

## **WORLD LITERATURE AND GLOBAL CORE TEXTS**

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Conference

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June 26, 2017 to June 27, 2017

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Singapore

Subject Fields:

Humanities, Intellectual History, Literature, Philosophy, World History / Studies

## **WORLD LITERATURE AND GLOBAL CORE TEXTS**

An international conference

hosted by

**Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences Singapore University of Technology and Design**

26-27 June 2017

Keynote speakers:

### **David Damrosch**

Harvard University

Chair, Department of Comparative Literature Ernest Bernbaum Professor of Comparative Literature

Director, Institute for World Literature

and

### **Deborah Martinsen**

Columbia University

Associate Dean of Alumni Education

Former Director of Core Curriculum

Adjunct Associate Professor of Russian Literature Adjunct Lecturer in English and Comparative Literature

Humanities faculty at many universities around the world show increasing interest in bringing classic works from different cultures within a single study of literature. This rapidly growing interest, however, outpaces the ability of interested humanists to establish a common framework for combining the classic literature of different cultures into a single course. This is especially true at universities in the West where the sudden rise of Asia has drawn keen attention from many humanists whose formal education and life experience has until now excluded much knowledge of non-Western cultures. At universities in Asia, on the other hand, humanists have long been aware of the sway of

Western culture, but years of reading Western literature, whether in the original language or in translation, has not yet produced a consensual set of ideas about how to combine Asian and Western literature into a unitary study.

This conference will address this deficiency by bringing together academics from both Asia and the West who are seeking to develop theoretical underpinnings and practical guidelines for a curriculum of global literature. Among the leaders in this endeavor is the Institute of World Literature (IWL) based at Harvard University, which is now in its sixth year of existence. The IWL is constituted by affiliated universities in North and South America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, whose faculty are eligible to participate in its annual four-week workshop that seeks to “provide its participants with a solid grounding in approaches to literature in global perspective”. Other leaders, who work from a different angle, are The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), neither of which is affiliated with the IWL, but both of which starting from 2012 have pioneered mandatory global core texts courses for all first-year undergraduates. Although CUHK and SUTD coincidentally designed similar reading lists for their courses, each has developed distinct pedagogical methods. There is valuable complementarity to the work of academics based at these three institutions. The IWL, by attempting to develop a general framework for thinking about literature across cultures, focuses more on the overarching nature of world literature. CUHK and SUTD, by investing substantial faculty resources in teaching global core text courses, focus on practical issues related to a similar curriculum. Bringing together theorists and practitioners from these three institutions, along with other interested scholars, to initiate a joint on-going conversation will help narrow the gap between naïve enthusiasm for teaching global literature and teaching it within a rigorous common framework.

The conference will address theoretical questions related to the establishment of world literature as a discipline in its own right:

- What, in the first place, is world literature? What are its fundamental concepts? And what are the strengths and weaknesses of these concepts?
- What are the new directions in which world literature is moving?
- What qualifies or disqualifies a particular text as world literature?
- How does a globalizing world effect the study of any literature? And how might a de-globalizing world effect the study of world literature?
- Does world literature presuppose a global perspective? If so, then what does world literature offer to those who have not developed a global perspective?
- How can we give a fair reading to texts drawn from foreign cultures we are unprepared to think about in deeply meaningful ways?

The conference will also address practical questions related to designing and teaching a humanities core course based on a multicultural syllabus of texts, as well as questions that arise out of the mission statement of the Association

for Core Texts and Courses (ACTC), the primary academic association for so-called “great books” courses:

- How does an academic immersed in one culture effectively teach the literature of another culture with which he or she has no meaningful familiarity?
- Is the inclusion of non-Western literature a subtle vehicle to reaffirm Enlightenment values by teaching students to read it critically as part of an exercise that, according to the ACTC, will allow students to “*free themselves from instant truths and local passions*”?
- Alternatively, is non-Western literature included for the sake of fitting it into a scheme of Enlightenment-derived universal questions that are, according to the ACTC mission statement, “*timeless in their philosophical significance and timely in their relevance for us*”?
- Where in a global core texts course is there room for particular cultural beliefs and dogmas that can neither be easily raised to universal values nor reduced to “*instant truths*” and “*local passions*”?
- How can a global core texts course balance Enlightenment values with particular cultural beliefs and dogmas?

Abstracts containing **500 words** on topics pertinent to these questions are invited for submission by **15 January 2017**. The selected panelists will be notified by **20 February 2017**. Generous funding is available for full or partial airfare and accommodation. Panelists are expected eventually to submit their papers to the conference organizers for editing and publishing a volume related to this conference. All abstracts and queries can be sent to [wlgctconference@sutd.edu.sg](mailto:wlgctconference@sutd.edu.sg)

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