

Globalized (Neo-)Classicisms?

Uses of Antiquity in Contemporary World Literatures

International Online Symposium

10 & 11 December 2020

11.30-16.00 CET / 16.00-20.30 IST

Organized by the UGC - DAAD - IGP programme
'Literature in a Globalized World'.



References to and constructions of a 'classical' antiquity have historically offered stability and unity during times of rapid socio-cultural change. The various Greco-Roman 'classicisms' constructed from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution in Europe yield salient examples of such dynamics. However, the range, reach and, not least, uses of classicism go far beyond these familiar histories. The amalgam of colonialist and humanist endeavours sent apotheosized versions of ancient Greece and Rome on a far-reaching journey around the world at the same time as Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers such as Herder, Hegel, and Nietzsche drew on classical Indian philosophy. This not only shaped their own intellectual projects but contributed to the construction of an idealized Indian 'antiquity' that has travelled just as widely and influentially as Western classicisms have. Within the Indian literary and political context, the longstanding appropriation of antiquity, in the form of Indian 'classics', created a relativizing and resistant foil to the supposedly superior 'classicism' propagated by colonial curricula, canons, and their legacies — developments that have a particular urgency in the current political climate.

Certainly, cultural makers who have found themselves at the receiving end of Eurocentric power structures have not only critiqued, but also reworked the tradition to alternative ends. Nonetheless, classical 'revivalism' remains a potent reactionary strategy in literature and the arts. Thus, although it has often been argued (and mourned) that the prominence of 'classical' themes, forms, ideas, ideologemes, and, fundamentally, epistemology is diminishing, what we can indeed observe is a resurgence of what our symposium proposes to analyze as 'globalized (neo-)classicisms'. The setting off of 'neo' is meant to question the purported newness of these strategies and highlight the construction, rather than recovery, of the past central to 'classicism'. In contrast, the 'globalized' as well as plural 'classicisms' are insisted upon. The 'classic' emerges in and through transcultural circulation and dialogue, whereby 'travelling' and translation necessarily engender variations in form and function.

Signals for a nascent revival of (globalized) classicisms can be identified in contemporary Anglophone literature produced for and in a world market. Prominent examples include novels such as Salman Rushdie's *The Golden House* (2017), Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire* (2017), Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* (2018), and Madeline Miller's *Circe* (2018); works that are clearly aimed at a global marketplace. Though the novel is arguably the most overtly

'classicized' genre, drama and poetry too play an important role in these figurations, as Trajal Harrell's *O Medea* (2019), Mark Fleishman's *Antigone: Not Quite/Quiet* (2019), and Theo Dorgan's lyrical *Orpheus* (2018) show. This Greco-Roman underpinning should not, however, occlude non-Western classicisms such as Amish Tripathi's *Shiva Trilogy* (2010-2013) or the *Ram Chandra* series (2015-2019).

It is long overdue, then, that scholars in Anglophone literary and globalization studies take up questions insistently posed by contemporary classicists such as Emily Wilson, Mary Beard, or Neville Morley. Let us ask not just 'why classics matter', but why particular constellations of the 'classics' matter and how they achieve that significance. And, equally pertinent, ask what is 'a classic' – and what are its implications and uses – in 'Indian', 'Western', and global contexts?

This joint symposium, headed by the UGC-DAAD-IGP collaboration between JNU, New Delhi, and JMU Würzburg seeks to offer a transnational forum for debating these phenomena and issues. In turning to the classics, we will build on the ideas explored under the aegis of our joint project 'Literature in a Globalized World: Creative and Critical Perspectives'. The following are among the questions to be discussed:

- What is a classic (in a globalized world)?
- Is our globalized era characterized by a rapid increase of '(neo-)classically' oriented literature?
- Can we trace developments in theoretical turns through these classical rewritings?
- What cultural and ideological work are references to and appropriations of 'the classics' supposed to do in the world of today, especially when classics get instrumentalized for political purposes?
- Can classicism be uncoupled from its hegemonic legacy? Can it be a tool of productively making sense in or of reframing the world created by capitalist globalization?
- What, in particular, is the work done by the contemporary novel of translating or twisting and reworking—in terms of localities, perspectives, genres and genders—'classical' themes, modes, and legacies? How do other genres re-/un-work classicisms?

Convenors:

Anna Frieda Kuhn (Idea and Coordination) // Isabel Eder (PR and Organization) // Zeno Ackermann, Saugata Bhaduri, MaryAnn Snyder-Körber (Professorial Committee)

For further information about our call for papers (submission by 18 November 2020), participation, or any other aspect of the symposium, please feel free to contact us by email **globalized.classics@gmail.com**