Hood.' I found it in the library."

"Good," I said. "What about it?"

"You *wrote* it!"

I had not realized when I said my interpretation had been published that I needed to explain that I had written it. My student, however, understood the press itself as conferring authority, whereas I was obviously a fallible human, demonstrably so twice a week. The real possibility of unauthorized publication is one reason that, even today, academic departments much prefer to rely on research published on paper to work available only online when judging someone for tenure. It's hard to know what "publishing" means in the Age of Wikipedia.

For any who have not used Wikipedia, let me explain that it is now the world's largest encyclopedia. It exemplifies the web today. It grows by the additions, amendments, and deletions of anyone who cares to play. In writing an article, one includes links to other Wikipedia pages and web pages outside Wikipedia, including original texts of works discussed, pictures of people mentioned, and videos demonstrating processes being explained. Those other pages, texts, images, and videos were, in all likelihood, not created by the article's original author, and they can change without that author—and subsequent co-authors—ever knowing. Also, in writing an article, writers insert "stubs," or links to non-existent Wikipedia pages that in the writer's opinion need writing. Thus every Wikipedia page is a node in infinite sets of informational and social webs, all

varying depending on the path one follows along the clickable strands and the mutable stops along the way. And it's free.

Wikipedia entries can be edited by anyone who registers. The editing process leaves a record of who did what, but one rarely reads that record. This unguarded process naturally has led to occasional efforts to represent certain people or events in one or another favored light, but for the vast majority of articles, Wikipedia's parent foundation takes no action, preferring, as one user noted, "consensus over credentials." Does this mob scholarship work? It has been enormously controversial. But the reality is that since it is cheap, easy, and quite often the very best resource one can find, it gets used. I've taken the trouble to correct (edit) a Wikipedia article only once, but, I must admit, I've spotted what I believed to be outright errors only three times. And they were minor—in my professional opinion.

What exactly did that vocal student find unfair about my citation? Was it unfair of me to back up my argument by calling in the power of a press? Was it unfair to have omitted mentioning my authorship of the book? Was it unfair that I, a professor, had access to a press for my side of the argument while the student could only splutter? Perhaps he meant all those things. But that encounter could never happen today. Today my students sit with laptops open and if they care to contradict me—which is often useful, enlightening, and necessary—they check their own facts first. Often on Wikipedia. And if they wish, they edit those online "facts." The power of the press has been democratized. This change is profound.

The words "author" and "authority" are cognates. Both come from Latin *augēre*, meaning, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, "to make to grow, originate, promote, increase." Both words are cognate with "augment," but clearly good writing requires not only addition but subtraction and transformation. Once upon a time, an author was an authority, an originator and nurturer of written work, a parent who might send this work out into the world ("Go, litel book" as Chaucer wrote) or keep it home, but who, by virtue of the fixity of ink on papyrus, parchment, or paper, was the only author, the only authority.

Today, however, authorship is potentially limitless. It extends through time, including the time beyond a document's original web posting. It extends beyond the individual creator, to materials already available and materials yet to come. Document creation can be as isolated an act as correcting an erroneous date, or as extensively coherent as writing a philosophical treatise, or as complexly and unpredictably engaging as uploading the framework

for a collaborative behemoth like Wikipedia.

Texts are now unstable. Yes, they can be archived, as the image of your face can be captured on a cell phone by a stranger in the street, but the text itself can be modified for diverse motives by diverse individuals at diverse times. Whatever Photoshop can do to your image, Wikipedia can do to your ideas. And hackers can do to your Facebook page. In this environment, individual readers and researchers clearly need critical intelligence to assess the worth of any online document. And often they *should* trust in the mob. The trick is knowing when.

> **In the Age of Wikipedia, just as all entries are potentially multimedia, affecting our use (reading, consulting, clicking, editing) of them, so all are potentially collaborative. Every "writer" is a potential "reader," and vice versa.**

Moreover, "documents" now are all potentially multi-media and interconnected. Do their non-textual features distract from, or augment, their textual authority? In either case, writers who omit graphics and links are like modern film directors who choose black-and-white: the option exists, but now that choice never passes unnoticed. "Why didn't she include a picture of the baby with the birth announcement?" When writing about the Civil War, does one include an image of the Lincoln Memorial or the façade of Ford's Theater or one side of a penny? Or of a slave auction? Or no image at all? Audiences notice.

In the Age of Wikipedia, just as all entries are potentially multimedia, affecting our use (reading, consulting, clicking, editing) of them, so all are potentially collaborative. Every "writer" is a potential "reader," and vice versa. The trick for Wikipedia, and for teachers—who are all potential learners, and vice versa—is to foster a social structure within which this open framework nonetheless supports sustained, deep, and important work both for the group and for the individuals in it.

