

LETTER FROM THE DEPARTMENT HEAD

I am thrilled to have another opportunity to welcome you to *Re:Search: The Undergraduate Literary Criticism Journal at the University of Illinois*. This is my third year as head of the Department of English and this is *Re:Search*'s third year, too. But while I'll be finishing out my term as department head this summer, I am fully confident that *Re:Search* will continue to flourish in the years to come. Making it to the third year is a real achievement and I salute all who have made this new issue possible.

As in previous years, you will find a diverse selection of works that demonstrate the many fruitful directions of contemporary literary and cultural studies. For the first time, I'm fairly certain, the journal is publishing an essay on a novel originally written in Slovenian! Krupa Patel's essay concerns Vladimir Bartol's 1938 Slovenian novel *Alamut*, which is read alongside Plato's Republic.

Comparative approaches can also be found in Melissa Deneufbourg's essay on Jane Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft and in James Koh's analysis of the 2013 film *Interstellar* along with space exploration narratives. Meanwhile, Amarin Young reads Maxine Hong Kingston in relation to feminist theory and Evan Duncan addresses performance and subjectivity in the work of James Baldwin. As department head—and as someone with a PhD in comparative literature—I am very pleased to see the historical, cultural, and linguistic range of literary, cinematic, and philosophical texts tackled here by the talented critics in *Re:Search*.

Re:Search is, of course, more than just a collection of strong essays by undergraduate scholars. It is the product of the hard work and editorial vision of its staff. We in the English department support this journal because it represents an opportunity for students to circulate their work to a broader public than just their professors and one or two close friends; but we also support it because it allows students to develop skills that they will take with them after graduation: editorial skills, communication skills, team-work skills.

Working on a journal will certainly help prepare you for graduate school and for a career in higher education; it also helps you develop the kinds of capabilities that will serve you well in any profession you decide to pursue. In the last couple of years, I have seen more and more voices in the media touting the kinds of training and opportunities that education in the humanities provides: student-run journals like *Re:Search* are a great example of what is possible.

It hasn't been an easy year in Illinois. A budget standoff at the state level has led to budget cuts for the university. But we in the English department are committed to maintaining our strong offerings for undergraduates and we will continue to support *Re:Search* and other endeavors that give our ambitious students the opportunities they deserve to engage in original research and to share their work with a broader public. *Re:Search* is public higher education in action.

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