

## Appendix 3

### The Program in Scripture and the Arts

As former Director of the Luce Program in Scripture and the Arts, Professor Peter Hawkins, prepared to leave Boston University in the summer of 2008, the Department of Religion had to tackle the question of what would become of the Program that the Luce Foundation had funded and that Professor Hawkins so successfully built. The Department, the College of Arts and Sciences, and indeed the University clearly recognized the remarkable contribution that the Program had made under Professor Hawkins' directorship from 2000 to 2008, and all were eager to see the Department continue and build upon that work. In addition to establishing a budget for the newly renamed Program in Scripture and the Arts to continue beyond the end of Luce funding in 2008, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences invited me to put together an interdisciplinary directorial committee. In addition to running the day-to-day operations of the Program—namely planning, organizing, and hosting events—this committee was designed to envision future possibilities for the Program, including potential funding sources.

The 2008–2009 committee included seven faculty members from throughout Boston University; the Departments of Religion, Modern Languages and Comparative Literature, English, and Art History, and the School of Theology were all represented. In addition, the committee members' work ranges from antiquity to the twenty-first century, and from China and the Near East to Europe and North America. This range was key, as going forward we are broadening the Program's definition of "scripture" to include sacred text across a wide range of traditions and expanding "the arts" to include the visual and musical as well as the literary. We all were (and, after an excellent first year post-Luce, are) excited about the possibilities and are invigorated by the opportunity to rethink and re-envision the Program's work within the University and the broader Boston community.

#### **Program Events: Fall 2008**

**On Thursday, September 18, 2008, Professor of Religion Frank Korom gave a lecture entitled "Orality, Literacy, and Innovation in a Bengali Bardic Tradition,"** in which he explored his recent research on an itinerant caste of scroll painters and singers in the West Bengal region of

India. Korom explored the changes the group has undergone as they have adjusted what once was a solely oral medium, coming to rely on modern forms of media for inspiration in the face of a declining system of patronage in the age of mechanical reproduction. Illustrating the talk with examples from the scroll painters' extensive repertoires, Korom explored the intersections of sacred and secular, orality and literacy in the context of a dynamic tension between tradition and modernity.

Korom spoke to an audience of 40, which included faculty in Religion, Classics, English, and Art History, as well as graduate and undergraduate students. In addition to members of the BU community, the talk attracted audience members from Tufts, Harvard, and other area schools.

On **Tuesday, October 21, 2008**, local young adult author **Francisco X. Stork** gave a reading from his forthcoming novel, *Marcelo in the Real World*, followed by a discussion with his editor **Cheryl Klein**, Senior Editor at Arthur A. Levine Books, a division of Scholastic, Inc. Stork's novel follows the experiences of an autistic young man whose life is circumscribed by a deep interest in the world's religions and by his own mystical experiences.

This event was held in conjunction with Professor Donna Freitas's seminar "Religion and Children's Literature." In addition to Professor Freitas's 15 undergraduate and graduate students, ten students from English, the DRTS, and the School of Theology attended the reading and discussion.

On **Thursday, October 23, 2008**, **Jeffrey Hamburger**, Kuno Francke Professor of German Art & Culture in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture at Harvard University, delivered a lecture entitled "**Openings**," in which he explored the visible elaboration of the word (and particularly the biblical word) with figured initials, frames and full-page miniatures made possible by the new medium of the codex as it developed over the medieval millennium.

Hamburger's talk played to a packed house, with more than 45 attendees in a room meant for 35. The audience included faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates from various departments (primarily Religion, History, and Art History), at BU, Harvard, BC, and a number of other Boston-area schools. In addition to the in-person audience, the talk found a broader listenership when it was rebroadcast on WBUR's "World of Ideas" on Sunday, November 30, 2008.

