

[Global Theory: Premodern, Otherwise](#)

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Type:

Call for Papers

Date:

October 15, 2022

Location:

Pennsylvania, United States

Subject Fields:

African History / Studies, Asian History / Studies, Latin American and Caribbean History / Studies, Medieval and Byzantine History / Studies, Middle East History / Studies

This project begins with one question. What would a global, nonmodern/premodern theory survey look like, if it did not assume that premodern thinking about literature, word, voice, text, sound, and language would necessarily end up pointing toward or arriving at something like the modern Euro-American/North Atlantic theory canon? Greek, Latin, and medieval European texts regularly populate anthologies of premodern literary theory and form the core of most premodern theory survey courses. But how would centering Arabic, Sanskrit, Chinese, sub-Saharan African, Pacific, and Indigenous American concepts transform our notions around premodern theorization of literature and culture?

To parse these larger questions in more precise ways.

- **What is 'literature'?** How have various premodern thinkers from a range of world traditions understood or sought to describe demarcations between everyday communication and the literary (be it performative, oral, or written)? Or are such demarcations not present in some traditions? Is literature something that only human animals do or is literature embedded in a more diverse cosmology or ecology, resonant with communicative practices of other ontologies? Where does literature 'sit' in relation to other disciplines or art forms (is it 'next to' rhetoric, dance, law, or music, for instance)?
- **How do we engage with 'literature'?** How have various premodern/nonmodern thinkers from a range of world traditions understood the relations between language, writing, reading, voicing, singing, composing, etc? What metaphors do they employ (for instance, likening reading to visionary flight, to bees gathering honey, or to cooking) and what are the implications of those metaphorical conceptions? What senses and/or forms of bodily comportment does reading entail, or does the body not matter to reading?
- **What does engagement with 'the literary' do?** What powers or effects have various classical thinkers from a range of world traditions ascribed to engagement with the literary? Does such engagement, for instance, heal, purify, corrupt, ensnare, or transform? Does it shape the cosmos? What ramifications are there to these

different understandings of engagement with the literary?

Selected participants will receive a \$500 USD honorarium to deliver a 30-minute presentation, followed by a 30-minute directed conversation, conducted via Zoom.

I will use these conversations (either live or pre-recorded) to teach a pilot version of a graduate seminar on global premodern theory in January-May 2023. Ultimately, the goal is to produce a publicly available set of materials for teaching and engaging with literary and cultural theory from a fuller range of the premodern world. (I am in active conversation with editors at *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* around possibilities for peer-reviewed publication for texts resulting from this collaborative venture.)

To apply, send the following documents to Charlotte Eubanks at cde13@psu.edu by October 15, 2022.

1. A keyword of conceptual interest and elasticity with a 500-word paragraph about it. (Examples might include: darśan (Sanskrit), wen (Sinitic), alef (Arabic), and so forth.)
2. The name of one primary text which illuminates or meditates on/around that word, along with bibliographic information for an original language version of that text and for an English translation of that text.
3. A short biosketch (200 words).
4. Your CV.

Please note: to receive the honorarium, participants need to have clearance to receive pay for work done in the US. Junior scholars, advanced graduate students, and international scholars are heartily encouraged to apply.

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