I believe there are ways to do that, ways that can extend indefinitely through time and even ways that can be tailored to a traditional semester. One such way can be seen in the syllabus for my course in The Humanities and Technology (which is linked to my home page and which, like all the references here, can be found through a Google search). In that course, taught in a computer lab but extending to the library and coffee shop and dorm rooms, we

teach collaboration so that the students can and do collectively define issues and produce group sites to address those issues, sites that the English Department pledges to maintain online. Follow my home page link to Selected Student Humanities InfoTech Coursework. I invite you to see what happens when "writing" becomes a process that engages groups over time; that reflects adding, subtracting, and substituting; that aims at public accessibility and public utility; that allows itself to think beyond text; and that sees itself as participating in the conversation that is the material—ever augmenting—of the world. This sort of writing puts the teacher and student in many regards on precisely the same level. And together—but mostly the students, of course—they produce results that can be spectacular, useful, and personally satisfying to the writers and audience, especially when individuals are both. You can, with full knowledge of this authorship, follow the links and judge for yourself. This, I think, is fair, and, for our world, immensely hopeful.

WEB LINKS

▶ **Wikipedia**
   en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia
▶ **Oxford English Dictionary**
   www.oed.com
▶ **Project Gutenberg / Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde***
   infomotions.com/etexts/gutenberg/dirs/etext95/troic10.htm
▶ **Humanities and Technology Syllabus**
   www.umich.edu/~lsarth/RTHf09/420f09syl.html
▶ **Eric Rabkin's Homepage**
   www-personal.umich.edu/~esrabkin
▶ **Google**
   www.google.com
▶ **Collaboration Tools**
   www.umich.edu/~mmx/collaboration_tools.htm
▶ **Selected Student Humanities InfoTech Coursework**
   www.umich.edu/~mmx/humsit_coursework.htm

TEACHING WRITING NOW

—Anne Gere

Writing, that is, the producing of it, has long occupied a marginal position in English departments. Literature dominates the course listings; only a few colleges offer a major in writing; and those who teach writing often occupy lower paid and less secure positions than faculty who teach literature. Furthermore, writing has never enjoyed the social status of reading outside the academy. Ask anyone you know about their experiences of reading, and you will usually hear stories of pleasure and intimacy. Shift the question to writing, and the stories are often accounts of punishment, difficulty, and isolation. Traditionally, writing has not been valued or practiced as reading has. But change is upon us.

One indication appeared in *Reading at Risk*, a report issued by the National Endowment for the Arts in 2004. This report focused on the declining numbers of people who read literature. Particularly among the younger population, there has been a significant drop-off in the reading of novels, poetry, and drama. However, tucked into this report was the fact that between 1982 and 2002 the number of people who report doing creative writing increased substantially, from 11 million to 15 million. I wager that today this number has increased significantly. If writing is extended beyond *creative* to include other forms, we can find ample evidence that the increase would be greater still. Consider the writing done in workplaces, community centers, coffee shops, and, especially, on the internet. Since 2002 we have witnessed a precipitous decline in the production and distribution of printed texts: I write as the University of Michigan Press shifts to digital monographs, Ann Arbor's beloved Shaman Drum bookstore has lost its struggle for survival, and the *Ann Arbor News,* now AnnArbor.com, distributes paper issues only on Thursdays and Sundays. Reading will, of course, continue in digital form, but these changes, combined with the increased number of people writing, suggests that we are entering a new world of literacy.

The increased numbers of people writing certainly has some relationship to new technologies and the social networking facilitated by writing. Think of text messaging, Facebook, and Twitter. But the increase can also be ascribed to the nature of writing itself, especially as we move from a manufacturing to an information-driven economy. Historically, writing has been associated with the practicalities of life, with getting and spending. Colonial writing masters took only male students because writing was necessary to their vocational futures, while females were taught reading only. The definition of literacy has changed since the Colonial period, when ability to sign one's name on a marriage certificate was an indication of literacy, but writing continues to play a central role in getting things done in our culture.

The larger cultural context nearly always shapes and is shaped by curricular changes in higher education. Writing instruction entered English departments because a group of Harvard alumni, mostly businessmen, alarmed by the writing of undergraduates in the 1890s, issued a series of reports calling for a first-year writing course. The GI Bill in the early 1950s and open-admissions programs in the 1970s each expanded and transformed writing

Students will negotiate our shifting culture, adjusting to the new configurations of the reading-writing relationship, meeting the challenges and opportunities of new technologies, and taking their places in a nation of writers.

instruction because they brought new populations into college classrooms. Writing instruction, in turn, has had a profound influence on the testing industry, as psychometricians call upon school-shaped genres of writing to measure student achievement. Similarly, the practices of revising and editing born of process-based writing instruction appear in much extracurricular writing.

