

DEPARTMENT OF LITERATURES IN ENGLISH

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WORK OF THE DEPARTMENT

The academic year 2008-09 was a time of transition, one which combined unusual challenges, related to staff movements, with sustained and even fruitful effort, as the department strove to continue the activities which it considers integral to its mandate, and to maintain high standards of pedagogy and scholarship.



Staff Matters

A significant challenge confronted this past year was the absence of three members of staff who have long played a major role in both graduate and undergraduate teaching, Dr. Michael Bucknor (whose Research Fellowship was extended for a second year), Dr. Norval Edwards, on sabbatical leave, and Dr. Curdella Forbes, who returned to Howard University after resigning from the UWI with effect from July 31, 2008. The department wishes to record its regret at the departure of Dr. Forbes, and its profound appreciation of her outstanding contribution over the years. Dr. Gregory Stephens' service with the University also came to an end on July 31, 2008, resulting in the suspension of our two courses in Film – which caused some disappointment for new students who had been particularly drawn to this area. On a positive note, we were gratified at the temporary appointment of Dr. Erna Brodber, acclaimed writer and scholar, to a full-time position in the department in Semester Two. Dr. Stephens' position has since been advertised, and despite the financial constraints now affecting the University, it is hoped that a replacement will be appointed in 2009-2010, bearing in mind that Film was identified several years ago as an important development area, and one which is

consonant with the University's strategic plan. The other three vacancies were filled by temporary appointments for the academic year, namely those of Ms. Lisa Brown, Dr. Harold McDermott and Ms. Tanya Shirley; a special word of gratitude is due to these lecturers for their professionalism, their flexibility and their level of commitment to the department, despite the uncertainties inherent in such temporary positions. We were privileged to continue to benefit from the support and the scholarship of three remarkable Professors Emeriti – Maureen Warner-Lewis, Edward Baugh and Mervyn Morris and were happy to have the opportunity of celebrating the role of these pioneers in an article entitled "Moving from Periphery to Centre" in the Gleaner 60th Anniversary Supplement (December 2008). The department is also greatly indebted to an outstanding and beloved member of staff, Administrative Secretary Miss Mary Gray, who retires in Semester One, 2009-2010; we noted with pleasure the recognition of Miss Gray's nearly three decades of exemplary service in December 2008, when she was one of five individuals across the University honoured in the context of the 60th anniversary celebrations.

Academic Program

With regard to the postgraduate program, we were able to implement in 2008-09 several of the recommendations formulated in the previous year's report of the departmental sub-committee on postgraduate matters, particularly regarding student access to information and course diversity; on the latter point, appreciation is due to the Heads of other departments in the Faculty, who agreed that students from Literatures in English could pursue electives from other disciplines (MA students are allowed up to two electives, and MPhil students one elective, i.e. one third of total course requirements in each case). The department has continued to benefit from the regular Staff/Student Seminar series, and it is especially gratifying that several graduate students, mainly at the MPhil level, have presented papers at this forum in the past year. Dr. Victor Chang (who also assumed the role of Departmental Coordinator for Graduate Studies) is to be commended for his extremely efficient and dynamic work in organizing these fortnightly seminars. In respect of new graduate programs, progress has been made in the revival of the long-deferred project of creating an MFA in Creative Writing; at the end of the academic year, a committee chaired by Mr. David Williams, and including Dr. Erna Brodber, Mrs. Verna George and Ms. Tanya Shirley, produced a draft proposal ready for

cross-campus consultation, and it is anticipated that this program could be offered in 2010-2011. In this context, the continuing interest in Creative Writing displayed by undergraduate students should be underscored; it is also noteworthy that the course E26C – Creative Writing, Poetry was successfully offered in summer 2009, with Tanya Shirley as Lecturer in charge. Under the terms of a staff/student exchange now in its third year, the department welcomed Dr. Asko Kaupinnen from Malmo University, who spent three weeks at Mona in November 2008, participating in the postgraduate teaching program, and guest lecturing in the course E34B – The City in Fiction. This exchange provides two students each year with the challenge and the opportunity of exposure to a different learning environment and to a different culture, and two UWI students spent a fruitful second semester in Sweden, achieving very good results – despite some initial problems of adaptation – while two Malmo students had a productive and enjoyable sojourn at Mona. In respect of innovative teaching approaches, it should be noted that the department continues to make substantial use of audiovisual material and web-based resources, and that it participated this year in the teaching program of the B.Ed. Distance degree and the Open Campus through its online/distance courses (E25C – West Indian Poetry, E25D – The West Indian Novel, E10A – Introduction to Poetry, E10B – Introduction to Prose Fiction and E10C – Introduction to Drama.)

