On Location: The Place of Literature in Global Cultures

COLT 102, 22000R, Spring 2015, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00 am-12:20 pm, WPH B27

Select one discussion section: Mondays, 9:00 am or 10:00 am, THH 106
Wednesdays, 9:00 am or 10:00 am, THH 106

This course explores a series of interrelated questions regarding the act of writing, the practice of reading, and the concept of world literature. What is the place of fiction—our focus—in a global world? Do authors write for their national audiences, or do they have an international readership in mind, linked with influential publishing centers? What is at stake when authors from the West depict other cultures? How do readers from the West approach texts from other parts of the world? What is lost, and what gained, when one reads in translation? What do recent theories of cosmopolitanism add to this discussion? What is the place of “place” in all this?

To investigate these questions, our focus will be on texts by eight fiction writers set in different locations around the world. We will read stories by Eileen Chang about Hong Kong and Shanghai, and texts by Jorge Luis Borges set in his native Argentina and elsewhere. We then travel to Haiti by means of two novels by Caribbean authors, Alejo Carpentier and Mayra Montero; one explores the clash between African and French cultures starting in colonial times, while the second is the tale of an environmentally fragile planet. Returning to Asia, we read a novel by David Mitchell about a Dutchman in eighteenth-century Japan, and one by Haruki Murakami set in contemporary Tokyo. Finally, we will read a novel by Milan Kundera, the Czech author, set in France, and stories by Jhumpa Lahiri featuring Indian and Indian-American characters in the United States and around the world.

COLT L/M/CT Track: This is a Literature concentration course.
This course fulfills the Category II Global Cultures and Traditions requirement.

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