The cultural shifts that are rearranging the relationships of reading and writing are driven in part by technological changes. Those of us who can remember typing a dissertation and possessing the skill to fill a page exactly so as not to have to retype the pages before and after, can testify to the ways that word processing changed the ways we write. But today technology is changing the very meaning of writing. Web 2.0, defined as using the internet to collaborate, share information and interact with others, is transforming the processes by which texts are produced, making it difficult to determine when a piece of writing is "finished." Digital forms ranging from Power Point to Photoshop are changing the roles of images and design as well as providing audiences for an ever-expanding number of writers. The interaction and endless revision characteristic of composing on the internet reduce the distinction between writing as process and as product because the "product" is continually under erasure.

Accordingly, the curriculum at the University of Michigan is responding to both cultural and technological shifts. English 229: Professional Writing, for example, helps students call upon rhetorical skills to design documents that address multiple readers, purposes, and professional contexts. The Sweetland Writing Center's new offerings include SWC 200: Writing in New Media. Some sections of this course are one-credit offerings focused on specific topics: Viral Video Rhetoric: Propaganda and Persuasion in a Digital Democracy; Visual Science: Writing and Presenting PowerPoint and Posters; and The Rhetoric of the Blog. Other sections of SWC 200 are three-credit courses that offer a more in-depth examination of issues: Writing for New Media: The Interplay of Text and Image; Audible Rhetoric: Writing for Podcasts; and Documentary Michigan: Writing Arguments in New Media Genres. Regardless

of the focus, these are emphatically not courses about technology *per se*. Rather, they are courses designed to help students write effectively in multi-modal environments and adapt to the changing status of writing. These are classrooms where students work together in small groups to produce an enhanced podcast that includes visual as well as audio text; where a student designs a rhetorically effective website for the entertainment associated with the Relay for Life; and where a whole class regularly comments on the effectiveness of blogs published on the internet. Courses like these will provide fuller support for students who will negotiate our shifting culture, adjusting to the new configurations of the reading-writing relationship, meeting the challenges and opportunities of new technologies, and taking their places in a nation of writers.

GRAMMAR IN THE 21ST CENTURY

—Anne Curzan

There is a rumor out there that the internet is destroying the English language. I hear worries that young people no longer know how to capitalize letters or use punctuation marks correctly, that student papers risk becoming overrun with *LOL*-like acronyms, and that no one will be able to construct a "grammatical sentence." As the professor who taught the 400-level English grammar course this winter, I can attest that students are highly adept at switching between texting language and academic language— and that they themselves are often highly critical of speakers and writers who use texting language in ways they deem inappropriate. In my course we also unpacked the multiple meanings of the word *grammatical*, meanings that tease apart the intuitive rules that govern systematic communication in any dialect from the etiquette rules that govern usage primarily in Standard English. All these rules change over time, and English grammar is in no danger of being destroyed.

Many English speakers, including many students at the University of Michigan, have a conflicted

To study grammar is to accept that grammar always changes and to understand better the relationship of spoken and written language. Dictionaries and usage guides can only try to keep up with the creativity that characterizes the human language. The internet will not destroy English any more than any other piece of technology before it. Will the internet change English? Absolutely.

relationship with "grammar": they want to understand the details of English grammar and sense that it will be useful; but they also may think of grammar as boring or scary (red pen marks come to mind) or "something they are not good at." But, as my students and I discussed, to speak a language natively is to be good at that language's grammar; it is the knowledge that we have acquired, much of it unconsciously, that allows us to communicate with each other every day in meaningful ways. To study a language's grammar is to gain the terminology and the analytic tools to unpack all the knowledge that goes into creating those meaningful utterances.

Some of that knowledge can seem very basic, such as the fact that modals such as *can* or *would* come before the main verb (e.g., *can study*). Some of that knowledge can seem much more complex, such

as the rules for when we must insert *do* (e.g., in *don't study* to support *not,* but not in *can't study* because *can* already supports *not*) and all the ways we can embed phrases and clauses inside each other (e.g., *the course on grammar that I took to learn more about how English works*—a noun phrase that has three clauses embedded in it!). Our knowledge of grammar also dictates what we cannot do; for example, we cannot contract a form of "to be" at the end of a clause; so in the following sentence we can contract the first *is* but not the second: *She's taller than he is*, but not **She's taller than he's*.