Student-Oriented Activities The department continued the tradition of organizing a seminar on career possibilities for English majors beyond the obvious options, and welcomed, on April 16, Mrs. Cecile Johnson-Semaj, a 1999 graduate and a Company Director, who was able to give practical advice on matters such as writing a resume aimed at a particular target group, as well as to identify skills and approaches acquired in the course of her degree program at Mona. The project of forming a Creative Writers' Club, which was first proposed by last year's students of E26D, bore fruit this academic year with the establishment, in October 2008, of a club which meets regularly on Thursday afternoons. The enthusiasm of this group, which is not limited to students of literature, was evidenced by the successful staging of their first public evening of readings at Pages Restaurant, on April 16, with Mervyn Morris as guest performer. Further evidence of the vitality and potential of this area was provided at the public reading, hosted on April 23 by Dr. Brodber, of pieces by students of the course E26D, who were able to hear their work evaluated prior to submitting the portfolio which is the basis of assessment for the course. Jolyn Bryan, the student

obtaining the highest mark in this course, is this year's recipient of the Brodber-Pollard Prize, inaugurated two years ago through the generosity of Dr. Tony MacFarlane. In this connexion, we also note with gratitude the introduction in 2008-09 of the Myrie-McKenzie Award, offered to the most outstanding student in the level one course E10B – Introduction to Prose Fiction; this prize is to be donated annually by the accomplished Jamaican writer Alecia McKenzie, in honour of her late mother.

Postgraduate Degrees

Mrs. Stephanie Fullerton-Cooper successfully defended her PhD thesis on the work of Erna Brodber on September 5, 2008. The department also notes with satisfaction the award of a Commonwealth Scholarship to our MPhil graduate Amorella Lamount, who is pursuing doctoral studies at the University of Reading.

Scholarly Activities and Outreach

The department remains committed to promoting and supporting book launches, public lectures, and other such events which privilege the literary arts. The annual West Indian Literature Conference (involving all three campuses and other tertiary institutions in the region, including the University of Miami)), held this past year at the University of Guyana, continues to facilitate fruitful relations with colleagues from the sister campuses and from overseas universities: three Mona graduate students and four lecturers presented papers at this year's conference (including a key note address by Carolyn Cooper). Colleagues maintained, in 2008-09, their longstanding support of the CXC/CAPE Examination system. Several colleagues are members of the Executive Committee of WIACLALS (West Indies Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies), and have various other international linkages (for example, Michael Bucknor was, in 2007-08 and 2008-09, the Regional Chair for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize). Despite the constraints inherent in its extremely modest operating budget, the department was able to organize a variety of events open to the public, summarized below:

- October 2008: The department hosted the second in the Edward Baugh Distinguished Lecture Series, delivered by Professor Mark McWatt, retired colleague from the Cave Hill

Campus and 2007 winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book.

- November 2008: The department was pleased to host a joint launch of recent collections of poetry, *Leaving Traces* by Velma Pollard, and *The Almond Leaf*, by Earl McKenzie. During the same month, Dr. Raphael D'Alleo, a visiting colleague from Florida Atlantic University, presented a seminar (in the regular Staff/Student series) on November 14, on the subject "The Literary Public Sphere and Jamaican Anti-Colonial Politics of the 1930s and 40s".
- January 2009: The department's contribution to this year's Research Day activities included a lively session entitled "Meet the Poets: 'Live' Practical Criticism for Students of Literature". Professor Edward Baugh (whose work the students recognized from their CXC syllabus) and two students of our Creative Writing courses, Mr. Damian Renee and Miss Renetta Taylor, read their poetry.
- February 2009: The department organized, in association with WIACLALS, the launch of Curdella Forbes' third collection of fiction, *A Permanent Freedom*. (Professor Emerita Maureen Warner-Lewis was the guest speaker at the launch.)
- March 2009: Michael Bucknor, who was for the second consecutive year appointed Chair of the Canada and Caribbean Regional Adjudication panel, organized the announcement ceremony for the regional awards for the 2009 Commonwealth Writers' Prize in the Philip Sherlock Centre for the Creative Arts. The evening's program included dramatic readings from the prizewinning books, and a memorable staging by students of poems by Olive Senior; Erna Brodber announced the winner of the Best Book award.
- April 2009: The department, in association with Gargamel, hosted the launch of Buju Banton's new CD "Rasta Got Soul". This event, which attracted a very large and responsive audience to the Undercroft, was organized and hosted by Carolyn Cooper.
- May 2009: The department organized a seminar for CAPE Literatures in English students, at which Victor Chang, Carolyn Cooper and Tanya Shirley delivered lectures to an appreciative group of students.

- June 2009: The department co-hosted the launch – before a capacity audience in the Philip Sherlock Centre – of Tanya Shirley’s first volume of poetry *She who Sleeps with Bones*.

Finally, we are pleased to note the publication, near the end of the academic year, of the *Journal of West Indian Literature (JWIL)* 17.2, April 2009: “Critical Approaches to Louise Bennett”, a volume which is emblematic of the scholarly collaboration demonstrated in the 2008 conference in honour of Miss Lou. This first of two volumes inspired by last year’s conference *Noh Lickle Twang*, in which the department was a major participant, was facilitated by guest editor Ifeoma Nwankwo, of Vanderbilt University. Victor Chang and Michael Bucknor are Chief Editor and Editor respectively of *JWIL*, a collaborative effort with colleagues at the two other campuses of the University.