On **Thursday, November 6**, the Program partnered with the Editorial Institute to host **Professor Christopher Ricks**, who delivered a talk entitled "**Faith in Eliot**." The talk drew from Ricks' many decades of work with Eliot's oeuvre, and shared some of Ricks's recent findings from Eliot's unpublished materials, which Ricks is exploring as he co-edits the forthcoming complete critical

edition of Eliot's poetry—the first such collection. Ricks illuminated relations between Eliot's Anglican faith and his aesthetics through close readings of Eliot's letters, essays, and poems. As one might expect, Eliot's relationship to Dante was particularly central to the discussion. At the same time, Ricks raised much broader questions about the relationship between Christianity and art as well as between faith and unbelief. In a typical insight, Ricks pointed out that "faith" has no precise opposite in the English language—we do not say "unfaith," but rather "unbelief"; our difficulty negating "faith," Ricks suggested, is rooted in the epistemological nature of faith itself, the fact that it does not claim to know and therefore does not admit of falsification.

The extraordinarily high intellectual caliber of Ricks's talk was matched by the extraordinarily high level of interest it generated from BU and the surrounding community. On a rainy Thursday evening, roughly one hundred people came out to hear Ricks speak. Faculty from BU's CAS and the School of Theology were present, as well as faculty from Harvard, BC, Brandeis, the Andover Newton School of Theology, and elsewhere. The audience also included undergraduates, graduate students, and non-academics. Most importantly for purposes of outreach, WBUR recorded the talk and subsequent question-and-answer period for subsequent broadcast on "World of Ideas" (the lecture was aired on Sunday, December 7, 2008). This recording also means that the talk will be part of a permanent, and valuable, audio archive of Ricks' reflections on Eliot. In short, the event brought the work of one of BU's finest scholars to a broad and varied audience, and spread awareness of the achievements of the Program in Scripture and the Arts, the Editorial Institute, and Boston University as a whole.

The final event of the fall 2008 semester was a **reading and discussion of the poetry of Rudaki**, the tenth-century Persian called the father of Persian poetry, by **Dr. Sassan Tabatabai of the Boston University Core Curriculum**, which took place on **Monday, November 24, 2008**. Tabatabai, a graduate of BU's University Professors Program and a scholar of Persian language and literature, recently completed an English translation of selections of Rudaki's work (Purdue University Press 2008). He drew on this work as he read the poet's work in Persian and in English translation and described the rich culture in which the material was composed, with a particular focus on the abundance of Zoroastrian ideas alongside the relative absence of Islamic beliefs that appear in the poetry.

The reading drew an audience of approximately 35, including faculty and undergraduate students from the Core Curriculum, the Writing Program, and the Department of Modern Languages and Comparative Literature. The evening was emceed by Professor David Eckel, Director of the Core Curriculum.

## **Program Events: Spring 2008**

In the spring semester, the Program hosted a series of three lectures on the act of writing in various spiritual traditions. This series was developed by committee members Professors Emine Fetvaci (Art History), Tom Michael (Religion), and Michael Zank (Religion) as a way of extending the Program's interdisciplinary mission. Thus, instead of a collection of various lectures and events all loosely united under the heading "Scripture and the Arts," this series modeled a true lecture series defined by a specific theme—a practice we intend to continue in the future.

On **February 11, 2009**, the Program along with the Department of Art History presented "Calligraphy in Chinese Society," a lecture by Professor Qianshen Bai of the Boston University Department of Art History. There were approximately 40 people in the audience, including students and faculty from Boston University, a professor of Persian calligraphy together with a number of his students from Northeastern University, as well as a few local residents not affiliated with any school, most notably an elderly Chinese man and his adult son who were attracted by our public flyers. Professor Bai gave a marvelous power-point lecture on many areas of Chinese calligraphy, including writing from the most ancient records of Chinese characters as seen on the "oracle bones" of Shang and Zhou periods; the intimate relation between calligraphy, poetry, and painting from the Confucian tradition; and the uses of calligraphy and related forms of Chinese writing in Buddhism and Daoism. His lecture visually explored the many applications of calligraphy for stelaes, rock carving, and even modern advertisement. The lecture was followed by a question and answer session and a demonstration of calligraphy during which Professor Bai wrote out several different styles of Chinese calligraphy using ink and brush. Finally the audience adjourned to a lively reception, and the evening was capped off by a dinner at the Elephant Walk restaurant attended by Professor Bai, three of his current undergraduate students, and Professors Emine Fetvaci and Tom Michael of the Program's directorial committee.