When I say "cannot" here, I mean that in the descriptive sense: it creates a sentence that native speakers categorize as ungrammatical. There is another set of rules called prescriptive rules, often captured in style guides and usage manuals, that tell us what we should not do in order to write (and sometimes speak) "correct" or "good" English. Many of these rules are important for students to know as well, for they—and their education—will be judged by their control of these rules. Some of the rules help clarify written prose, which does not, for example, tolerate the ambiguity that speech allows. Some of the rules help us create a style of written prose that is valued in a given discipline. Over the past fifteen years, I have discovered that these rules are ever so much more fun to learn when you also study where they come from, how they may conflict with the spoken language, and when it does—and does not—make sense to follow them in writing and in speech. Students in my course this term explored the mythical rule (which does not actually seem to appear in style

BY THE NUMBERS

WIKIPEDIA *The Free Encyclopedia*

13
million articles

3+
million articles in English

75
thousand active contributers

BLOGS

133
million blogs
(indexed by Technorati since 2002)

900
thousand blog posts per day

77
percentage of internet users
who read blogs

twitter

4+
billion tweets

22.5
million tweets per day

18
million active users
(projected by end of 2009)

Sources: Wikipedia, Technorati, popacular.com, eMarketer Digital Intelligence

guides) that one should not start a sentence with *and* or *but*; the often overly sweeping prohibitions of the passive voice that ignore the importance of the passive not only in scientific fields but also for academic staples such as *it could be argued*; and the waning health of *shall*, *whom*, and the subjunctive.

Some prescriptive rules run counter to our everyday experience with the spoken language, and no teacher should ignore that fact. We split our infinitives in speech on a regular basis (as did Star Trek with "to boldly go"), and yet some authorities still tell us that we should not split them in writing. Many of us use *hopefully* as a sentence adverb to mean 'I hope that,' much in the same way that we use *frankly* as a sentence adverb to mean 'I say frankly'; yet style guides tell us not to use *hopefully* this way, while they give *frankly* a pass. Studies show that most of us use the pronoun *they* as a singular in our speech (e.g., *I was talking to my neighbor and they said the movie is terrible*); style guides steer us toward *he or she* or rewriting the sentence to avoid the issue, sometimes telling us that *they* violates the rules of grammar in this construction. This simply is not true. Singular *they* may violate the rules as laid out in style guides, but 21st-century speakers of English, like centuries of speakers before them, have given to *they* a singular function to fill this need for a singular generic pronoun; it is a rule in their native grammars of the language. Discussing this fact with students does not mean students will suddenly ignore the style guides; rather I have found that it makes students more interested in and aware of the issue and more informed in their decision about how to handle it (which in my class may include using singular *they* and footnoting the first use to explain that decision).

As the example of singular *they* suggests, the grammar of English is always changing, and some usage rules try to block the innovative forms. It is one of several reasons that writing lags behind speech, but the standard written language changes as well. For instance, not everyone realizes that *shall* is not the only modal on the decline: *must* is also decreasing in usage, replaced by new modals such as *have to* and *need to*, which are coming to be more accepted in formal prose. While many disparage *funner* and *funnest* as the comparative and superlative forms of *fun*, what they may not realize is that *fun*—a relatively new adjective formed from the noun *fun*—is simply trying to act like a regular one-syllable adjective; adjectives with one syllable tend to take *-er/-est* (*taller*, *leanest*), adjectives of three syllables or more tend to take *more/most* (*most beautiful*), and adjectives of two syllables are variable between the two. Does this mean that students should use *funnest* in their academic writing?

Not if they aren't prepared to accept the consequences. Does it mean that *funnest* will win in the end? Probably. And as a student pointed out, the new ad campaign for iPods ("the funnest iPod ever") is not hurting its case.

To study grammar is to accept that grammar always changes and to understand better the relationship of spoken and written language. Dictionaries and usage guides can only try to keep up with the creativity that characterizes the human language. The internet will not destroy English any more than any other piece of technology before it. Will the internet change English? Absolutely. Will it wreak havoc with the apostrophe? It might, but the apostrophe's troubles go back centuries: it has long been unstable, used variably for possession, contraction, and sometimes plurals—as those who read unedited Renaissance texts can attest. And in at least some constructions, the apostrophe has become obsolete, given the growing tendency in English to stack up noun after noun as pre-modifiers without the possessive (e.g., *University of Michigan English Department Fall term course guide offerings*). As far as capitalization goes, if Benjamin Franklin had had his way, we would be capitalizing all nouns; for now, my guess is that the power of the Microsoft Word grammar checker will keep our capitalizing habits fairly stable in formal prose. But I find that sometimes I consciously choose not to use capital letters when I text to conform to the conventions of the genre (and speed the typing on my now obsolete cell phone).

