

PROMOTION RECOMMENDATION
The University of Michigan
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

Approved by the Regents
May 20, 2010

Michael D. Byers, assistant professor of English language and literature, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts, is recommended for promotion to associate professor of English language and literature, with tenure, College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.

Academic Degrees:

M.F.A.	1996	University of Michigan
B.A.	1991	Oberlin College

Professional Record:

2006 – present	Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Michigan
2003 – 2006	Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Pittsburgh
2002	Visiting Assistant Professor, Oberlin College
1999	Distinguished Visiting Lecturer, Seattle University
1996 – 1998	Stegner Fellow, Stanford University

Summary of Evaluations:

Teaching – Professor Byers is a gifted teacher who continues to improve his performance in class and to develop innovative and highly successful new courses at both the graduate and undergraduate levels. In his relatively brief time at Michigan he has taught ten separate courses to considerable acclaim. They display remarkable versatility and a strong commitment to sharing his passionate and contagious dedication to fiction with his students. Student response has been extremely positive.

Research – The recent prose of Michael Byers (as was the case with his earlier work) falls into two separate categories—the short story and the novel. He has two books in manuscript and en route to publication; the first is a novel, *Percival's Planet*, and the second is a collection of short stories entitled *The Beautiful Days*. Henry Holt in the United States and Picador in the United Kingdom will publish *Percival's Planet* in 2010; the stories that comprise *The Beautiful Days* will no doubt appear as a collection shortly thereafter. Professor Byers has also published a number of articles and essays on matters pertaining to craft, and has begun to establish himself as an essayist and critic. All of his work is scrupulously crafted, meticulously built and much-revised; the language has been polished to a reflective sheen.

Recent and Significant Publications:

Percival's Planet, a novel, Henry Holt, forthcoming 2010.

The Broken Man, a novella, PS Publishing, forthcoming, 2010.

"Guess Who?" a short story in *Tin House*, forthcoming 2009.

"Betty Brown Calling," a short story in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, XLVIII(2), 2009.

"Bartholomew's Island," a short story in *Chicago Review*, 54(3), 2008.

Service – The Masters in Fine Arts Program in Creative Writing is a relatively small unit - and faculty, including junior faculty, are often required to undertake a significant service load. Even by such standards, however, Professor Byers' collegiality has been exceptional. During his three years at Michigan he has undertaken the following service assignments: The Hopwood Committee (twice), MFA Admissions Committee, departmental Executive Committee, faculty search committee (twice, once in fiction and once in poetry), and the MFA Exam Committee (as chair of the fiction sub-committee). In all these capacities, and more, he demonstrates a real commitment to service.

External Reviews:

Reviewer (A)

"Byers is as prodigiously talented a writer as we have in this country today. ... In a contemporary literary culture where arch irony and the immortalization of adolescent fantasy threaten to choke out any more serious concerns, Byers' writing is not only better than most, it is, to my mind, essential."

Reviewer (B)

"The fact that he is equally accomplished as a short story writer and a novelist makes him especially valuable, I think, as well as his ability to incorporate extensive research seamlessly into his creative work. ... I have high hopes that this novel will win critical acclaim *and* reach a wide audience; it will be thrilling to see on the bestseller list a book that is this intelligent, humane, and beautifully written."

Reviewer (C)

"In short, Professor Byers is writing fiction of exceptional merit, and there is every reason to believe that the arc of his talent, and his success, leads upward."

Reviewer (D)

"His publication record is a remarkable one. His list of short story publications is a list of the literary journals fiction writers dream about—*Ploughshares*, *Boulevard*, *Glimmer Train*, *Tin House*. These are the finest."

Reviewer (E)

"I was favorably impressed by his teaching statement, which showed rigor, open-mindedness, and a lively intellect. ...I would rate the quality of the writing as excellent. I would include *Long for this World* on a list of outstanding first novels of the past ten years."

Reviewer (F)

"The new novel is a major work by almost any standard. ... I consider *Percival's Planet* to be the best work of fiction I have read in a year or more, and I would be greatly surprised if it were not nominated for one of the major annual fiction awards."

Reviewer (G)

"...Byers is clearly a lover of language, a perfectionist in the creation of sentences, a great observer of human nature. His own fiction clearly indicates a passion for an deep background in literature... ...he is his own writer, a person who has emulated, clearly, the great writers, and has

found his own voice as a result of successful alchemy. In reference to the question concerning Mr. Byers' 'most significant' work, I believe his latest novel signals his most exciting project to date."

Reviewer (H)

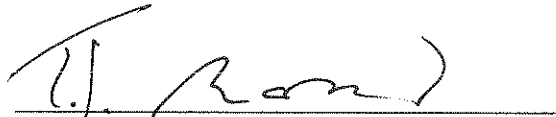
"Any writing program that employs him should feel blessed. Students can only benefit enormously from his work and his presence."

Reviewer (I)

"In my opinion Michael Byers is one of the finest short story writers of his generation. ...I feel very strongly that Professor Michael Byers should receive promotion and tenure at the University of Michigan. He is a tremendous writer with a great future, and he deserves a secure place in the program that has arguably become *the* most prestigious MFA degree in the land."

Summary of Recommendation:

Professor Byers has been an excellent addition to his department in general and the MFA Program in particular. His work is excellent, his teaching is very strong, and he has been a generous citizen. The Executive Committee of the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts and I recommend that Assistant Professor Michael D. Byers be promoted to the rank of associate professor of English language and literature, with tenure, in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.



Terrence J. McDonald
Arthur F. Thurnau Professor,
Professor of History and Dean
College of Literature, Science, and the Arts

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