

## **The Whole World in One Classroom: The 2013 Institute for World Literature (IWL) at Harvard University**

The Institute for World Literature, Harvard University, Cambridge (MA), United States, 24 June – 19 July 2013

Nora Berning

### **How to cite:**

Berning, Nora: „The Whole World in One Classroom: The 2013 Institute for World Literature (IWL) at Harvard University, 24 June – 19 July, 2013, The Institute for World Literature, Harvard University, Cambridge (MA)“. In: KULT\_online 36 (2013).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22029/ko.2013.782>

© by the authors and by KULT\_online

## The Whole World in One Classroom: The 2013 Institute for World Literature (IWL) at Harvard University

The Institute for World Literature, Harvard University, Cambridge (MA), United States, 24 June – 19 July 2013

Nora Berning



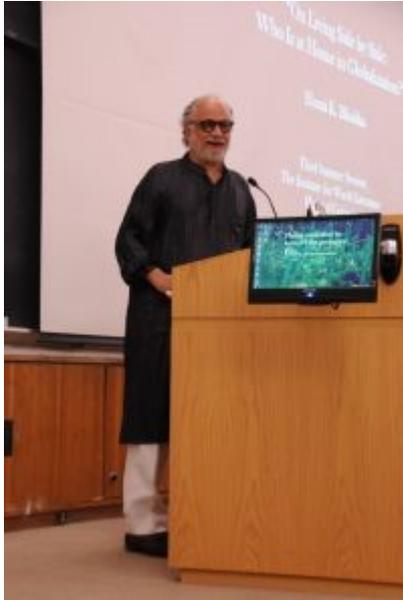
The notion of world literature has experienced an unparalleled boom in recent years. This boom consequently reinvigorates critical debates about such general topics as translation, genre theory, comparative poetics, literary globalization, and the politics of world literature. From June 24 to July 19, 2013, 140 graduate students, faculty members, and independent scholars of literature, arts, the humanities, and related social sciences gathered at Harvard University (Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.) in order to discuss world literature from a global perspective in the context of the 2013 Institute for World Literature. The IWL (Department of Comparative Literature, Cambridge), is supported by more than sixty institutional partners, among them the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC).

### World Literature connected

The institutional membership made it possible for the GCSC to fund a four-week research stay for two postdoctoral researchers, Dr. Jens Kugele and Dr. Nora Berning, who participated in what turned out to be an intensive period of structured study, supplemented by enriching informal discussions and various cultural events. The researchers from all over the world attended seminars, core lectures, guest lectures, professional panels and affinity group sessions with thematic foci that were related to the overall theme of world literature. Participants were able to participate in two different seminars over the course of the month, which were taught by renowned scholars in the field: Susan Bassnett, Helena Buescu, David Damrosch, Theo D'haen, Wai Chee Dimock, Djelal Kadir, Stephen Owen, Nirvana Tanoukhi, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, Karen Thornber, and Lawrence Venuti.



## The discourses of World Literature



The stress of the seminars was on the discussion of primary texts of world literature, as well as the ongoing theoretical and methodological changes and challenges of a field that is very much in flux. The variety of seminars which consisted of a maximum of twenty members made it possible for the researchers to explore world literature from different angles and to assemble valuable material for teaching courses in world literature. In addition to the inaugural guest lecture by Homi Bhabha, Emily Apter and the American writer Gish Jen complemented the weekly lectures by the Institute faculty; both concentrated on key concepts in world literature and provided ample food for thought. In the lectures and panels on professional issues such as program development, pedagogy, publishing, and the job market, the entire group of participants came together. The seminars and affinity

group sessions, on the other hand, gave the researchers an opportunity to present and discuss their own research. Especially the affinity groups, which were related to a common general theme (e.g. cultural memory, nation and globe, center and periphery, etc.), revolved around the participants' current research projects and functioned as a promising platform for future collaborations.

## World Literature as a "way of life"

The days when world literature stood primarily for European masterpieces have long passed. As early as the first day of the summer school it became clear that there are many competing definitions of what world literature is and that a plethora of different approaches exists side by side. The more the researchers immersed themselves into the diversity of the world's literary traditions and cultures, the more they began to realize that world literature is actually a way of thinking, if not "a whole way of life" (Raymond Williams). To be able to experience this "way of life" at the oldest institution of higher education in the United States was not only a true blessing, but also an unforgettable experience. All institutional members of the IWL look forward to next year's session in Asia's 'world city' – Hong Kong – whose global appeal is second to none.