We know that we all use different forms of English when we speak; I do not always speak like an English professor (I have found it detrimental to much social interaction!) and my students speak differently with me than they do with their different circles of friends than they do with their parents. That all of us use different forms of English in the many forums in which we write—different grammatical constructions, different punctuation conventions, different words—is part of that same ability to adapt our language to meet our daily communicative needs. And through that adaptation, we change the language, both spoken and written, every day. ▢

iPod touch. The funnest iPod ever.
Millions of songs. Thousands of movies. Hundreds of games.

Funnest Ever?

Apple's most recent iPod ad campaign: Thinking outside the box grammatically or representative of changing standards in writing?

TINA LUPTON

Since finishing my PhD at Rutgers in 2004, I have been teaching at the University of British Columbia and working on a book about the way texts in mid-eighteenth-century Britain use language to draw attention to themselves as material objects. The aim of "Knowing Books" is to take seriously the physicality of print as something that came into view as part of a commercial world in the eighteenth century, but from a critical perspective that engages the wider mood of self-consciousness about print in which many of these texts were originally written: Sterne and Hume are the most famous of the authors described in the study. The origins of this project lie in my wish, first conceived as a student of postcolonial theory at Sussex, to recast structuralist and poststructuralist accounts of Enlightenment rhetoric. My other motivation, which developed in New Jersey, is to question the idea that rhetorical self-consciousness is an inherently progressive or high-literary move.

In the last years, I have published articles on eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature and German fiction in journals including *ELH*, *NOVEL*, *New German Critique*, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* and *Philosophy and Literature*. My newest project, for which I have a Humboldt fellowship, will explore the challenges of representing married life in eighteenth-century novels from a formalist perspective. But my favorite reading is mostly in other periods: *Never Let Me Go*, *Portrait of a Lady*, and *Jude the Obscure* might be my top three novels.

My favorite places are as far-flung as my favorite books. I was born in London but grew up in Australia and have spent happy years since then in Brooklyn and Berlin and Vancouver. Most recently, I lived in Copenhagen while teaching on a faculty exchange from UBC. But the sound of packing tape on boxes has lost much of its appeal, and I'm honored and excited to be landing now in Ann Arbor. ☐

NEW FACULTY **INTRODUCTIONS**

VICTOR ROMÁN MENDOZA

I'm thrilled to come to Michigan after spending a year teaching at a liberal arts college in Pennsylvania, and, before that, a year as a postdoctoral fellow in the Asian American Studies Program at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. My teaching and scholarship focus on twentieth-century United States, Asian American, and ethnic American literary and cultural production.

My book manuscript, *Fantasy Islands: Illicit Desire and Philippine-US Imperial Relations*, tracks the mutually constitutive formations of race, gender, and sexuality in the twentieth-century US, as inflected by its colonial and neocolonial occupation of the Philippines. A literary-historical and cultural-studies analysis of disparate fin de siècle works, *Fantasy Islands* parses out US cultural fantasies around the *insurrectos* (originally, anti-colonial, Philippine insurgents) that the Philippine-American War (1899 to its official end in 1902) engendered. I argue that processes of social management in the US—racial formation, gender performativity,

and sexual governance—were articulated to popular cultural fantasies, not only about the colonial Philippine Other vis-à-vis other ethnic American and colonized peoples in the imperial imagination, but also about the white, heterosexual, American subject. The fantasies played out in this archive, I argue, helped shape nascent criteria of what was deemed sexually and racially deviant, not to mention normal, in the United States.

I have also been contributing to the exciting criticism produced at the interdisciplinary crossings of critical race theory, transnational feminist studies, queer studies, and queer-of-color critique. This next project, on what I call *homoimperialism*, explores how neoimperialism has afforded Western lesbian and gay politics and cultures something of a normative voice in state-managed projects, within the U.S. and on a transnational level. I'm eager to exchange ideas around the concurrent and ongoing formations of race, gender, and sexuality with my students and colleagues at the University of Michigan. ☐

SEAN R. SILVER

I come to Michigan from UCLA, where I earned my degree in 2008. My current book project revisits eighteenth-century imagination theory—the imagination, that is, before Romanticism. An eighteenth-century poet or painter would have been less likely to think of the imagination as a creative faculty than as a treasury of objects or images—a "storehouse" or a "museum." It is therefore significant, I argue, that numerous eighteenth-century authors were also collectors. For such exemplary figures as rock-hound Alexander Pope, bibliophile John Locke, or numismatist Joseph Addison, literature was a curatorial science.

