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# The Bottle Imp

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Profile: John Corbett

In 2007 it is my privilege to be chairman of the Scottish Literature Discussion Group of the Modern Language Association of America ([www.mla.org](http://www.mla.org)). The Discussion Group committee is a small, enthusiastic band of four MLA members with an active research interest in Scottish Studies. We serve for four years on the committee and during our brief lifespan as committee members, our brief is to provoke and expand the study and teaching of Scottish Literature in the North American academy. In recent years the Discussion Group has benefited from the active support, both financial and intellectual, of the Scottish Arts Council, International Committee of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies ([www.asls.org.uk](http://www.asls.org.uk)). This support has helped organise the Scottish Writers' Exhibition at MLA and fund visiting writers to talk to some of the thousands of literature and language scholars who give up the dark days between Christmas and New Year to attend the annual MLA convention. In 2006 we persuaded poet and dramatist, Liz Lochhead, and children's author, Theresa Breslin, to travel to Philadelphia, and in late 2007 we look forward to the participation of novelists, Louise Welsh and Iain Finlay Macleod in Chicago.

Being Chairman of a Discussion Group is akin to spinning plates on a number of poles; there is an official academic panel to organise, this year, perhaps inevitably, on the effects of the Union of 1707 and the referendum of 1997 on Scottish Literature; there are writers and academics to persuade to leave hearth and home behind during the festival season to join a massive gathering of academics in the USA; and there are special session proposals to nurture and encourage. This year we have around six proposals put forward to the MLA committee on diverse aspects of Scottish Literature, as well as a petition signed by over 200 MLA members that the Discussion Group be raised in status to a Division. By June of this

year we'll know how successful these applications have been; whatever the outcome, however, it will have been an active and enjoyable period of tenure, aided and abetted by Kenneth McNeil, David Hall Radcliffe and, particularly, this year's secretary and chairwoman-in-waiting, Fiona Wilson.

My involvement in Scottish Literature might seem strange in that I am a Professor of Applied Language Studies in the Department of English Language at Glasgow University. Another part of my life revolves around intercultural language education, and I edit a journal called *Language and Intercultural Communication* and I have written books and articles on learning and teaching language and culture. However, my own interest in Scottish Literature stretches back to my undergraduate studies, a quarter of a century ago, and my career as a language scholar has always been intertwined with my literary interests. I have published on stylistics and Scottish literature, the history and development of the Scots tongue, language planning for Scots and translation into Scots. In September of the coming year, a colleague, Dr Alison Phipps and I will co-direct a new taught M.Litt degree course in Translation Studies in Scotland. The course will build on the flowering of creative work in translation sponsored by the Scottish Poetry Library ([www.spl.org.uk](http://www.spl.org.uk)) and the excellent research resource of the Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation ([www.boslit.nls.uk](http://www.boslit.nls.uk)). For further details of the M.Litt course, see [www.gla.ac.uk/postgraduate/prospectus/graduateschools/arts/taught/translationstudiesinscotland](http://www.gla.ac.uk/postgraduate/prospectus/graduateschools/arts/taught/translationstudiesinscotland)).

However my own research and teaching at present are focused largely on the growing field of corpus-driven language studies. This summer sees the completion of the Scottish Corpus of Texts and Speech ([www.scottishcorpus.ac.uk](http://www.scottishcorpus.ac.uk)), and the start of work on its successor, a digitised corpus of Scottish writing from 1700-1945. Both these major projects have received funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Board, and each promises to shed light on the way language, non-literary and literary, has been used in Scotland in modern times. The SCOTS corpus can now be accessed freely online; it includes around 800,000 words of speech as well as 3,200,000 words of written text; and the website allows word searches using concordances and maps. Another colleague on the SCOTS project, Dr Wendy Anderson, and I are currently writing a guide to the use of this and other online resources in language teaching and research. The successor project should shed

[www.thebottleimp.org.uk](http://www.thebottleimp.org.uk)

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new light on the development of modern Scots and English writing in Scotland.

These are indeed a lot of plates to keep spinning, but one of the deepest pleasures of working in these diverse fields is the active support of colleagues, who bring with them their own expertise and enthusiasms. It is a good time to be part of the growing community of researchers into Scottish language and literature.

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