

Remapping World Literature

David Damrosch

2023 Balzan Prize for World Literature

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Affiliated Institution: Institute for World Literature

Website: <https://iwl.fas.harvard.edu/news/balzan-colloquium-10-fully-funded-places-iwl-2024>

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David Damrosch is Ernest Bernbaum Professor of Comparative Literature and Director of the Institute for World Literature at Harvard University.

The project brings together a group of approximately ten graduate students and postdoctoral fellows each summer for five years (i.e., fifty participants in all) to attend a session of the Institute for World Literature as the members of the year's Balzan Colloquium on a common topic in world literary studies, for publication in journal and then book form. Under the overall rubric "Remapping World Literature," each year's Balzan Colloquium will have a specific topic. The focus will be on researchers from countries whose literatures have been understudied internationally, and the program will enable the participants to build connections and collaborations extending beyond their initial participation and publications.

The framework for this proposal is the Institute for World Literature. Working with an international board of advisers, David Damrosch founded the Institute in order to provide training and community for graduate students, postdocs, and junior faculty who are engaged in world literary studies but whose home institutions do not provide training in the field. The home base is at Harvard, but since the intention was to reach out to the world in practice as well as in theory, the IWL meets on a rotating basis at Harvard and at other locations around the world. In addition to sessions at Harvard, meetings have been held in Beijing, Istanbul, Copenhagen, Tokyo, Lisbon, Hong Kong, and Mainz. Future sessions will be held in Nicosia in 2024 and in Reykjavik in 2025, then in Berlin (2026), at Harvard (2027), and tentatively in Seoul (2028).

By now, the program has trained some 1500 participants. At Harvard in the summer of 2023, there were 52 participants from 35 countries. The participants take seminars taught by leading scholars of world literature, attend plenary sessions with guest speakers including prominent world authors (these have included the Nobel laureates Mo Yan, Orhan Pamuk, and Herta Müller), and share their own work together in weekly colloquia. The seminars and colloquia regularly result in ongoing projects and in publications in the Brill *Journal of World Literature* and elsewhere. The *Journal of World Literature* itself, now in its eighth year, was founded on the initiative of two postdoctoral students at IWL a decade ago.

A major limitation in the Institute's work has been that affiliate universities have good funding for such programs; in addition to covering the affiliation fee, they often help their people with travel and lodging expenses. As a consequence, IWL has very few affiliates and participants from Africa or from the less developed economies in Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America, as can be seen from the map of affiliates on the IWL website:

<https://iwl.fas.harvard.edu/pages/institutional-affiliates>.

The Balzan Prize funding will enable the IWL to significantly expand its outreach during the five-year period, and in the process to develop ongoing relationships with several universities in countries not now on the IWL map. Colleagues will be asked to solicit applications from Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Chulalongkorn in Bangkok, Eötvös Loránd in Budapest, Santiago de Chile, and the American University of Beirut, but an open call for applications from elsewhere will also be launched. In the annual application cycle, people from underrepresented areas will be invited to apply for the year's Balzan Colloquium, which the David Damrosch and the Associate Director will oversee.

Each year, the colloquium will have a common topic of general interest. In consultation with the Institute's Executive Committee and co-editors of the *Journal of World Literature*, Damrosch has developed the following topics to propose for the five years of "Remapping World Literature": 2024 (Nicosia): Multilingualisms; 2025 (Reykjavik): Literature and Environmental Crisis; 2026 (Berlin): World Literature beyond the Anglosphere; 2027 (Harvard): Premodernities; 2028 (tentatively in Seoul): Imperial peripheries.

Once revised for publication, each year's papers will become a special issue for the *Journal of World Literature*, of which Damrosch is one of the editors in chief, and for which the Institute is responsible for one issue per year.

First Year Report

Damrosch reached out to colleagues in several countries for their recommendations of talented graduate students and recent PhDs working on the year's topic, "Multilingualisms," and the program was also advertised the Balzan program on the IWL website, <https://iwl.fas.harvard.edu/news/balzan-colloquium-10-fully-funded-places-iwl-2024>.