The Program in Scripture and the Arts hosted the renowned Islamic calligrapher **Mohamed Zakariya** for three events on **March 17 and 18, 2009**. His first a lecture, "Signs of the End of the World: Death and the Afterlife in the Hadiths," was held on March 17<sup>th</sup> during Professor of Religion Stephen Prothero's course RN 106, "Death and Immortality." Religion lecturer Scott Girdner also brought his students from RN 214, "Islam." Together these courses created an audience of 200 undergraduate students, and a number of other members of the BU community also attended the lecture. Zakariya addressed the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad on signs of the end of the world—a theme of particular interest to both classes. He entertained questions from the audience after the lecture.

Zakariya's second lecture, "The Art and Practice of Islamic Calligraphy," was delivered on the evening of March 17th, and focused on the history and development of the Ottoman calligraphic tradition, as well as his own training, career, and calligraphic practice. His discussion of the process of learning and teaching the art of calligraphy drew particular interest from the members of the audience. Zakariya's evening lecture was a very successful event, drawing a broad and diverse audience from the Boston community: the approximately 50 attendees included faculty and students from the departments of Religion, Art History, Anthropology, History, and Modern Languages and Comparative Literature at Boston University, as well as faculty and graduate students from a number of other Boston-area schools. The lecture was followed by a question and answer session as well as a small reception where listeners could speak with Zakariya in an informal fashion. The evening ended with a dinner for 20 members of the BU faculty as well as guests from the Harvard University Art Museums, the Harvard Divinity School, MIT, and other local institutions.

Zakariya's visit was of particular interest to students in Arabic language courses who are just learning to write the Arabic alphabet, the very alphabet which forms the basis of Zakariya's art. On Wednesday March 18<sup>th</sup>, Mohamed Zakariya held a joint calligraphy workshop with Bahman Panahi, a calligrapher in the Persian tradition who is currently a visiting professor at Northeastern University. Assistant Professor Margaret Litvin and Language Lecturer Giselle Khoury brought their Arabic classes to the workshop, forming the core of the nearly 50 students in attendance. The two calligraphers talked about their practice and demonstrated calligraphy to students in an informal setting that promoted lively interaction between the students and the calligraphers. Both Zakariya and Panahi appeared to enjoy the experience immensely, and the students made the most of the opportunity to ask questions of these master calligraphers. Lunch was also provided.

These events were co-sponsored by the Institute for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations and the Art History Department, with the generosity of Assistant Professor Emine Fetvacı's Peter T. Paul Career Development Professorship.

On **March 30 and 31, 2009**, the Program hosted Newbery Medal-winning author **Avi**, whose work includes more than sixty books for children and young adults. On Monday, March 30<sup>th</sup>, Avi gave a public reading at the Public Library of Brookline under the sponsorship of the Children's Book Store in Brookline Village, co-organized with the Program, that was attended by more than 100 local children and parents. At 6:00 that evening, he led a small seminar for a dozen students and faculty from the BU School of Education and the Center for the Study of Children's Literature at Simmons College, in which participants had the opportunity to discuss not only Avi's work with him, but also

the process of crafting—and teaching—literature for children. Avi's visit culminated in his evening lecture on Tuesday, March 30<sup>th</sup>, "When Jesus Laughed—Historical Fiction: Religion, Readers and Reality." Attended by more than 100 students and faculty from BU, Simmons College, and other area universities, Avi's lecture explored the role of religion and interpretation in both the writing and reading of his work, making the distinction between his own beliefs and his efforts, as the author of historical fiction, to accurately represent religious institutions and beliefs. The dinner after the lecture included a number of faculty and students from Boston University (Religion and SED) and Simmons College, and closed the evening with a lively discussion of both children's literature and of the difficulties of engaging in an objective discussion of religion—as an author and/or a scholar. This was the first ever collaboration between the Department of Religion and the School of Education, and all parties were very pleased with its success.

