



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Marriott Library Collaborates on Award-Winning Online Course**

**April 23, 2008** – This March, a University of Utah course created by Languages and Literature professor Christine A. Jones in collaboration with Luise Poulton, curator of the Rare Books Division of the University of Utah’s J. Willard Marriott Library, received a 2007-08 Innovative Course Design Competition Prize from the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies.

The idea of the course budded from Dr. Jones’s idea to incorporate rare books into the study of French theater of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. During spring semester 2006, the graduate and undergraduate students of French 4900/7900 wrote essays based upon their research relying on rare books from the Marriott Library. The essays are now part of a website created collaboratively by Dr. Jones and Luise Poulton. The site is designed to be useful to researchers of theater, dance, music, French culture, and early modern history, showcasing rare books from the Marriott Library’s collection. It is a unique archive of online resources and serves as a portal into the J. Willard Marriott Library’s Digital Collections, which includes scanned rare books, maps, newspapers, and journals in searchable format. The web archive is called *Dramatis Personae Archive, A History of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century Performance Arts*.

The creation of this course as a collaboration with Rare Books came about somewhat unexpectedly, Jones explained. “Besides the canonical French plays that would form the primary corpus of texts, I thought I would also use early treatises on acting and

some images to incorporate an element of performance studies into the course [...]— that’s as far as my imagination went.” When Jones asked Poulton about possible rare books she might show students during the course, Poulton provided a full bibliography of rare French and British books on dance from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The rare books became a central focus of the course and that marked the beginning of the collaboration continued Jones, “That month, my course conception changed entirely from a survey whose basic materials would be Classical and Enlightenment plays, to an interdisciplinary research course on the art of performance from the Classical to the early Romantic period in France and England (roughly 1640 to 1825).”

The work of the class focused on the intellectual and artistic value of the books as historical objects. The idea for a website that showcased the collection and included book commentaries came when research revealed that many of the books were not available on the web. “Luise invited my students to work directly with the books. Every other week, students pored over the volumes for both content and aesthetic interest.” commented Jones. “Each student adopted one book and was responsible for distilling the contents down to a short commentary that then could be posted on the *Dramatis Personae* website.”

For students, this was an opportunity to encounter early-modern material culture and learn about book history. As Poulton explains on the website: “The students showed great care and respect for the age and fragility of the books, even though it meant that the books were not easy to work with – an added challenge to the project but with great rewards. The students were as enthusiastic about the books as historical objects as they were about the texts contained within. In the twenty-first century, books still provoke the mind and enchant the senses in a way that those read on a computer screen never can. That said, the digitization of these books means that people all over the world are able to study them at their convenience.” She added that Dr. Jones will teach the course again, which means that more books and more commentaries will be added to the website and it will grow each time the course is taught.

While Jones and Poulton were the leaders in the course and website development, many staff from the Marriott Library contributed to the online course. The Library’s Technology Assisted Curriculum Center’s (TACC) instructional design staff provided the

application development, Digital Technologies scanned hundreds of pages of rare books, and the Multimedia Center added to their holdings with music from the era.

“These are just the kind of projects we like to be known for,” commented Joyce Ogburn, university library and director of the J. Willard Marriott Library, “Not only is it our mission to house and protect these treasured books, but to foster scholarship by making these materials as widely accessible as possible.”

To view the website, go to [www.dramatispersonaearchive.org](http://www.dramatispersonaearchive.org).

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