Ten participants were selected out of fifty-five applications for the Colloquium:

1. Nikitta Adjirakor, BA Ghana, PhD from Bayreuth, now on a postdoc back in Ghana
2. Ghazouane Arslane, Assistant Professor at Larbi Tebessi University, Algeria
3. Dipak Barkhade, PhD candidate at the University of Hyderabad
4. Eduardo Eguiarte Ruelas, Research Associate at El Colegio de México, Mexico City
5. Raad Khair Allah, BA and MA from Syria, now a PhD candidate at Warwick
6. Malak Khalil, PhD candidate at King's College, University of Cambridge
7. Rachid Oumarou Mal Mazou, MA from University of Buea, Cameroon, PhD from Liège, now Lecturer in translation studies, University of Yaoundé, Cameroon
8. Gaurav Sonik, PhD from Jawaharlal University, now assistant professor at VIT-AP University, Andhra Pradesh, India
9. Eszter Melitta Szabó, BA from Eötvös Loránd, now a PhD candidate at the University of Toronto
10. Pimchanok Tuntiyut Sripawadkul, PhD candidate at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok

Each of them participated in the weekly Balzan Colloquium, giving a paper of their own and serving as respondent for a paper by another member of the colloquium. After each participant had given their paper and received feedback in the colloquium, Damrosch and executive director Delia Ungureanu met with them individually to discuss their draft and advise on revisions for publication in the *Journal of World Literature*. Eight of the ten proceeded to revise and expand their papers. (Malak Khalil and Eszter Szabó decided not to propose a contribution.) Following one and sometimes two revisions under our guidance, the set of eight papers is now out for peer review; the special issue, “Multilingualisms: Views from the Global South,” is set for publication in early December 2025.

Unexpected developments made it impossible to hold the second colloquium in Iceland, so it was decided to meet instead at Harvard for the 2025 Balzan Colloquium, “Literature and Ecological Crisis”, with eleven participants out of fifty-two applications:

1. Gergö Balogh: PhD from Eötvös Loránd, now asst prof at the University of Szeged
2. Christian Benitez: MA from Manila, now a PhD candidate at Chulalongkorn, Bangkok
3. Ian Claros: Lecturer at Ateneo de Manila University, Manila
4. Renata Defelice: PhD candidate at the Universidad Nacional de Rosario, Argentina
5. Emine Akkulah Dogan: PhD candidate at Hacettepe University, Ankara
6. Joya John: Assistant Professor at Krea University, Andhra Pradesh, India
7. John Kehinde: PhD 2023 from Babangida U, Nigeria, now a research assistant there
8. Nandita Mahajan: PhD 2024 from Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, now a researcher in Hyderabad
9. Bonaventure Munganga, BA in the Democratic Republic of Congo, PhD 2023 from the University of New South Wales, Australia, now a postdoc there
10. Khanh Nguyen: BA from Hue University, now a PhD candidate at the University of Wisconsin
11. Tem Nji: PhD 2024 from the University of Buea, Cameroon, now on the job market

Adjustment to original plans for the project are being considered in light of the current US administration’s nearly total ban on approving visas to sub-Saharan Africans—with the remarkable exception of white South African farmers, who are being given refugee status. Both John Kehinde in Nigeria and Tem Nji in Cameroon were denied visas after extremely perfunctory interviews, though Bonaventure Munganga in Sydney did receive his visa; the outcome of Rachid Oumarou’s interview is pending. Under these circumstances, the summer 2025 Balzan Colloquium will be held in hybrid form, so that Kehinde and Nji can take part and then submit essays for the ensuing special issue of the *Journal of World Literature*. However, the full IWL program cannot really be experienced online, so their travel and lodging expenses will be covered to come in person to Berlin the following year, as regular participants in the program. Though ordinarily IWL returns to Harvard every third year, it plans to meet elsewhere in the world for the remaining years of the present US administration (and of the Balzan Colloquium’s life). Following Berlin in 2026, meetings will be held in Sichuan in 2027 and either in Glasgow or Amsterdam in 2028.