But because I believe in the importance of following hunches—a value I work to instill in my students—my research has also generated a number of parallel interests. I have published recently on eighteenth-century food science and on "taste" as a nexus of empiricism and aesthetics, and am currently working on connections between "genius" and the modernization of obstetrics in eighteenth-century culture—where the word "conception" sometimes takes a surprisingly vexed double sense.

Not all of my interests are strictly academic. Between college and graduate school, I spent six years as a carpenter and cabinetmaker in Tucson. I have recently taken an interest in cooking—in part because of my academic interest in taste, but also because I am rediscovering, in the preparation of food, the same creative pleasures which drew me to woodworking in the first place. I enjoy fly-fishing and backpacking; I sail competitively; I play tournament chess (badly); and I ride a motorcycle—when I can get it working. Now that I have moved to Michigan, I am thinking of taking up cross-country skiing.

My family has a long history in and around Ann Arbor; though they are mostly now in California, Ohio, and Florida, both sides of my mother's family lived historically between Ann Arbor and Lansing. So I am in part excited to begin my career at Michigan because it feels like a sort of homecoming. □

RECENT FACULTY PUBLICATIONS

Enoch Brater, *Arthur Miller Plays: Six;* **Anne Curzan**, *How English Works (Second Edition);* **Nicholas Delbanco**, *The Hopwood Lecture Series: Sixth Series,* and *Literature: Craft & Voice* (co-edited with Alan Cheuse).

Laura Kasischke, *In a Perfect World;* **Petra Kuppers and Neil Marcus**, *Cripple Poetics: A Love Story;* **Kerry Larson**, *Imagining Equality in Nineteenth-Century American Literature;* **Khaled Mattawa**, *Amorisco,* also (translated from Arabic by Mattawa), *Joumana Haddad: Invitation to a Secret Feast*, *Iman Mersal: These Are Not Oranges, My Love: Selected Poems, Amjad Nasser: Shepherd of Solitude: Selected Poems of Amjad Nasser;* and **Anita Norich**, *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Intertext.*

Eileen Pollack, *Creative Nonfiction: A Guide to Form, Content, and Style, with Readings;* **Tobin Siebers**, *Disability Theory,* and *Zerbrochene Schönheit;* **Keith Taylor**, *If the World Becomes So Bright;* **Cody Walker**, *Shuffle and Breakdown;* **Jennifer Wenzel**, *Bulletproof: Afterlives of Anticolonial Prophecy in South Africa and Beyond;* and **Andrea Zemgulys**, *Modernism and the Locations of Literary Heritage.*
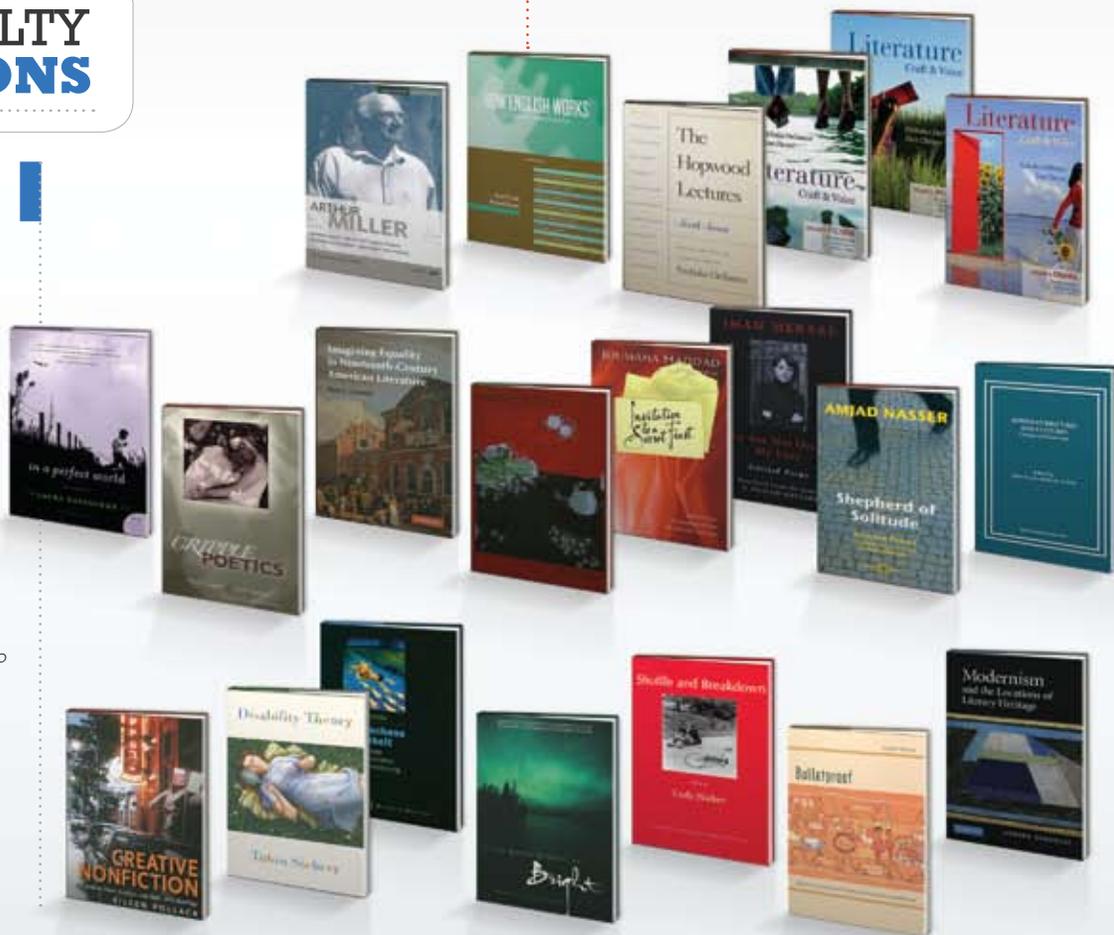
Digital *humanities*