PAPERS PRESENTED

Dr Michael Bucknor

- “Romantic Revolutions: Masculinity Discourses in Jamaican Popular Culture.” 28th West Indian Literature Conference, “Quiet Revolutions,” University of Guyana, April 26-29, 2009, (13 pages).

Professor Carolyn Cooper

- “Caribbean Fashion Week: Creolising Beauty in the African Diaspora”. 28th West Indian Literature Conference, “Quiet Revolutions,” University of Guyana, April 26-28, 2009.
- “Cosmetic Cultures” Keynote Lecture at Leeds University conference, June 24, 2009, Centre for Interdisciplinary Gender Studies.

Dr Mawuena Logan

- “Legba in the House: African Cosmology in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.” Postgraduate/Staff Seminar, Kingston, Jamaica, University of the West Indies, Mona Campus April 2009.
- “Black Aesthetics and the Black Writer in the 21st Century: Aidoo and Morrison Revisited.” 5th Biennial Conference, Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora (ASWAD): Accra, Ghana, August 2-6, 2009.

Dr Harold McDermott

- “Poetry as Detergent: Hybridity and Syncretism in the Work of Earl McKenzie”. 28th West Indian Literature Conference, “Quiet Revolutions”, University of Guyana, April 26-29, 2009.

Dr Anthea Morrison

- “‘When the music hits/you feel no pain?’ Gisele Pineau’s Dialogue with Bob Marley in *L’Esperance-macadam*”. 28th Annual West Indian Literature Conference, University of Guyana, April 26-29, 2009 (22 pages).

PUBLICATIONS

Ms Lisa Brown

- * Review of Curdella Forbes’ *A Permanent Freedom*. (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2008) in *Journal of West Indian Literature* Vol. 17, No. 2: April 2009.

Dr Michael Bucknor

- * “Sounding Off: Performing Ritual Revolt in Olive Senior’s ‘Meditation on Yellow’” Special Issue on “Sound” Mosaic. 42.2, June 2009. 54-71.

Professor John Lennard

- * View from Mount Diablo by Ralph Thompson, an annotated edition. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press 2009 / Tirril: Humanities E-Books 2009, 160pp.

Dr Mawuena Logan

- * “Negritude-Postcolonial Interface in Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s *Ambiguous Adventure*.” Negritude: Legacy and Present Relevance. Eds. Isabelle Constant and Kahiudi C. Mabana Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009 (150-161)
- * “Postcoloniality and Resistance in *The Wine of Astonishment and The Dragon Can’t Dance*.” *Revista Brasileira do Caribe*, 9.18 (Jan./June 2009): 553-572.
- * “A Search for Home and Identity: Peter Abrahams’s Contribution to Literature.” *Jamaica Journal* 32.1-2 (2009): 86-88.

- * “Metaphysical Cloning: An African Epistemology in the Works of Zora Neale Hurston and Maryse Condé.” *Obsidian: Literature in the African Diaspora* 9.1 Spring/Summer 2008: 20-30.

Dr Harold McDermott

- * “CAPE Communication Studies”, Caribbean Educational Publishers, Port of Spain, 2008.

Tanya Shirley

- * *She Who Sleeps With Bones*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2009.

PUBLIC SERVICE

Ms Lisa Brown

- Secretary, West Indian Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (WIACLALS).

Dr Michael Bucknor

- Editor, *Journal of West Indian Literature* (Regional Journal)
- Chief Judge, Canada and the Caribbean Region of the 2009 Commonwealth Writers’ Prize Competition
- Member, Pan-Commonwealth Judging Panel, Final Awards, New Zealand for 2009 Commonwealth Writer’s Prize Competition
- Chief Examiner, CAPE Literatures in English, Caribbean Examinations Council

Dr Victor L. Chang

- Treasurer, West Indian Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (WIACLALS).
- Chief Editor, *Journal of West Indian Literature (JWIL)*.
- Editor, *Pathways*

Professor Carolyn Cooper

- Member, Board of Directors, Development Partners and Management International Limited, Kingston

Dr Norval Edwards

- Member of Advisory Board, Issues in Critical Investigation, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee)
- Associate Editor, *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*
- Manuscript Reviewer, Duke University Press

Dr Harold McDermott

- Adjudicator, Jamaica Creative Writing Competition for the Play Category, Jamaica Cultural Development Commission
- Assistant-Chief Examiner, CAPE Communication Studies

Tanya Shirley

- Member, Fundraising Committee of Special Olympics, Jamaica

CATEGORIES OF STUDENTS

Undergraduate

Number Registered

| | |
|---------------|--------------|
| Year I | 484 |
| Year II | 536 |
| Year III | 381 |
| TOTAL: | 1,401 |

First Class Honours

Shauna Palmer

Susan Whyte

Postgraduate

Registration

| | |
|-------|----|
| PhD | 4 |
| MPhil | 18 |
| MA | 24 |

Award of Degrees

PhD Stephanie Fullerton-Cooper