On Tuesday, **April 7, 2009** the Program in Scripture and the Arts sponsored a screening of the award-winning documentary film *Trouble the Water*, followed by a discussion with the directors, Tia Lessin and Carl Deal, and one of the principal subjects of the film, Brian Nobles. Co-sponsored by the Center for Practical Theology and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Professor of Homiletics and Pastoral Theology Dale P. Andrews in the School of Theology, the Office of the University Chaplain, and National Endowment for the Humanities Distinguished Teaching Professor Diana Wylie, the event attracted an audience of well over one hundred. The audience included BU faculty and staff from across the university community as well as graduate and undergraduate students from CAS, COM, and STH. Following the screening, Mr. Nobles and the directors were introduced by Professor Andrews, who moderated the question-and-answer session, which lasted for nearly an hour. A stimulating discussion about the nature of documentary filmmaking, the political and cultural circumstances that led to the Katrina disaster, the circumstances in New Orleans three years later, and the religious resources of the community in the city's Ninth Ward took place. Prior to the screening, a private dinner was held gathering together interested faculty, students and staff from the School of Theology, the Departments of History, African Studies, and Religion, and the filmmakers. A tremendous success, this event led to a thoughtful, challenging dialogue about the intersections of art, activism, religion and scripture while bringing an acclaimed documentary directly to a BU audience.

On **April 23, 2009**, Rabbi Kevin Hale presented a lecture on his work as a *sofer stam* or Torah scribe, "And Now Write This Song for Yourselves': The 613<sup>th</sup> Commandment at the Jewish Sacred Scribal Tradition." In spite of the late date, the lecture drew an audience 25, including faculty,

undergraduate and graduate students and others. Rabbi Hale's demeanor and style, as well as the substance of the presentation (which included both slides and a collection of the tools and products of a scribe, which Rabbi Hale invited the audience to examine and discuss with him after the lecture), very much endeared him and his extremely rare craft to the audience. Students and faculty alike were enthusiastic.

The following day, Rabbi Hale appeared as a guest speaker in Professor Michael Zank's course CAS RN 101, "The Bible." The class had over seventy students, mostly of a Catholic background, mostly in science and engineering, and they too responded enthusiastically to the presentation, in which Rabbi Hale used the classroom blackboard and chalk to offer the students a demonstration of Hebrew calligraphic techniques.

Rabbi Hale's visit to the classroom was perhaps the most valuable part of his visit: he made a tremendous effort to bring a hands-on experience of the spiritual devotion to the material culture of Torah to a classroom that had just studied some of the texts he referred to. As Professor Zank joked to his students, the guest lecture was a perfect antidote to his own work in the classroom: where Professor Zank had dismantled and taken apart the Torah into literary fragments, Rabbi Hale put it together again as an object of devotion. In short this was a real enrichment of the class, allowing students to experience the text not just as a cultural and historical artifact but as the dynamic living and lived scripture that it is in the contexts of those traditions that hold it sacred.

## **Conclusion**

We do not yet have a blueprint for the program's "post-Luce" long-term future. Meetings with colleagues in BU's Development Office indicate that the kind of multi-year grant we had from the Luce Foundation in the past is exceedingly rare and unlikely to be replicated. There are a number of one-year grants that we might pursue for support, although that approach does not seem very practical. If the dean sees fit, we may be able to continue to use the former Luce Program Director's budget line to support programming on a more modest basis. Our effort to maintain a strong presence while extending resources by combining "local talent" with outside speakers was very successful this year, and will probably remain an important model for the future. Integrating the program with undergraduate and graduate curriculum—something we did much more consciously and systematically this year than in the past—was also a successful model. In AY 08-09, Religion Department chair, Deana Klepper, oversaw the running of the program, on top of her responsibilities to the department. Next year, our committee will have its own chair (tentatively

Tom Michael, one of our current committee members) and we hope that with one committee member designated to take on a leadership role, this exploration can move forward more intensively.

A very positive development in the long-term future of the program was the hiring this year of Emily Hudson to the position in Religion and Literature. Hudson works on sacred text in Hindu tradition (the *Mahabharata* and medieval and early modern Sanskrit literary theories as they pertain to it), and she is ideally suited to help us develop a broader vision of what the study of sacred text and its reverberation in the arts might look like. We are hopeful that she, along with a recent Religion Department hire in East Asian Religions, Tom Michael (who has University of Chicago Religion and Literature training and a strong literary component to his work), may be able to forge a new path for what continues to be an exceptionally successful program that provides a venue for exploring the role of sacred text in broader culture; that functions to create a sense of intellectual community for faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates; that bridges gaps between departments, schools, and programs at Boston University and other area institutions; and that brings the fruit of intellectual discourse to the general public.