—David Porter

As anyone over the age of 30 well knows, the digital landscape of our society is changing at a pace that has become increasingly difficult to follow, let alone keep up with. And if old-fashioned paper-and-ink lovers have it tough, large language and literature departments, if anything, have it even tougher. New technologies—blogs, Twitter, and viral videos, Kindles, iPhones, and Facebook pages—are fundamentally transforming how people use and interact with the spoken and written word. If English faculty are slow in adapting to these changes or in thinking creatively about their implications, the more familiar concepts of text, narrative, and literacy on which our teaching is based will come to seem increasingly outmoded to our students.

This is why, when the Office of the President announced a new initiative to fund interdisciplinary cluster hires in emerging research areas, the English Department joined with three other units—the Department of Communication Studies, the Program in American Culture, and the School of Information—to submit a proposal in the field of Digital Environments. In May, we learned that our proposal was selected for funding, and over the past few weeks, each of our four units has launched a national search for a promising junior scholar at the cutting edge of current work in this field. A successful hire in English, we hope, will help both our faculty and students to rethink the relationship between new technologies and humanistic learning, and enable us to develop constructive ways of bridging the gap between forms of textuality past and future. ☐

Illustration: Anthony Cece

▲ Ben Prize winners: (L) Ray McDaniel and (R) Alex Ralph with award presenter Laurence Kirshbaum (Center)

NOTEWORTHY TEACHERS

The 3rd annual **Ben Prize** was awarded to Ray McDaniel and Alex Ralph. The Ben Prize was established in 2007 in honor of Laurence Kirshbaum and was made possible through the generosity of Bradley Meltzer and a group of donors to promote the teaching of good writing. The award was named after Mr. Kirshbaum's grandson.

Two exceptional lecturers are chosen each year for their work with students to improve writing skills. Nominations for this award, which includes a monetary stipend, come from students. Kirshbaum was once again on hand earlier this year to present McDaniel and Ralph the award recognizing their achievements.

The three recipients of this year's **David and Linda Moscow Prize for Excellence in Teaching Composition** were Michael Bunn, Delia DeCourcy, and D'Anne Witkowski.

The committee had to make difficult decisions from a field of highly qualified and talented instructors in the English Department Writing Program. The three instructors who were selected this year are remarkable for the energy, passion, insight, pedagogical skill and creativity, and commitment they bring to the teaching of writing. Please join us in congratulating these accomplished instructors and celebrating their achievements. ☐

EVENTS

The Department hosted several major events this past year. The first was a symposium in honor of recently retired professor, Richard W. Bailey, titled, "**Perspectives on English Language Studies**." Bailey is one of the most distinguished and respected scholars in English language studies, a wide-ranging field in which Bailey's prolific publications represent pioneering work in an extraordinary number of areas.

Another was the **8th Annual Introduction to Book Publishing Workshop**. This weekend workshop helped students interested in book publishing gain an understanding of the many facets of the trade. The workshop featured a number of visiting experts, including many U-M alumni, currently working in publishing.

Also hosted by the Department, the **3rd Annual Sarah Marwil Lamstein Children's Literature Lecture** brought Cynthia Kadohata to campus. Kadohata is the award-winning author of three adult novels and three young adult novels: *The Floating World*; *In the Heart of the Valley of Love*; *The Glass Mountains*; *Kira-Kira*; *Weedflower*, *Cracker! The Best Dog in Vietnam*; and *Outside Beauty*.

Finally, in conjunction with the **Lara Hutchins Heberle Lecture**, the Department held a reception to celebrate the many contributions of Sidonie Smith, who stepped down as Department Chair in June after six years of dedicated service. The lecture featured Nancy K. Miller, professor of English, French and Comparative Literature at the Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY), and author of *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts*; *French Dressing: Women, Men and Ancien Régime Fiction*; and *Bequest and Betrayal: Memoirs of a Parent's Death*.
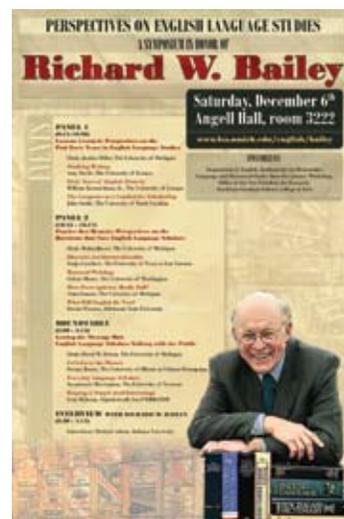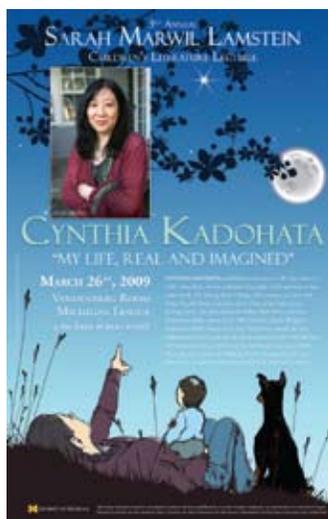
▲ Top: Sidonie Smith honored at reception following the Lara Hutchins Heberle Lecture. Bottom L-R: Posters for the Sarah Marwil Lamstein Children's Literature Lecture featuring Cynthia Kadohata and the Perspectives on English Language Studies symposium in honor of Richard W. Bailey.

A NEW LOOK

Over the past year we were hard at work collecting feedback from users of our website, meeting with focus groups, and studying current trends in educational institution websites. The result: a complete redesign of the Department of English Language and Literature website. Take a moment to visit the new site to download audio and video files, subscribe to RSS feeds, or simply browse around for the latest information on our department and programs.

www.lsa.umich.edu/english/

Thank You!

Despite the challenging economic times in which we live, you, our alumni and friends, have been incredibly generous this year.

You gave over $27,000 to our Strategic and Gift Funds. We use these gifts to enhance the classroom experience for our undergraduates, to support our graduate students, and to retain and recruit the exceptional faculty that make us one of the top English programs in the country.

You stepped up to President Coleman's Donor Challenge for graduate student support with more than $10,000 in gifts, which were matched by the President. You donated more than $13,000 to the New England Literature Program (NELP) to provide scholarships for students. Many of these gifts were in memory of Walter Clark, who passed away in May, 2008.

You gave more than $24,000 to the Bear River Writer's Conference. And you continued to support the Prison Creative Arts Project (PCAP) with more than $20,000 in donations. We are in your debt.

No gift to the Department is too small, and we value and appreciate each one.

You <u>are</u> the Michigan Difference.

Announcing a new giving opportunity
The Ralph Williams Excellence in Teaching Award

Over the past year Professor Williams taught his last classes at the University of Michigan. His impact, however, will hopefully be felt for many years to come through the encouragement and cultivation of the unique talents that great lecturers bring with them to class. The Department of English Language and Literature has established an annual award to recognize the achievements of faculty in the English Department who reach a broad undergraduate audience with the best that literary study has to offer. Gifts of all sizes can contribute to the success of this fund and to the ongoing excellence in undergraduate teaching at U-M.

Funding Goal $100,000

Thinking about giving?
Your support is always greatly appreciated.

✉ Please see the postage paid envelope inside.

If you would like to speak to someone directly, please feel free to contact the Chair of the Department or the staff of LSA Development who would be happy to discuss your giving options. The liaison officer for English in LSA Development is Peggy Burns. Peggy's contact information is as follows:

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Or, if you prefer, you could contact the gift officer responsible for your region of the country. To learn more about them, please visit the following webpage:
www.lsa.umich.edu/lsa/alumni/contact/

MUNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN MLSA